



Until we are all equal

THE 2024

GIRLS' LEADERSHIP INDEX REPORT

Voice, Choice, and Power

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First published by Plan International in 2024

Text, illustrations, design © Plan International 2024

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INDEX REPORT

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

FOREWORD	1
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT	3
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	4
SETTING THE SCENE	8
Objectives of Girls’ Leadership Index	9
Scope and Country Focus	9
Development of the Girls’ Leadership Index	10
Key Considerations when Reading the Index	10
The Domains	11
GIRLS’ LEADERSHIP INDEX 2024	13
GIRLS’ LEADERSHIP INDEX BY DOMAIN	16
Education	17
Economic Opportunities.....	20
Protection.....	23
Health	26
Political Voice and Representation.....	28
Law and Policies	30
Climate Action	33
RECOMMENDATIONS: Based on GLI 2024	36
CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES: Priorities for Targeted Actions	43
Child Marriage	43
Gender Inequality	43
Inadequate Access to Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR)	44
CATALYZING CHANGE: Building Better Futures for Girls	45
REVIEWS	46

FOREWORD



During a recent visit to one of our program communities, I met a young girl named Saima who expressed her desire to become a leader in her community. When I asked her what she believed was needed for girls like her to rise as leaders, her response was both powerful and clear: *“We girls need love, care, and support to dream of becoming leaders. We must break the myths that limit us and challenge the beliefs that girls cannot be leaders or changemakers. We also need more agencies and allies to support us in gaining equal power, freedom, and representation.”*

In that moment, Saima captured the essence of what girls everywhere need to thrive. Girls are already organizing, leading, and driving change in their homes and communities. However, structural barriers—such as gender stereotypes, unequal access to education, and violence—continue to prevent them from realizing their full potential. These barriers, deeply entrenched in social, political, and economic systems, limit their opportunities and hinder their ability to lead.

The 2024 Girls' Leadership Index (GLI) offers a critical examination of the progress and challenges facing girls and young women across the Asia-Pacific region. Through this report, we gain a deeper understanding of the complex and often intersecting issues that impact girls' lives, including education, health, economic opportunities, protection from violence, climate change, political participation, and the legal and policy frameworks that either support or restrict their development.

As the region grapples with an increasingly volatile landscape—marked by socioeconomic inequalities, climate change, shrinking civic space, and geopolitical tensions—it is essential that we acknowledge the unique and compounded challenges that girls face. This year's report not only provides a data-driven overview of these challenges but also offers concrete, actionable recommendations for policymakers, civil society organizations, governments, and the private sector. These insights will help shape decisions and investments aimed at empowering girls and young women, enabling them to become the leaders of tomorrow.

At Plan International, we are committed to using evidence-based research to inform our programs and advocacy work. The GLI serves as a cornerstone for our efforts to advocate for girls' leadership and gender equality across the region. By investing in girls' leadership today, we are investing in a more just, equitable, and sustainable future for all.

Ultimately, empowering girls is not just about improving their lives—it is about securing a better future for entire communities and nations. The 2024 Girls' Leadership Index is an invaluable resource for policymakers, activists, NGOs, and governments as they make critical decisions and investments in programs for girls. Together, we can create a world where girls are truly free to lead, thrive, and make lasting change.



Bhagyashri Dengle

Regional Director, Plan International Asia-Pacific Hub



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The successful completion of the Girls' Leadership Index 2024 is the result of the collective efforts of many individuals and organizations. We extend our sincere gratitude to all who contributed to this important research:

Kusalin Wongnamkob, Regional Gender and Inclusion Adviser; Hongxia Zhang, Regional Monitoring and Evaluation Specialist; and Alexandra Pura, Regional Gender Transformative Program and Policy Lead, comprised the Core Group for this research.

We would like to acknowledge the members of the Steering Group, who provided guidance throughout the process: Julie Gurung (PQI Director, Plan International Nepal), Nazla Mariza (Influencing Director, Yayasan Plan International Indonesia), Ronald Rofiandri (Policy and Advocacy Advisor, Yayasan Plan International Indonesia), and Megawati Megawati (Policy and Advocacy Specialist, Yayasan Plan International Indonesia). Their insightful guidance and support facilitated key decision-making during the development of the report, especially on how the GLI report can be made more accessible and useful for country level advocacy.

We are especially grateful to Miller Jones Consulting, specifically Jennifer Miller, Alex Riba and Erica Stillo, for their significant contribution to the research and for generously sharing their expertise in methodology and data collection. Hongxia Zhang provided exceptional leadership in methodology, data gathering, and analysis. Ruxana Hossain Parvin, Regional Education Advisor, provided invaluable support in data validation.

We would like to express our special thanks to the communications team for their support, particularly Trần Thu Quỳnh, Cao Trần Quế Chi, and Văn Trọng Hiếu.

We also acknowledge the inspiration and full support provided by the APAC Hub Management Team, especially Bhagyashri Dengle, Regional Director, and Sharon Kane, Director of Sub-region.

Finally, we extend our deepest gratitude to the team of consultants, Boonthida Parnnui, John Luke Chua, and Kwankamol Prurapark, for their dedication and expertise in data analysis and developing the Girls' Leadership Index 2024.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In March 2020, Plan International Asia-Pacific (APAC) Regional Hub invested in girls' leadership in Asia and the Pacific and launched the first Asia Girls Report that presented the Asia Girls' Leadership Index, followed by the launch of the Pacific Girls' Leadership Index in 2021 and 2022. Using available data from globally recognized databases, the Girls' Leadership Indexes (GLI) measure the opportunities of adolescent girls and young women in 19 South and Southeast Asian countries and 14 Pacific Island member countries and territories of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) to develop and demonstrate leadership capabilities.

For the purpose of the GLIs, girls' leadership has been defined as *“the ability of girls and young women to make decisions by themselves and exercise their rights at different levels and in different aspects of their lives, and their ability to individually and collectively influence decision-making and decision-makers about issues that affect their ability to realize their rights.”*

Why We Need the GLI

Girls' leadership continues to face significant barriers across the Asia-Pacific region. These barriers include limited access to quality education, economic opportunities, and participation in decision-making processes. Cultural norms, gender-based violence, and early marriage remain systemic challenges, particularly in lower-ranking countries. Additionally, a lack of disaggregated data on girls' leadership in key areas hampers effective policymaking and program development. The scarcity of gender-specific and age-specific data across sectors, particularly in adolescent health and economic participation, highlights the need for a comprehensive and continuous data collection process.

The GLI provides critical insights into the progress and gaps in advancing girls' leadership across the Asia-Pacific region. It offers a measurable framework that helps governments, development organizations, and private sector stakeholders identify areas for targeted interventions to empower girls and young women and ensure their full participation and leadership in society.

Girls' Leadership Index Report 2024

The GLIs comprise seven core domains: **education, economic opportunities, protection, health, political voice and representation, national laws and policies, and climate action**. Each domain is an aggregation of between three and six indicators drawn from internationally recognized databases available online. A normalization process is required before aggregating indicators for each domain to account for indicators having different measurement units. Domain indexes are obtained by averaging the normalized positive indicators within the domain, with the resulting index

lying in the range [0,1]. The higher the score, the more advanced the country is in this domain in terms of girls' leadership. The GLI is then obtained by averaging the seven domain indexes.

This report presents newly available data across seven Asian and Pacific GLI 2024 core domains. The report is organized as follows:

- **Section 1:** Brief Overview of the Girls' Leadership Index
- **Section 2:** Scope of the GLI and methodology for index development
- **Section 3:** The updated Girls' Leadership Index 2024, including trend analysis and comparison against the 2022 index, as well as highlighting significant changes that inform development needs
- **Section 4:** Recommendations based on the GLI 2024 that help readers identify focused areas for intervention and actionable points for practitioners and policymakers

Regional Ranking Overview

Singapore, Thailand, and the Philippines are the three countries on the Index with the highest rankings in Asia. These countries demonstrate strong performances across key domains, particularly in education, protection, and law and policies. Conversely, the three lowest-ranking countries are **Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Brunei Darussalam**.

Significant gaps remain in education, economic opportunities, protection, and climate action, severely limiting girls' leadership potential.





In the Pacific, the three highest-ranking countries on the 2024 Girls' Leadership Index are **Australia, New Zealand, and Fiji**, showcasing strong performances across the domains of education, economic opportunities, voice and representation, and law and policies. The three lowest-ranking countries are **Papua New Guinea, Nauru, and the Solomon Islands**, where persistent challenges in education, health, voice and representation, and gender equality continue to limit the leadership potential of girls and young women.

Overall, the 2024 GLI for Asia and the Pacific reveals significant disparities in girls' leadership opportunities across the region. High-ranking countries like Singapore, Australia, and New Zealand excel in domains such as education, economic opportunities, and protection but still face challenges in areas like climate action.

Conversely, lower-ranking nations like Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Papua New Guinea struggle in most domains yet exhibit strengths in specific areas—for instance, Bhutan's strong performance in climate action despite lower overall rankings. These trends indicate that **while top performers have room for improvement, countries lagging behind possess valuable assets that can be leveraged.**

All in all, the region requires focused efforts to address persistent gaps, particularly in **gender-based violence, strengthening legal frameworks, and enhancing the political and economic participation** of girls and young women.

Recommendation for Targeted Actions

Plan International's 2024 Girls' Leadership Index Report offers a roadmap for countries to prioritize investments in girls' leadership, particularly in the lowest-ranking countries like Afghanistan, Bangladesh, and other Asia-Pacific nations in the bottom half of the index. Analysis of the 2024 index reveals critical cross-cutting issues hindering girls' leadership: socio-economic barriers, cultural norms, limited digital access, and weak legal protections for gender equality. Addressing these factors holistically is vital for progress across all domains.

The GLI recommends targeted interventions that leverage successful models to create sustainable change. These include *community-led education initiatives* (e.g., India's Educate Girls program), *financial literacy and entrepreneurship training* (e.g., Vietnam's SheMeansBusiness), and *protection initiatives* to combat violence and child marriage. Foundational challenges—such as inadequate economic opportunities, health access, and protection from early marriage—must be prioritized to unlock girls' potential as leaders. Best practices like Plan International's Skills and Opportunities for Youth Employment and Entrepreneurship (SOYEE) initiative offer scalable models, while collaborative efforts among civil society, the private sector, and policymakers are essential to creating a supportive environment. To ensure lasting impact, the report calls on governments to adopt gender quotas, strengthen legal frameworks, and engage the private sector in promoting digital inclusion, gender-diverse leadership, and sustainable practices. These actions will collectively foster an environment where girls can thrive as empowered leaders in the Asia-Pacific.

Catalyzing Change: Building Better Futures for Girls

To strengthen girls' leadership, stakeholders should engage young women as active change agents, utilizing youth-centered models like *Champions of Change* and *Safer Cities*, and supporting girls' organizations through targeted funding. Creating supportive environments is essential; this involves developing inclusive policies, ensuring safe spaces for expression, and addressing regional challenges like climate change and shrinking civic space. Future studies should explore emerging issues affecting girls' leadership, such as climate impacts on education and economic opportunities, and the barriers imposed by restricted civic spaces.

SETTING THE SCENE

The Asia-Pacific region is home to 60% of the world's youth population, approximately 750 million young people aged 15 to 24 years. Yet, in many parts of this vast region, girls and young women are undervalued and underestimated. They continue to face gender-related barriers and inequalities that prevent them from realizing their full potential. Discriminatory attitudes and practices limit their ability to lead, set goals, and act upon them.

Globally, inconsistencies persist in the collection, availability, disaggregation, and reporting of data on adolescent girls and young women. This lack of consistent data hampers efforts to gain deep insights into the factors that enable or constrain their leadership capabilities. Increasingly, governments and donors are demanding relevant evidence and data that demonstrate the need to secure funding and inform policy and strategic dialogue.

To address this gap, **Plan International's Asia-Pacific Regional Hub has developed the Girls' Leadership Index—the first of its kind specifically focused on adolescent girls and young women in the region.**



The GLI examines seven core domains essential to supporting or constraining girls' leadership: **education, economic opportunities, protection, health, political voice and representation, laws and policies, and climate action.** By assessing these areas, the GLI seeks to understand how girls and young women can realize leadership within their families, workplaces, and wider communities, fully exercising their rights.

Objectives of Girls' Leadership Index

- To improve and deepen understanding of the situation of girls and young women in Asia-Pacific.
- To present relevant data in a meaningful and user-friendly manner.
- To inform and influence policy makers, donors, and members of the public to invest in leadership development for adolescent girls and young women.
- To inform contextually relevant and strategic policies, programs, and services.

Scope and Country Focus

The GLI is an instrument that uses **available data from globally recognized databases** to **measure the opportunities of adolescent girls and young women** in 19 South and Southeast Asian countries and 14 Pacific Island member countries and territories of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific to develop and demonstrate leadership capabilities.

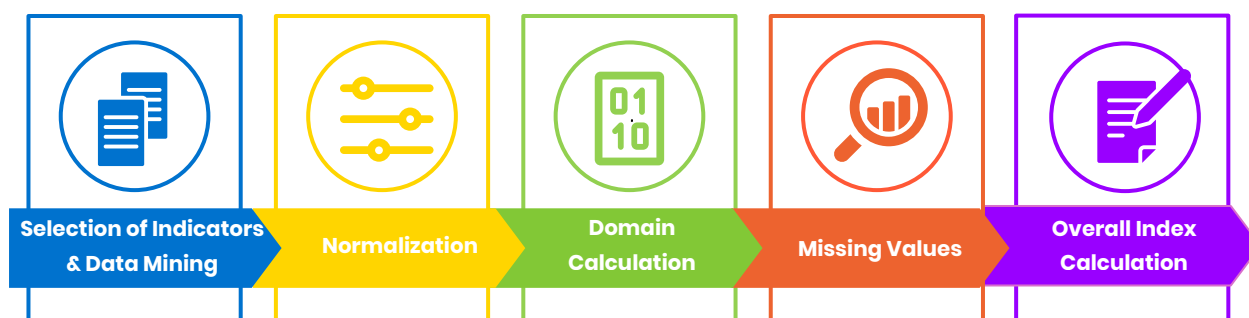
Country focus in Asia

- 
- Afghanistan
 - Bangladesh
 - Bhutan
 - Brunei Darussalam
 - Cambodia
 - India
 - Indonesia
 - Lao, PDR
 - Malaysia
 - Maldives
 - Myanmar
 - Nepal
 - Pakistan
 - Philippines
 - Singapore
 - Sri Lanka
 - Thailand
 - Timor-Leste
 - Vietnam

Country focus in Pacific

- 
- Australia
 - Fiji
 - Kiribati
 - Marshall Islands
 - Micronesia
 - Nauru
 - New Zealand
 - Palau
 - Papua New Guinea
 - Samoa
 - Solomon Islands
 - Tonga
 - Tuvalu
 - Vanuatu

Development of the Girls' Leadership Index



























- 1) **Selection of indicators and data population:** Indicator selection was based on our Girls' Leadership Research Framework, which outlined domains and potential indicators. That framework informed a scan of global databases for complete data sets on each proposed indicator. Indicators were drawn from internationally recognized databases available online.
- 2) **Normalization:** A normalization process was conducted to account for indicators having different measurement units. This process resulted in unitless indicators with values between 0 and 1. A second process was undertaken to transform all indicators into 'positive' values.
- 3) **Generation of the seven domain indices:** The domain indices were obtained by averaging the normalized positive indicators in each domain. Equal weights were assigned for each indicator within each domain.
- 4) **Aggregation of the domain indices to produce the overall index:** The overall index was obtained by averaging seven individual domain indices.
- 5) **Data sources:** The Girls' Leadership Index (GLI) scores are derived from publicly accessible data from reputable global sources, including the World Bank, UNESCO Institute for Statistics, International Telecommunication Union (ITU), Human Development Index (HDI), and International Labour Organization (ILO), among others. These sources ensure that the GLI is grounded in reliable and internationally recognized data for accurate and meaningful insights.

Key Considerations when Reading the Index




















- Asia and Pacific Indexes are not comparable against each other as they both have different indicators.
- Indexes cannot be compared against previous reports (2019 or 2021) as data is sometimes updated in previous years based on the dataset
- Climate Action has been introduced to the Asia GLI in 2022. With this addition, the index needed to be recalculated, including versions of the index from previous years. The trends are now presented in this year's report.
- The GLI 2024 result is presented through bar charts with corresponding positive and negative arrows which refers to the the normalized value of overall index for that domain that has changed, not the country ranking or indicator.

The Domains

Asian Countries

 Education	Completion Rate, Lower Secondary Female (%) Gross enrolment ratio for tertiary education, female (%) Access to Internet, Female (%) Mean years of schooling, female (years)	  
 Economic Opportunities	Share of youth not in employment, education or training (youth NEET rate), Female (%) Youth Labour Participation Rate, Female (%) Account ownership at a financial institution or with a mobile-service provider, Female (%) Female share of employment in managerial positions (%)	  
 Protection	Percentage of girls aged 5-17 years engaged in child labour Percentage of women aged 20-24 who were married before age 18 Percentage of the female population ages 15 and older that has ever experienced physical and/or sexual violence from an intimate partner	 
 Health	Adolescent birth rate (births per 1,000 women aged 15-19) Proportion of women aged 15 - 19 years who have their need for family planning satisfied with modern methods Prevalence of stunting, height for age, female (% of children under 5) Suicide Mortality Rate (15-19), female (per 100,000 female population)	 
 Political Voice & Representation	Proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments Woman's testimony carries the same evidentiary weight in court as a man's Proportion of girls under 5 years of age whose births have been registered with a civil authority	 
 Laws & Policies	Equal rights between sons and daughters to inherit assets from parents Equal remuneration for work of equal value Legislation on sexual harassment in employment Laws prohibiting or invalidating child marriage Legislation specifically addressing domestic violence	
 Climate Action	Number of deaths and missing persons attributed to disasters (per 100,000 population) Number of directly affected persons attributed to disasters per 100,000 population (number) Countries with NDC to Paris Declaration on Climate Change (2021 updated) Proportion of population with primary reliance on clean fuels and technology (%) Terrestrial and marine protected areas (% of total territorial area) Carbon dioxide emissions, production emissions per capita (tonnes)	   

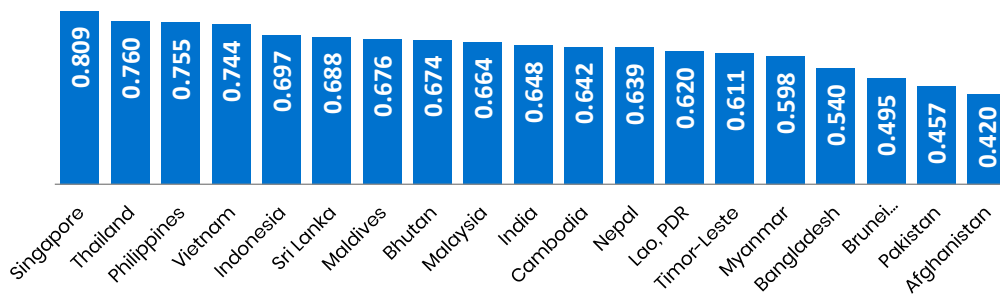
Pacific Countries

 Education	Gross enrolment ratio, primary, female (%) Gross enrolment ratio, lower secondary, female (%) Out-of-school rate for youth of upper secondary school age, female (%) Expected years of schooling, female	
 Economic Opportunities	Share of youth (15-24) not in employment, education or training, female (%) Female youth unemployment (15-24 years) Female share of employment in senior and middle management (%) Law mandates equal remuneration for work of equal value	 
 Protection	Percentage of the female population ages 15 and older that has ever experienced physical and/or sexual violence from an intimate partner Percentage of the female population ages 15 and older that has ever experienced sexual violence from a nonintimate partner Proportion of women aged 20-24 years who were married or in a union before age 18	
 Health	Adolescent birth rate (births per 1,000 women ages 15-19) Suicide mortality rate, female (per 100,000) Maternal mortality ratio (per 100,000 live births) Modern contraception prevalence rate (15-19 years)	
 Political Voice & Representation	Proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments A woman can apply for a passport in the same way as a man Proportion of girls under 5 years of age whose births have been registered with a civil authority	 
 Laws & Policies	Equal rights between sons and daughters to inherit assets from parents Legislation specifically addressing domestic violence Legislation on sexual harassment on employment Laws prohibiting or invalidating child marriage Laws prohibiting discrimination in access to credit based on gender	
 Climate Action	Number of deaths and missing persons attributed to disasters (per 100,000 population) Number of directly affected persons attributed to disasters per 100,000 population Proportion of population with primary reliance on clean fuels and technology (%) Terrestrial and marine protected areas (% of total territorial area) Carbon dioxide emissions, production emissions per capita (tonnes)	   

GIRLS' LEADERSHIP INDEX 2024

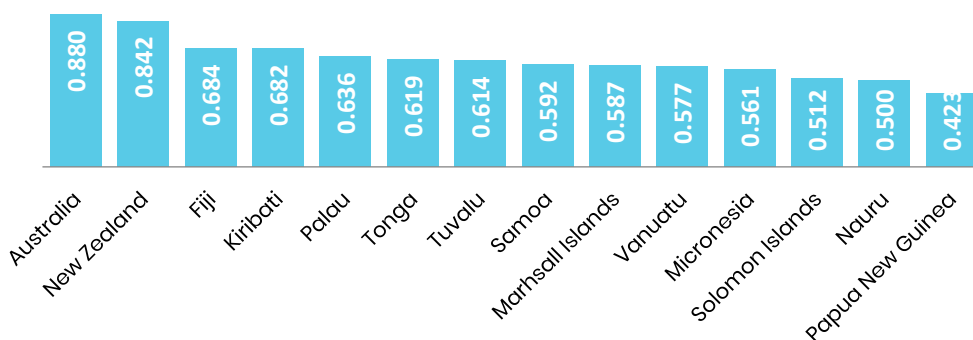
Asia Girls' Leadership Index

Overall, in the 2024 GLI, the Pacific region has experienced more changes in rankings compared to Asia, where many countries have maintained their positions.



In Asia, the top three countries in the 2024 GLI remain consistent with 2022: Singapore (0.80891), Thailand (0.75953), and the Philippines (0.75486). Conversely, the lowest-ranking countries are Brunei Darussalam (0.49451), Pakistan (0.45735), and Afghanistan (0.42044). Notably, Indonesia demonstrates the most significant improvement in the region, while Brunei Darussalam experiences the largest decline in its GLI performance. These trends highlight the varying levels of progress and challenges across Asian nations.


Pacific Girls' Leadership Index



Overall, in the 2024 GLI, the Pacific region has experienced more changes in rankings compared to Asia, where many countries have maintained their positions. In the Pacific, nine countries have demonstrated positive improvements in the 2024 GLI since 2022. However, the GLI scores have slightly decreased for Micronesia, the Federated States, New Zealand, Palau, and Papua New Guinea, with Nauru experiencing the most significant decline. The top three highest-ranking countries in the 2024 Pacific GLI are Australia (0.87977), New Zealand (0.8417), and Fiji (0.68424). In contrast, the Solomon

Islands (0.51196), Nauru (0.49989), and Papua New Guinea (0.4229) are the lowest-ranking nations in this domain. These rankings highlight the diverse progress and ongoing challenges in fostering gender equality and empowering girls and young women across the Pacific region.

The Asia Girls' Leadership Index Domain Ranking










	Education	Economic Opportunities	Protection	Health	Political Voice & Representation	Laws & Policies	Climate Action
Afghanistan	19	19	17	19	17	5	14
Bangladesh	11	17	16	10	16	4	16
Bhutan	15	14	10	8	5	2	1
Brunei Darussalar	3	10		1	18	6	19
Cambodia	17	5	9	9	10	3	5
India	12	13	12	15	11	2	7
Indonesia	8	9	5	7	8	3	4
Lao, PDR	16	11	15	11	14	2	18
Malaysia	2	3		4	7	4	9
Maldives	6	4	2	12	13	4	2
Myanmar	10	7	7	6	15	5	12
Nepal	14	16	14	16	6	1	10
Pakistan	18	18	11	17		4	11
Philippines	5	8	3	13	3	1	13
Singapore	1	1	1	2	1	3	8
Sri Lanka	9	6	4	5	12	3	15
Thailand	4	2	8	3	4	2	6
Timor-Leste	13	15	13	18	9	2	17
Vietnam	7	12	6	14	2	1	3

Each domain is an aggregation of between three and six indicators drawn from internationally recognized UN and World Bank databases available online. For some domains (i.e. Protection and Voice), data was not available for specific countries. As such, these countries have not been ranked in those domains.

In Asia, Singapore secured the top position in four key domains in 2024: education, economic opportunities, protection, and voice and representation. Brunei Darussalam led the health domain, while Nepal and the Philippines jointly ranked first in laws and policies. Bhutan emerged as the highest performer in climate action. Conversely, Brunei Darussalam also ranked lowest in two domains: laws and policies and climate action. Pakistan was the lowest-ranked country in voice and representation, and Afghanistan held the lowest positions in four domains: education, economic opportunities, protection, and health. These rankings highlight the diverse strengths and challenges faced by countries in advancing girls' leadership across various sectors.

The Pacific Girls' Leadership Index Domain Ranking

	 Education	 Economic Opportunities	 Protection	 Health	 Political Voice & Representation	 Laws & Policies	 Climate Action
Australia	1	2	1	1	2	1	3
Fiji	8	8	10	4	5	2	5
Kiribati	6	5	12	7	4	2	8
Marshall Islands	7	4	2	12	6	4	14
Micronesia	11	14	8	5	7	4	12
Nauru	13	3	14	13	13		6
New Zealand	2	1	7	2	1	1	4
Palau	4	7	6	3	8	5	1
Papua New Guinea	14	13	13	14	14	4	9
Samoa	5	10	5	6	12	3	7
Solomon Islands	12	11	9	11	11	4	11
Tonga	3	8	4	8	3	5	2
Tuvalu	9	6	3	10	10		13
Vanuatu	10	12	11	9	9	3	10

Each domain is an aggregation of between three and six indicators drawn from internationally recognized databases available online. For some domains (i.e. Law), data was not available for specific countries. As such, these countries have not been ranked in those domains.

In the Pacific region, Australia ranked first in four key domains for 2024: education, protection, health, and laws and policies. New Zealand secured the top position in three domains: economic opportunities, voice and representation, and jointly with Australia in laws and policies. Palau led the climate action domain. Papua New Guinea ranked lowest in education, health, and voice and representation. Micronesia, Federated States received the lowest rank in economic opportunities, while the Marshall Islands and Nauru were last in climate action and protection, respectively. Overall, the region requires focused efforts to address persistent gaps.

GIRLS' LEADERSHIP INDEX

BY DOMAIN

This section presents the 2024 Asia-Pacific Girls' Leadership Index (GLI) across its seven pivotal domains: education, economic opportunities, protection, health, voice and representation, laws and policies, and climate action.

For each domain, we provided the index results for Asian and Pacific countries, along with key observations and interpretations of the scores. Significant changes from previous GLI reports in 2022 are highlighted to showcase trends over the years. By examining the factors and contexts contributing to selected countries' improved or diminished performance, we aim to identify areas where targeted development interventions are needed.

This analysis is intended to spark conversation and inspire action among all sectors involved in advancing girls' leadership development in the Asia-Pacific region.



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Education

SUB-INDICATORS

ASIA

- Completion Rate, Lower Secondary Female (%)
- Gross enrolment ratio for tertiary education, female (%)
- Access to Internet, Female (%)
- Mean years of schooling, female (years)

PACIFIC

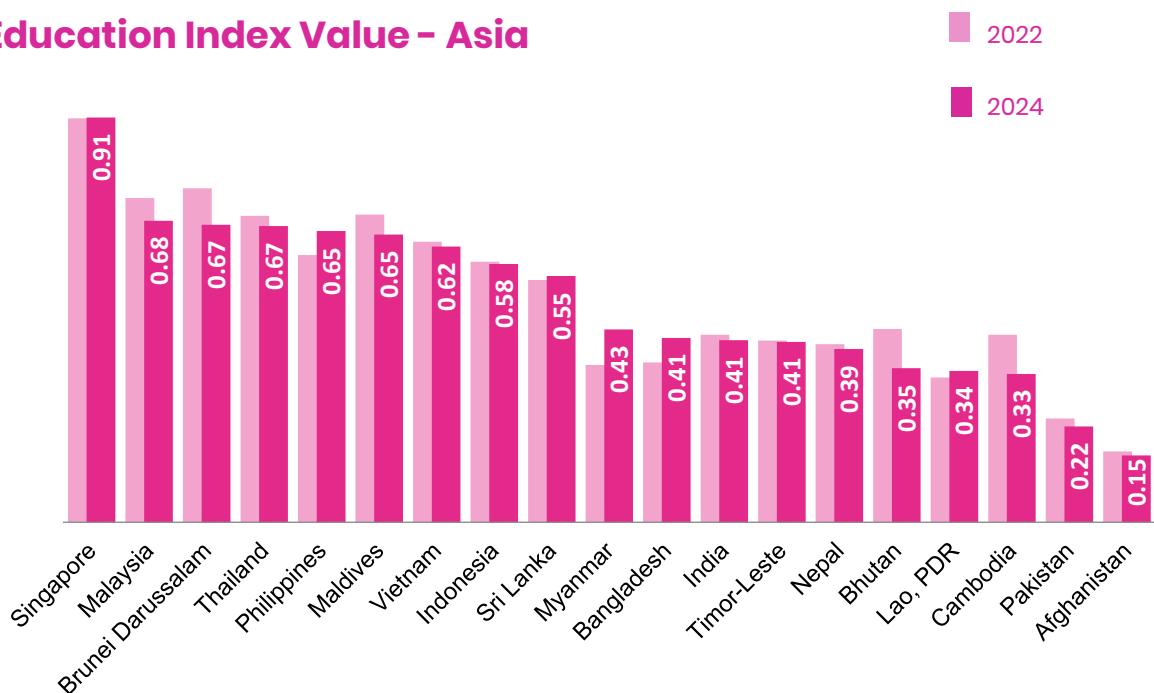
- Gross enrolment ratio, primary, female (%)
- Gross enrolment ratio, secondary, female (%)
- Out-of-school rate for youth of upper secondary school age, female (%)
- Expected years of schooling, female

Education serves as a foundational pillar for developing girls' leadership, providing them with the essential knowledge, skills, and confidence to lead and make informed decisions. In the Asia-Pacific region, there is significant variation in educational attainment among girls. For example, Thailand has a **lower secondary female completion rate** exceeding 130%*, indicating over-age and under-age enrollments, while Laos has a rate below 60%. Such disparities highlight unequal opportunities for girls to cultivate leadership abilities.

Access to tertiary education also varies, with **gross enrollment ratios** for young women differing widely across countries. Furthermore, **access to the internet**—a critical resource for education and empowerment—is limited for many girls, affecting their ability to engage with digital learning platforms. The **mean years of schooling for females** reflect these inequalities, influencing their potential to assume leadership roles.

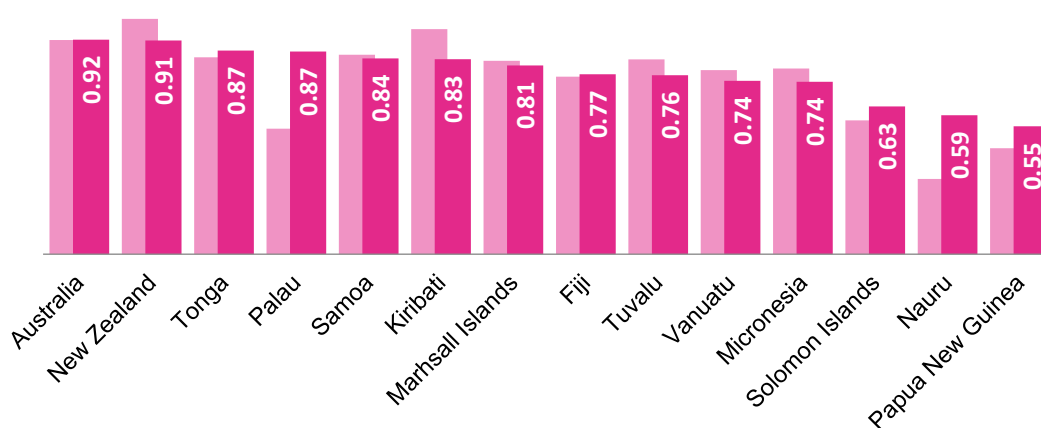
Enhancing educational access and quality is thus crucial for fostering an environment where girls can emerge as empowered leaders.

Education Index Value - Asia



The 2024 Education Index for Asia shows **Singapore** maintaining its leadership with a slight increase, while **Malaysia** and **Brunei Darussalam**, despite still being among the top performers, experienced notable declines compared to 2022. **The Philippines** stands out as the biggest improver, significantly increasing its score, driven by gains in **secondary completion** and **internet access**. On the other hand, **Bhutan** and **Cambodia** saw substantial drops in their scores, indicating challenges in sustaining progress. **Myanmar** and **Bangladesh** made notable improvements, signaling positive developments in foundational education. However, **Afghanistan** and **Pakistan** continue to rank the lowest, with declining scores, highlighting persistent barriers in girls' education access.

Education Index Value - Pacific

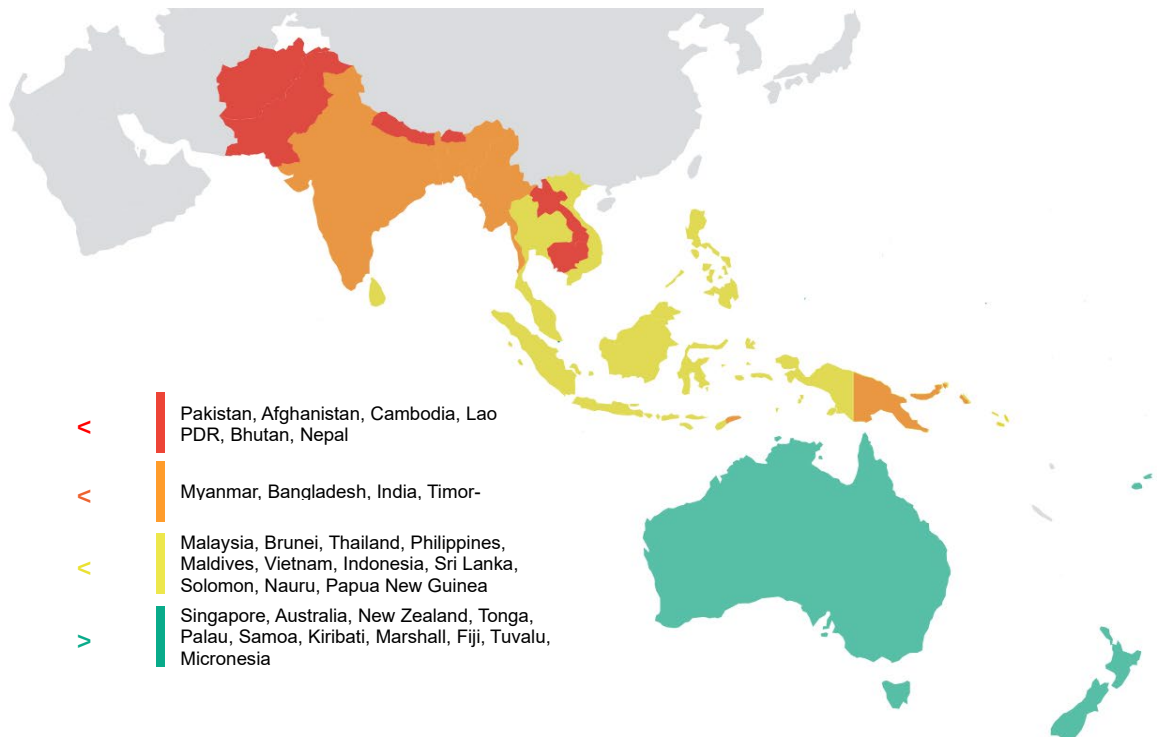


The 2024 Education Index for the Pacific region reveals significant improvements in countries like **Palau**, which saw the largest increase, rising from **0.53570** in 2022 to **0.86500** in 2024, driven by strong enrollment rates. **Tonga** also showed steady progress, while **Australia** maintained its top position with a slight increase. In contrast, **New Zealand** experienced the largest drop, falling from **1.00450** to **0.91200**, although it remains one of the top performers. Lower-ranked countries like **Nauru** and **Papua New Guinea** demonstrated notable improvements, reflecting efforts to reduce out-of-school rates. However, countries such as **Kiribati** saw declines, indicating ongoing challenges in maintaining educational progress.

**Thailand's 130% completion rate reflects the inclusion of over-age and under-age students in lower secondary education, indicating that students outside the typical age range are enrolled. This may result from delayed school entry or grade repetition, signaling both broad access and challenges within the system that can affect educational consistency for girls.*

In comparison, ASEAN countries generally outperform SAARC countries in the Education Domain of the Girls' Leadership Index. For instance, Singapore, Malaysia, and Brunei Darussalam have Education Index Values above 0.65 in 2024. In contrast, most SAARC countries have index values below 0.55, with the Maldives being the exception at 0.6460. This indicates that girls in ASEAN countries tend to have better educational opportunities, which can significantly enhance their leadership potential compared to their peers in SAARC nations.

The 2024 Education Index – Asia and Pacific



GLI in Context

Recent developments in Palau's education system have resulted in significant improvement in its education index score from 2022 to 2024. The surge attributed to strategic educational reforms, including:

- **Integration with the Pacific Regional Education Framework (PacREF):** Palau enhanced education quality and aligned with regional goals.
- **Partnerships with the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education:** This expanded access to higher education through regional collaboration and resource-sharing.
- **New educational initiatives:** The Ministry of Education introduced a new year-round school calendar, launched the first-ever kindergarten program, and upgraded technology in all public schools.
- **United Nations Country Implementation Plan:** In 2023, Palau and the United Nations signed the Country Implementation Plan (CIP), which aligns UN engagements with national development priorities, including education, health, and food security.



Economic Opportunities

SUB-INDICATORS

ASIA

- Share of youth not in employment, education or training (youth NEET rate), Female (%)
- Youth Labour Participation Rate, Female (%)
- Account ownership at a financial institution or with a mobile-service provider, Female (%)
- Female share of employment in managerial positions (%)

PACIFIC

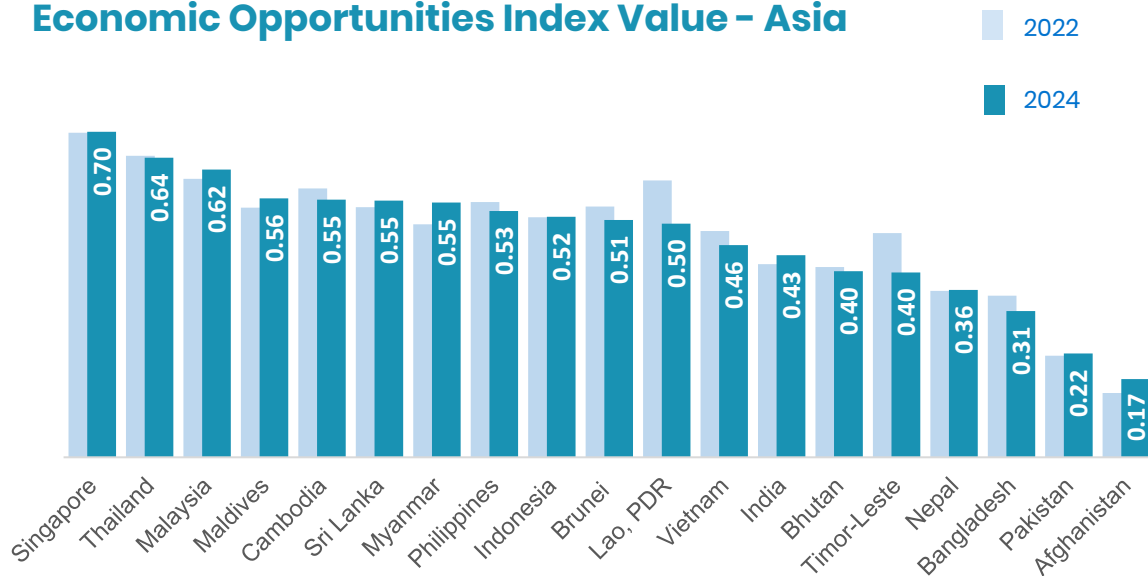
- Share of youth (15-24) not in employment, education or training, Female (%)
- Female share of employment in senior and middle management (%)
- Law mandates equal remuneration for work of equal value
- Female youth unemployment (15-24 years)

Economic opportunities are fundamental to empowering girls and young women, acting as a cornerstone for their personal development and leadership potential. In the Asia-Pacific region, significant gaps persist that hinder this empowerment. In 2022, a staggering 61.71% of young women in Bangladesh were **not in employment, education, or training**—a sharp increase from the previous year. Meanwhile, New Zealand boasts the highest **female labor force participation rate** at nearly 80%, illustrating how economic engagement fosters leadership opportunities. Afghanistan sits at the other extreme with about 5%.

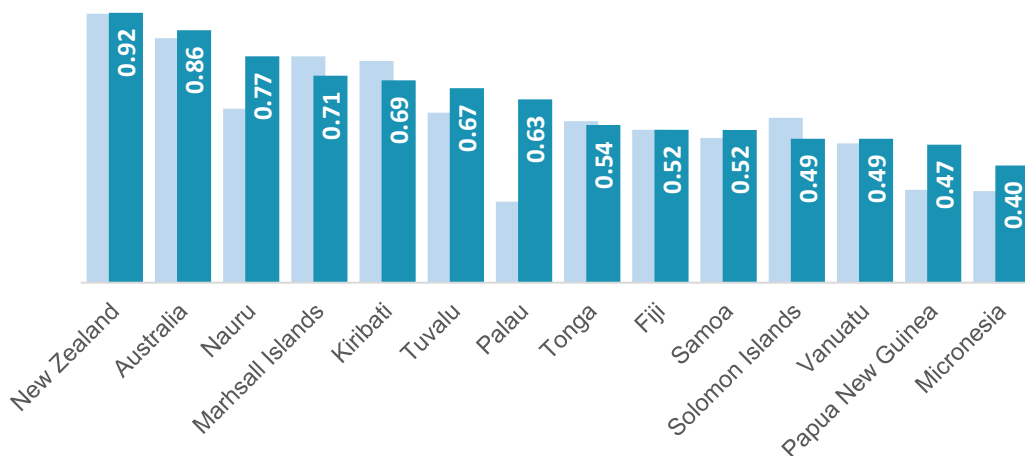
Access to financial services is another critical factor. While the **gender gap in account ownership** in East Asia and the Pacific is among the lowest globally at just 3%, disparities remain, especially in digital inclusion. In countries like Bangladesh, digital banking has significantly increased financial inclusion among women, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, **women's representation in management positions** averages only 30% in the region, with notable exceptions like Thailand, where close to 65% of companies have female top managers in 2024.

Legal frameworks mandating equal remuneration for work of equal value exist in many countries, but enforcement is inconsistent, leading to persistent wage disparities. Addressing these inequalities is essential to unlock the full leadership potential of girls and young women in the region.

Economic Opportunities Index Value – Asia



Economic Opportunities Index Value – Pacific



The 2024 Economic Index for Asia shows **Singapore** maintaining its top position with a slight increase, while **Malaysia** and **Maldives** posted modest improvements, driven by better financial inclusion and youth labor participation. **Myanmar** made significant progress, moving up in the rankings, while **the Philippines** saw a slight decline. **Bangladesh**, **Lao PDR**, and **Timor-Leste** experienced notable drops, reflecting challenges in female labor market participation and financial inclusion. Meanwhile, **Pakistan** and **Afghanistan** remain the lowest performers, despite minor improvements, highlighting persistent barriers to women's economic empowerment across the region. Overall, the region shows mixed progress, with clear gaps in female managerial representation and labor participation.

The 2024 Economic Index for the Pacific shows **New Zealand** and **Australia** maintaining their top positions with slight improvements, driven by strong performance in female youth unemployment and **equal pay laws**. **Nauru** and **Palau** saw the most significant

improvements, with Palau making a substantial leap, reflecting gains in **female managerial roles and youth NEET rates**. Conversely, the **Marshall Islands** and **Kiribati** experienced notable declines, struggling with youth unemployment and managerial representation. **Papua New Guinea** showed moderate progress, while countries like **Fiji** and **Samoa** remained stable, reflecting ongoing but slow advancements in women's economic participation across the region.

GLI in Context

Let's examine key developments contributing to worsening economic opportunities for girls in **Timor-Leste** and **Lao PDR**, the two countries with the most significant drop in their 2024 index.

Timor-Leste: Limited job opportunities and access to education and training

- The high rate (20.3%) of the youth population aged 15-24 not engaged in employment, education, or training (NEET) has been a persistent issue.
- The lack of job opportunities, especially in rural areas where 70% of the population lives, has contributed to the worsening economic opportunities for girls.
- The lack of access to quality education and vocational training has been identified as a significant barrier to employment for young people, particularly girls.

Lao PDR: Gender inequality and lack of supportive investment in human capital

- The Gender Inequality Index ranked Lao PDR at 120 among 170 countries in 2021, highlighting persistent gender disparities perpetuated by social norms in health care, education, and labor markets.
- Women's participation in the workforce is limited, with a labor force participation rate of 42% compared to 53% for men. Women are more likely to be in informal and unpaid family work.
- The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated social indicators for girls, including a decline in female gross enrollment rates in lower and upper secondary schools.
- The high rate of early marriage and adolescent pregnancy, with 23.5% of girls aged 15-19 married, has limited girls' access to education and economic opportunities.



Protection

SUB-INDICATORS

ASIA

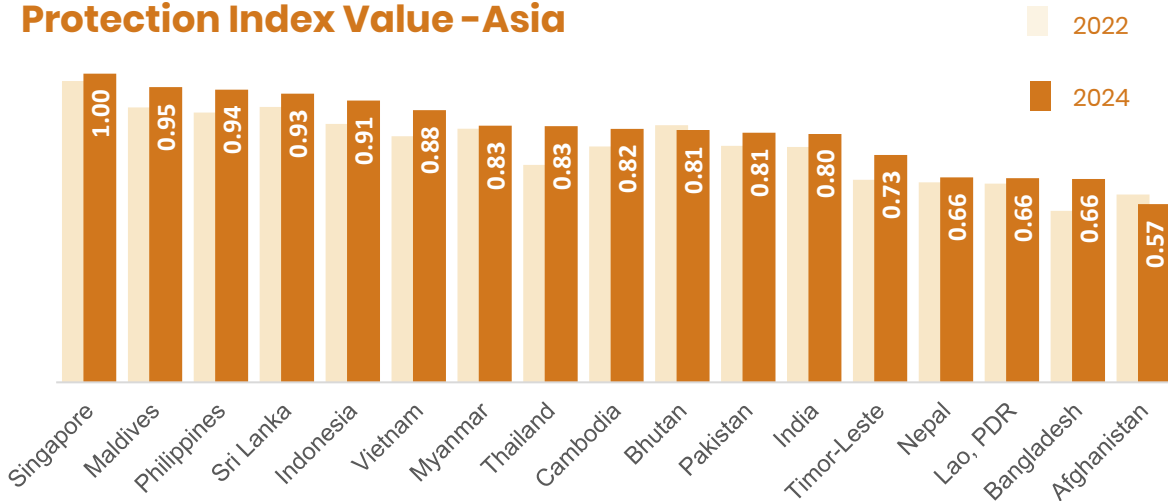
- Percentage of girls aged 5-17 years engaged in child labour
- Percentage of women aged 20-24 who were married before age 18
- Percentage of the female population ages 15 and older that has ever experienced physical and/or sexual violence from an intimate partner

PACIFIC

- Percentage of the female population ages 15 and older that has ever experienced physical and/or sexual violence from an intimate partner
- Percentage of the female population ages 15 and older that has ever experienced sexual violence from a nonintimate partner
- Proportion of women aged 20-24 years who were married or in a union before age 18 (%)

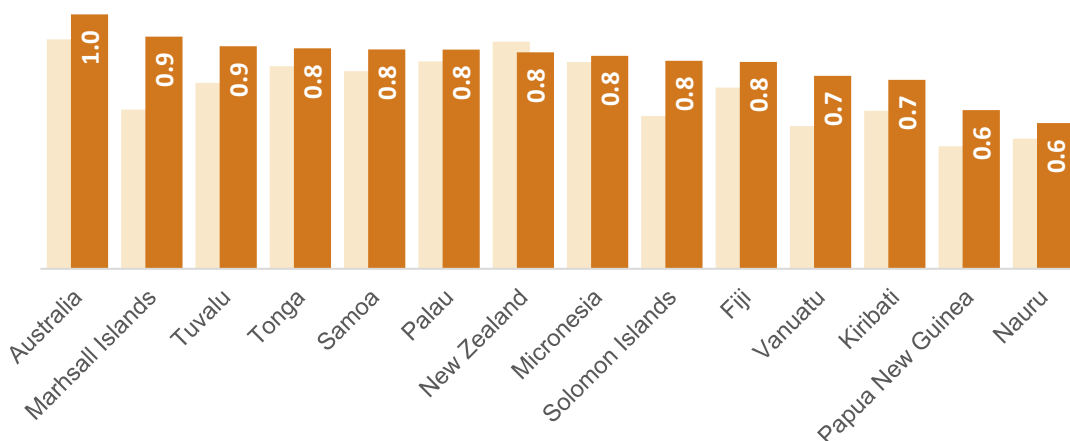
Protection is a critical foundation for nurturing girls' leadership, as issues like child labor, early marriage, and gender-based violence severely hinder their development and ability to lead and live empowered lives. Despite progress, significant challenges persist in the Asia-Pacific region. As of 2024, approximately 160 million children worldwide are engaged in **child labor**. The Asia-Pacific region has the second highest number of children in child labor, with 48.7 million children engaged in such activities, with the majority working in the agricultural, garment, and seafood sectors. **Early marriage** also remains a pressing concern; in 2024, 18.7% of women aged 20–24 were married before age 18, a decrease from 24.1% in 2003, yet at the current rate, child marriage may not end until 2092. India has the largest number of child brides globally, with 15.6 million women married before 18, followed by Bangladesh. **Gender-based violence** further exacerbates these challenges; in Southeast Asia, 33% of partnered women aged 15–49 have experienced **physical and/or sexual violence from an intimate partner**, with countries like Timor-Leste and Vanuatu exceeding global averages. Limited data on **non-intimate partner violence** underscores the need for comprehensive reporting, as fear and stigmatization often suppress disclosures. Addressing these protection gaps is essential to remove barriers that prevent girls from realizing their leadership potential in the region.

Protection Index Value - Asia



The 2024 Protection Index for Asia shows notable improvements across the region, with **Singapore, Maldives, and the Philippines** leading in progress. Singapore maintains its top position, while **Maldives and the Philippines** showed significant strides in reducing **child marriage** and protecting women from violence. Countries like **Vietnam, Indonesia, and Thailand** also posted strong improvements, indicating advances in child protection and addressing intimate partner violence. On the other hand, **Afghanistan** experienced a decline, highlighting persistent challenges in combating child labor and violence against women. Despite progress in countries like **Bangladesh, Nepal, and Lao PDR**, these countries still face significant gaps in protection, particularly in early marriage and gender-based violence.

Protection Index Value - Pacific



The 2024 Protection Index for the Pacific shows substantial progress, with **Australia** maintaining its leadership and **Marshall Islands, Tuvalu, Tonga, and Samoa** making significant gains in reducing **child marriage** and combating violence against women. **Palau, Micronesia, and Fiji** also posted strong improvements, reflecting enhanced protection efforts. However, **Papua New Guinea and Nauru** remain the lowest performers despite modest progress, facing persistent challenges in addressing intimate

partner violence. **New Zealand** experienced a slight decline, signaling the need for continued focus on protection measures, particularly against intimate partner violence.

GLI in Context

Despite the overall trend of improvement across the region in this domain, the sub-indicator that shows the least progress and persists as a significant issue across both Asia and the Pacific is **intimate partner violence**. Many countries continue to struggle with high rates of physical and/or sexual violence against women aged 15 and older by intimate partners.

Let's explore further on this issue.

Q: How effective are current laws in Asia and the Pacific in addressing intimate partner violence?

A:

- **Enforcement challenge:** Definitions of domestic violence in the laws of some ASEAN countries exempt certain acts of violence. This leaves room for discretion and interpretation of the law. For example, Cambodian law allows for disciplining if conducted with compassion, pity, and sincerity. The Thai law also includes in its definition of domestic violence “unethical dominance” permitting family members to commit any unlawful acts. This allows for tolerance for violence if certain conducts are not considered as amounting to “unethical dominance.”
- **Social norms challenge:** Cultural and social norms often perpetuate violence against women, making it difficult to enforce laws effectively. For instance, in some Pacific nations, customary and faith-based rules can be prejudicial to women at risk of gender violence and may prioritize reconciliation over redress for victims.

Q: What are the main barriers to reporting intimate partner violence in Asia and the Pacific?

A:

- **Cultural and Social Barriers:** Cultural and social norms, including fear of retaliation and stigmatization, cultural and religious expectations, and language barriers, are significant obstacles to reporting intimate partner violence.
- **Financial Barriers:** Survivors may have low-wage employment and may not be able to support themselves if they were to leave.
- **Legal Barriers:** The lack of criminalization of marital rape, such as in Myanmar, further hinders reporting and seeking help.

SUB-INDICATORS



ASIA

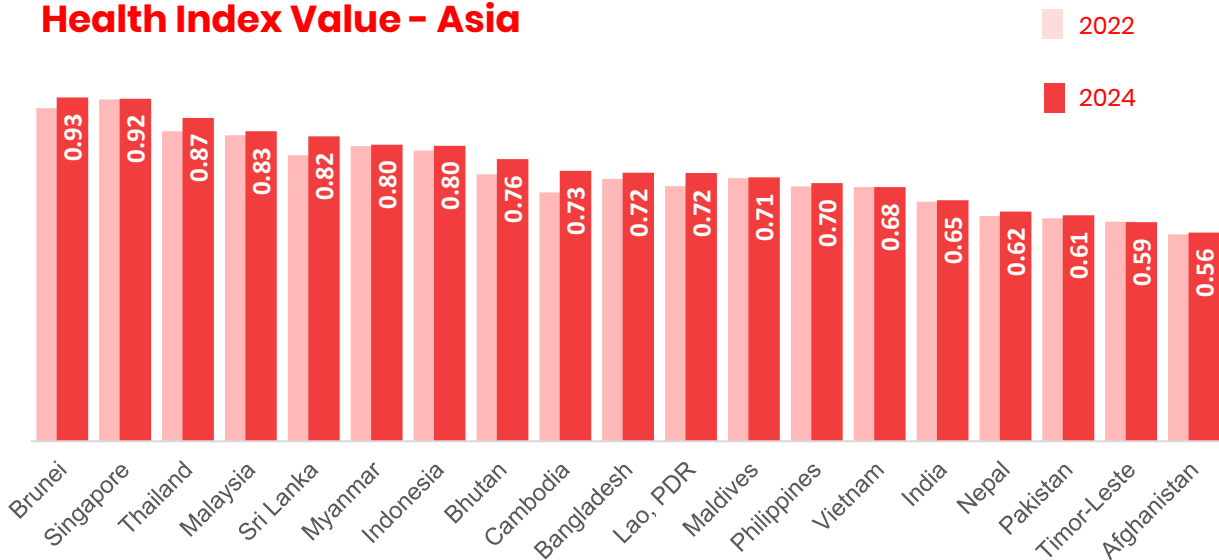
- Adolescent birth rate (births per 1,000 women aged 15-19)
- Proportion of women aged 15 - 19 years who have their need for family planning satisfied with modern methods
- Prevalence of stunting, height for age, female (% of children under 5)
- Suicide Mortality Rate (15-19), female (per 100,000 female population)

PACIFIC

- Adolescent birth rate (births per 1,000 women ages 15-19)
- Suicide Mortality Rate, female 15-19 (per 100,000 female population)
- Maternal mortality ratio (per 100,000 live births)
- Maternal mortality ratio (per 100,000 live births)

Health underpins girls' ability to develop and exercise leadership. High adolescent fertility rates, resulting from inadequate reproductive health education and services, lead to complications that are a leading cause of death and disability among young women, undermining their potential. Malnutrition, evident in high levels of stunted growth among children under five, signifies systemic socioeconomic challenges that impede girls' physical and cognitive development. Widespread mental health disorders such as depression and anxiety can lead to suicide, the second leading cause of death among youths aged 15 to 29, further eroding the leadership pipeline.

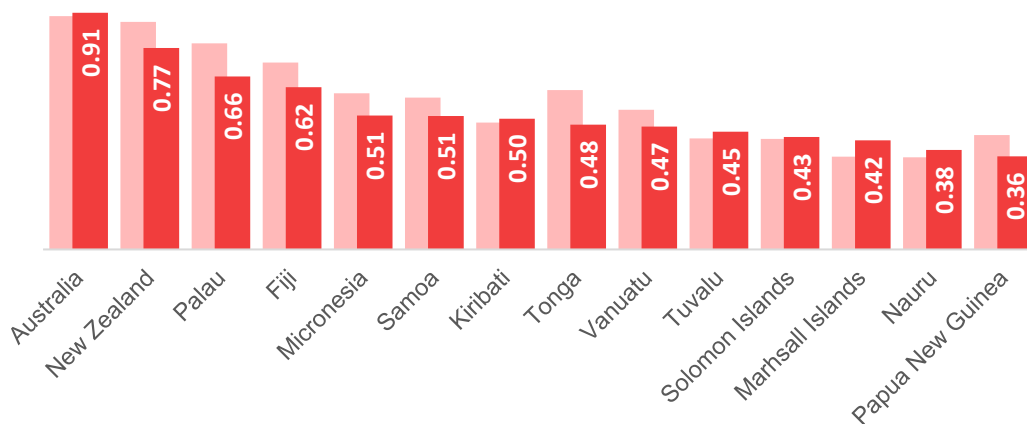
Health Index Value - Asia



In Asia, the 2024 GLI Health Index Value shows overall advancement across the region except for **Timor-Leste**, which experienced a slight decline of 0.00100 points, and Vietnam, which remained unchanged. This suggests improvement in critical areas of health affecting girls and young women. Most countries in Asia have increased their scores in this domain. **Cambodia** demonstrates the most significant improvement with 0.058 points. **Brunei Darussalam** emerges as the new leader in the health domain,

surpassing **Singapore** in 2022. **Afghanistan** ranks last, highlighting ongoing health challenges.

Health Index Value – Pacific



In the Pacific region, the 2024 Girls' Leadership Index highlights significant variations in health outcomes for girls and young women. **New Zealand, Palau, Fiji, the Federated States of Micronesia, Samoa, Tonga, Vanuatu,** and **Papua New Guinea** faced declines in their Health Index Values. This suggests setbacks in their health domains. Conversely, **Australia, Kiribati, Tuvalu, Solomon Islands, Marshall Islands,** and **Nauru** show improvements. **Australia** maintains its leading position with a slight increase in its Health Index Value by 0.0129. **Papua New Guinea** holds the lowest score in the 2024 data. This is a drop from 2022, when **Nauru** held the last spot, indicating significant health challenges that need addressing.

GLI in Context

Let's examine key developments that have driven significant improvements in the health domain for girls and young women in Cambodia, the country with the most notable positive change in the 2024 Girls' Leadership Index.

Cambodia: Remarkable Progress in Health Domain

Improving from rank 14 in 2022 to rank 9 in 2024, Cambodia has made significant advancements in the health domain through a comprehensive strategy. The percentage of women in the 15–19 age group whose family planning needs are met through modern contraceptive methods increased from 45.8% in 2022 to 53% in 2024, highlighting the effectiveness of robust family planning programs. Additionally, the suicide mortality rate for females aged 15–19 declined from 2.8 per 100,000 in 2022 to 0.93 per 100,000 in 2024. This reduction reflects the success of comprehensive mental health campaigns that have raised awareness, reduced stigma, and improved access to counseling and support services. These achievements are the result of coordinated efforts by government initiatives and non-governmental organizations, ensuring that young women receive the necessary resources to make informed decisions and lead healthier, more empowered lives.



Political Voice and Representation

SUB-INDICATORS

ASIA

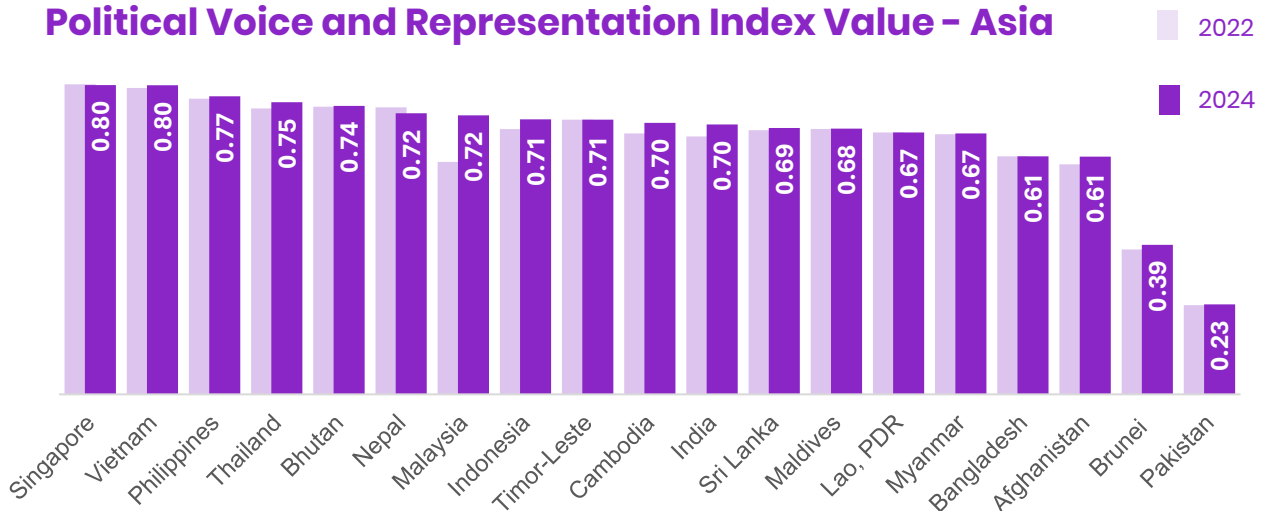
- Proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments
- Woman's testimony carries the same evidentiary weight in court as a man's
- Proportion of girls under 5 years of age whose births have been registered with a civil authority

PACIFIC

- Proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments
- Proportion of girls under 5 years of age whose births have been registered with a civil authority
- A woman can apply for a passport in the same way as a man

Political voice and representation fundamentally shape the ability of women and girls to influence policies and advocate for their rights. Women are significantly underrepresented in decision-making positions within government, and achieving gender parity in parliamentary representation remains a distant goal. Without adequate representation in national parliaments, women find it challenging to shape legislation and policies that address their specific needs and challenges. Additionally, ensuring that women’s testimonies carry the same evidentiary weight as men’s in courts is crucial for creating a justice system where women’s voices are equally valued and considered. This legal equality empowers women to participate fully and confidently in societal and political spheres.

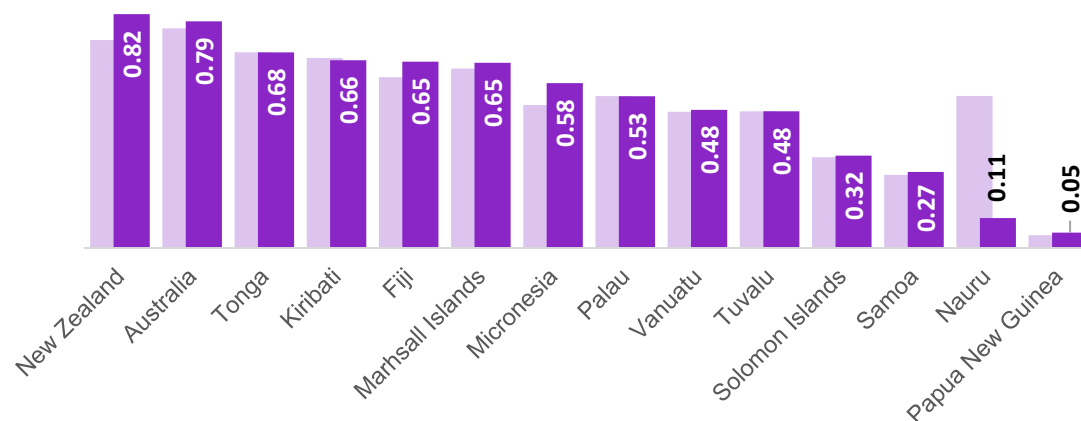
Political Voice and Representation Index Value – Asia



In Asia, the 2024 GLI Index Value highlights **Singapore** as the leader in advancing women and girls' political representation, followed by **Vietnam** and **the Philippines**. **Singapore's** proactive policies, such as mandatory gender quotas in certain sectors and robust support for female candidates, have significantly enhanced women's participation in politics. **Vietnam** and **the Philippines** have also made substantial strides by increasing the number of women in parliament and implementing laws that promote

gender equality in political participation. Conversely, **Pakistan** ranks the lowest in this domain with 0.23178 points due to persistent political instability and cultural barriers that limit women's representation in government. The complex political environment, influenced by conservative societal norms and security challenges, impedes the effective representation of women in political decision-making.

Political Voice and Representation Index Value – Pacific



In the Pacific region, **Australia** leads with the highest scores in this domain, followed by **New Zealand** and **Tonga**, while **Papua New Guinea** ranks last with a score of 0.054 points. **Australia's** top position is attributed to its robust policies promoting gender equality in political representation, including gender quotas and strong support systems for female candidates. **New Zealand** and **Tonga** also demonstrate significant progress, with **New Zealand** maintaining high levels of female parliamentary representation and **Tonga** implementing initiatives to increase women's participation in governance. Conversely, **Papua New Guinea** struggles with low female representation in parliament, limited birth registration rates for girls, and restrictive policies that hinder women's equal access to passports, reflecting broader challenges in gender equality and political empowerment.

GLI in Context

*"Although women's representation in politics remains modest and progress is gradual, a shift in attitudes across the island is demanding change."
(UNDP Pacific, 2024)*

Nauru has seen a sharp decline of -0.4272 points in the Political Voice and Representation domain of the 2024 GLI compared to 2022. This drop is primarily due to the continued underrepresentation of women in parliament, with only two women holding seats in the 19-member legislature. Cultural barriers and high campaign costs further discourage female candidacy, while restrictive policies limit women's equal access to passports, reducing their mobility and political participation. Additionally, stagnation in birth registration rates for girls under five undermines their legal recognition and access to essential services. Addressing these barriers is crucial for improving gender equality and empowering women to take on leadership roles in Nauru.



Law and Policies

SUB-INDICATORS

ASIA

- Law 1: Equal rights between sons and daughters to inherit assets from parents
- Law 2: Equal remuneration for work of equal value
- Law 3: Legislation on sexual harassment in employment
- Law 4: Laws prohibiting or invalidating child marriage
- Law 5: Legislation specifically addressing domestic violence

PACIFIC

- Law 1: Equal rights between sons and daughters to inherit assets from parents
- Law 2: Legislation establish clear criminal penalties for domestic violence
- Law 3: Legislation on sexual harassment in employment
- Law 4: Laws prohibiting or invalidating child marriage
- Law 5: Laws prohibiting discrimination in access to credit based on gender

A gender- and socially inclusive legal and policy framework is essential for achieving gender equality and protecting the rights of girls and young women. Strong legal protections are critical for dismantling systemic barriers that restrict girls' access to education, economic opportunities, and safe environments. By enacting and enforcing comprehensive laws, countries can foster empowering environments that encourage girls to pursue leadership roles, actively participate in societal development, and drive meaningful change within their communities.

Law and Policies Index Value - Asia

ASIA	Law Index Value	Law-1	Law-2	Law-3	Law-4	Law-5	Law Rank
Nepal	1	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	1
Philippines	1	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	1
Vietnam	1	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	1
Bhutan	0.8	✓	✓	✓	⊗	✓	2
India	0.8	✓	⊗	✓	✓	✓	2
Lao, PDR	0.8	✓	⊗	✓	✓	✓	2
Thailand	0.8	✓	✓	✓	⊗	✓	2
Timor-Leste	0.8	✓	✓	✓	⊗	✓	2
Cambodia	0.6	✓	⊗	✓	⊗	✓	3
Indonesia	0.6	⊗	⊗	✓	✓	✓	3
Singapore	0.6	✓	⊗	✓	✓	⊗	3

ASIA	Law Index Value	Law-1	Law-2	Law-3	Law-4	Law-5	Law Rank
Sri Lanka	0.6	✓	⊗	✓	⊗	✓	3
Bangladesh	0.4	⊗	⊗	✓	⊗	✓	4
Malaysia	0.4	⊗	⊗	✓	⊗	✓	4
Maldives	0.4	⊗	⊗	✓	⊗	✓	4
Pakistan	0.4	⊗	⊗	✓	⊗	✓	4
Afghanistan	0.2	⊗	⊗	✓	⊗	⊗	5
Myanmar	0.2	✓	⊗	⊗	⊗	⊗	5
Brunei	0	⊗	⊗	⊗	⊗	⊗	6

In Asia, nearly all countries in the region have laws against sexual harassment in employment, with the sole exceptions being **Myanmar** and **Brunei Darussalam**. Only six countries: **Nepal, the Philippines, Vietnam, Bhutan, Thailand, and Timor-Leste**, have implemented equal remuneration for work of equal value. **Nepal, the Philippines, and Vietnam** lead the region by enacting all five essential gender-related laws and policies. In stark contrast, **Brunei Darussalam** is the only Asian country without any of these critical measures. Addressing these deficiencies is crucial for fostering a more equitable society where girls and young women can realize their leadership potential.

Law and Policies Index Value - Pacific

PACIFIC	Law Index Value	Law-1	Law-2	Law-3	Law-4	Law-5	Law Rank
Australia	1	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	1
New Zealand	1	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	1
Fiji	0.8	✓	✓	✓	✓	⊗	2
Kiribati	0.8	✓	✓	✓	✓	⊗	2
Samoa	0.6	✓	✓	✓	⊗	⊗	3
Vanuatu	0.6	✓	✓	⊗	⊗	✓	3
Marhsall Islands	0.4	⊗	✓	⊗	⊗	✓	4
Micronesia	0.4	✓	✓	⊗	⊗	⊗	4
Papua New Guinea	0.4	✓	✓	⊗	⊗	⊗	4
Solomon Islands	0.4	✓	✓	⊗	⊗	⊗	4
Palau	0.2	⊗	✓	⊗	⊗	⊗	5

PACIFIC	Law Index Value	Law-1	Law-2	Law-3	Law-4	Law-5	Law Rank
Tonga	0.2	⊗	✓	⊗	⊗	⊗	5
Nauru	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	
Tuvalu	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	

In the Pacific region, **Australia** and **New Zealand** lead the rankings by implementing all five laws and policies. In contrast, **Nauru** and **Tuvalu** have no applicable legislation for any of these sub-indicators. **Palau** and **Tonga** have only enacted legislation establishing clear criminal penalties for domestic violence. Notably, this particular legislation is the most prevalent across the Pacific, with the exceptions of **Nauru** and **Tuvalu**.

GLI in Context

Child Marriage Remains a Critical Issue in the Asia-Pacific Region

Child marriage continues to be a significant global challenge, with an estimated **640 million girls and women** alive today having been married during childhood. Each year, approximately **12 million girls** are forced into marriage before turning 18, and without accelerated efforts, this number could rise to over **100 million** by 2030, falling short of the Sustainable Development Goals' target to end the practice.

Despite the severity of child marriage, the GLI has found that many countries in the Asia-Pacific region lack laws prohibiting or invalidating the practice. These countries include Bhutan, Thailand, Timor-Leste, Cambodia, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Malaysia, Maldives, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Myanmar, and Brunei Darussalam. In the Pacific: Samoa, Vanuatu, the Marshall Islands, Micronesia, the Federated States, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Palau, Tonga, Nauru, and Tuvalu also do not have legislation addressing child marriage. The absence of such laws perpetuates gender inequality and hinders the empowerment of young women, limiting their opportunities for education, economic participation, and leadership.



Climate Action

SUB-INDICATORS

ASIA

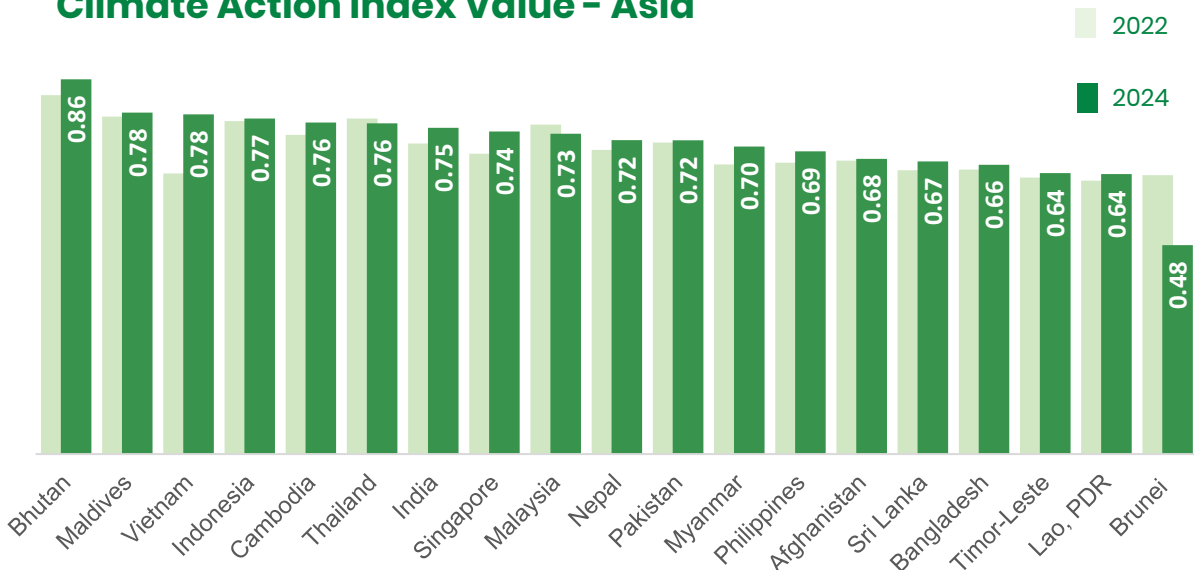
- Number of deaths and missing persons attributed to disasters (per 100,000 population)
- Number of directly affected persons attributed to disasters per 100,000 population (number)
- Proportion of population with primary reliance on clean fuels and technology (%)
- Terrestrial and marine protected areas (% of total territorial area)
- Carbon dioxide emissions, production emissions per capita (tonnes)
- Countries with NDC to Paris Declaration on Climate Change (2021 updated)

PACIFIC

- Number of deaths and missing persons attributed to disasters (per 100,000 population)
- Number of directly affected persons attributed to disasters per 100,000 population
- Proportion of population with primary reliance on clean fuels and technology (%)
- Terrestrial and marine protected areas (% of total territorial area)
- CO2 emissions (metric tons per capita)

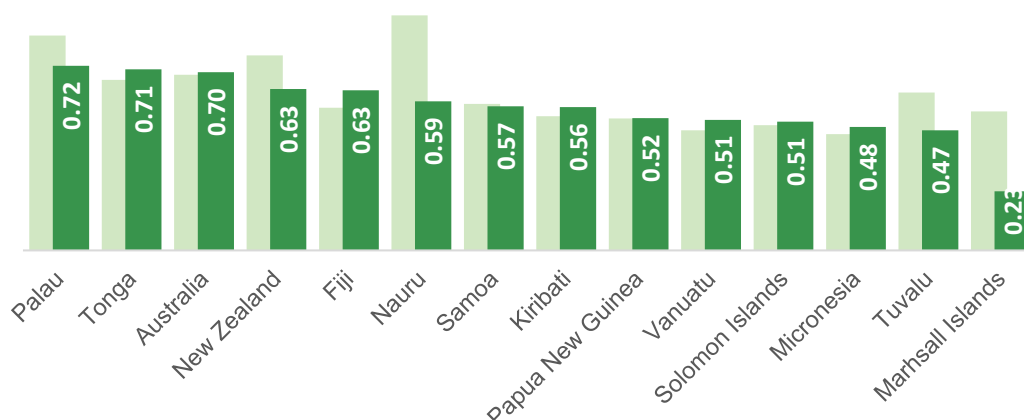
The Climate Action domain highlights the unique and disproportionate impacts that climate change has on girls and young women. Daily inequalities are magnified by climate-related hazards, potentially preventing up to 12.5 million girls each year from completing their schooling by 2025. Factors such as age, gender, and intersecting identities exacerbate the uneven effects of climate disasters on livelihoods, education, health, and overall well-being, placing girls and young women at the forefront of climate activism and advocacy. Empowering girls with the necessary voices, power, and agency is essential for driving meaningful climate justice and ensuring that their contributions lead to sustainable and equitable solutions for future generations.

Climate Action Index Value – Asia



In Asia, the Climate Action domain shows overall improvement, reflecting enhanced efforts to address climate challenges and empower girls in climate resilience and advocacy. However, progress is uneven, with **Thailand, Malaysia, and Brunei Darussalam** lagging behind. In contrast, **Bhutan** leads with a 0.036-point increase. This disparity underscores the urgent need for **Thailand, Malaysia, and Brunei Darussalam** to implement gender-inclusive climate strategies. Prioritizing the effective execution of climate policies is essential for advancing sustainable development.

Climate Action Index Value – Pacific



In the Pacific region, **Palau** ranks highest despite a slight decrease of 0.1189 points. Conversely, **Nauru** and **the Marshall Islands** have faced significant declines of 0.3 points each, reflecting challenges such as increased disaster-related deaths, lower reliance on clean fuels, limited environmental protections, and higher carbon emissions. These setbacks underscore the urgent need for these nations to invest in climate strategies and strengthen their environmental policies.

GLI in Context

Brunei Darussalam Faces Significant Decline in Climate Action Domain

In Asia, all 19 countries have submitted their Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) under the Paris Agreement on Climate Change. Sixteen of these 19 countries show an increase in scores. Among them, Vietnam shows the most significant score increase.

Brunei Darussalam has experienced the most substantial decline, ranking lowest among 19 Asian countries with a decrease of -0.4272 points. This decline is primarily due to Brunei's continued reliance on hydrocarbon resources, making the energy sector the largest contributor to its greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, accounting for 54.6% of total emissions. The country's slow adoption of clean fuels and renewable energy technologies, coupled with challenges in establishing electric vehicle (EV) infrastructure and providing financial incentives, has hindered progress. Although Brunei has committed to ambitious climate goals through the Brunei National Climate Change Policy (BNCCP) aiming for 30% renewable energy by 2035, implementation remains limited. Additionally, Brunei's efforts in deploying carbon capture, utilization, and storage (CCUS) technologies and expanding renewable energy capacity are still in the early stages, further impeding its ability to improve its climate action score.



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RECOMMENDATIONS:

Based on GLI 2024

This section identifies countries and domain areas requiring urgent development interventions based on the 2024 GLI. By highlighting key issues and underlying causes, we offer actionable recommendations to guide stakeholders in making targeted investments and interventions. The proposed actions focus on two main strategies:

- 1) Prioritizing low-performing countries (with a 2024 index in the 3 lowest rankings for that domain) and those with declining scores to address critical gaps and maximize impact.
- 2) Leveraging regional best practices and international standards to inform scalable solutions for similar challenges.

EDUCATION

Despite overall progress, significant disparities persist due to **socio-economic barriers, cultural norms, and infrastructural limitations**. Low female enrollment rates, limited internet access, and low completion rates at secondary and tertiary levels disproportionately affect girls, hindering their leadership potential.

Prioritized countries:
Afghanistan, Pakistan, Cambodia, Laos, Papua New Guinea, Nauru, Solomon Islands

Development Advocacy and Initiatives:

Civil Society & Development Communities:



Transform girls' education through targeted interventions: The *Because I Am a Girl* campaign mobilized €436 million and changed education policies in 17 countries through advocacy and direct programming. Its signature achievement was influencing the UN Global Goals via a 2.3 million-signature petition, while their *Accelerated Learning Programs* provide intensive 9-month basic education for out-of-school girls aged 9-12 through community learning centers.



Expand community-driven programs to promote girls' education: Engage local stakeholders to increase female enrollment and retention in schools. Adapt successful models like the *Educate Girls program in India*, which has enrolled over 750,000 out-of-school girls by working closely with communities and training volunteers.

Private Sector



Improve digital access and literacy: Collaborate with governments and educational institutions to invest in affordable internet infrastructure and digital literacy programs for

girls. This aligns with initiatives like the *Girls Go Digital project*, enhancing digital skills in underserved communities.

Government and Policy Makers



Strengthen policies ensuring equal access to education for girls: Implement measures to reduce dropout rates, such as providing financial incentives and creating safe learning environments.

ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES

Prioritized countries:

Afghanistan, Pakistan,
Bangladesh, Micronesia,
Papua New Guinea,
Solomon Islands, Vanuatu

Gaps in financial inclusion, youth employment, and female leadership are symptoms of deeper socio-economic issues. **Limited rural development, inadequate education, and social norms** push young women into informal work and domestic roles, restricting their economic prospects. Early marriage and adolescent pregnancy further hinder their education and workforce participation, perpetuating economic vulnerability for girls.

Development Advocacy and initiatives:

Civil Society & Development Communities:



Address socio-economic barriers to employment: Implement community programs that raise awareness about the impact of early marriage and promote economic opportunities for young women.



Empower youth through economic opportunities: The *Skills and Opportunities for Youth Employment and Entrepreneurship (SOYEE)* initiative by Plan International focuses on marginalized youth, particularly young women, by implementing economic empowerment projects in over 40 countries. SOYEE provides market-driven employability skills, financial literacy training, and peer-to-peer mentoring, facilitating job matching and placements in emerging sectors like green, digital, and creative economies, which could generate 139 million new jobs by 2030.

Private Sector



Enhance financial literacy and entrepreneurship opportunities: Implement programs like the *SheMeansBusiness initiative in Vietnam*, which trains women in digital and financial skills, empowering them to start and grow businesses effectively.



Promote gender diversity in leadership: Establish mentorship programs and set gender representation goals, following examples like *Unilever's Women Empowerment Program in Southeast Asia*, which focuses on building a talent pipeline and supporting women's career advancement.

Government and Policy Makers



Support female labor force participation: Incentivize businesses to hire young women and invest in education and vocational training to enhance skills relevant to the job market.

PROTECTION

Persistent **cultural norms** that uphold male authority and **systemic inequalities** perpetuate violence against women. **Weak legal frameworks** and inadequate enforcement exacerbate these vulnerabilities, hindering progress in the Protection domain

Prioritized countries:
Lao PDR, Bangladesh,
Afghanistan, Nauru,
Papua New Guinea,
Kiribati

Development Advocacy and Initiatives:

Civil Society & Development Communities:



Support work to transform harmful social and gender norms that perpetuate gender-based violence: Plan International's **Champions of Change** initiative equips girls with leadership skills and engages boys in challenging harmful masculinities. In Nepal, for example, participants run community workshops to address gender-based violence, and in Vietnam, youth-led campaigns focus on ending early marriage. These activities foster community-wide awareness and allyship, reducing stigma and encouraging protective behaviors that directly address the root causes of violence against women.



Strengthen support services for survivors of violence and abuse: Implement programs like the **Weto in Mour (WIM) program** by Women United Together Marshall Islands, which provides counseling, financial support, and essential resources to victims.

Private Sector



Ensure accountability and respect for human rights: Adhere to the **UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs)** by conducting due diligence to prevent child labor and enforcing responsible supply chain management.

Government and Policy Makers



Invest in regional initiatives: Participate in programs like the **Pacific Partnership to End Violence Against Women and Girls**, which promotes gender equality and supports survivors. At the national level, laws should be strengthened to align with international standards to address the root causes of violence and child exploitation.

HEALTH

Prioritized countries:

Pakistan, Timor-Leste, Afghanistan, Marshall Islands, Nauru, Papua New Guinea

Despite notable advancements in reproductive health, nutrition, and mental health, significant challenges remain due to limited access to services, stigma surrounding mental health, and inadequate health infrastructure. High adolescent pregnancy rates, malnutrition among young girls, and rising mental health issues continue to impede the leadership potential of girls and young women.

Development Advocacy and Initiatives

Civil Society & Development Communities:



Expand community-based health programs: Implement initiatives like the **Community Health Worker (CHW) programs by the American Public Health Association (APHA)**, which train local health workers to provide reproductive and mental health services in underserved areas.



Enhance access to quality health services: Implement projects such as Plan International's **"Strengthening Health Outcomes for Women and Children"**, which removes barriers to quality health services in Bangladesh, Ghana, Haiti, Nigeria, and Senegal. This initiative reduces maternal and child mortality by improving health facilities, training healthcare staff, addressing negative gender stereotypes, and engaging men to support women's health and decision-making.

Private Sector:



Invest in health technology and services: Collaborate with technology companies to develop and deploy mobile health applications that offer information on reproductive health, nutrition, and mental well-being, enhancing accessibility for underserved communities.

Government and Policy Makers:



Increase funding for health infrastructure: Prioritize investments in healthcare facilities, particularly in rural and underserved areas, to ensure equitable access to quality health services for girls and young women.

POLITICAL VOICE AND REPRESENTATION

While progress has been made in some areas, significant barriers continue to hinder equal political voice and representation for girls and young women in the Asia-Pacific region. Low participation rates in political institutions, limited access to leadership training, and societal norms that discourage female leadership restrict their ability to effectively influence policy and decision-making processes.

Prioritized countries:

Afghanistan, Brunei Darussalam, Pakistan, Samoa, Nauru, Papua New Guinea

Development Advocacy and Initiatives

Civil Society & Development Communities:



Enhance leadership training: Partner with NGOs to provide leadership and advocacy training for girls and young women by participating in and joining successful programs like the **Women’s Leadership Initiative, a component of the Women and Youth in Democracy Initiative (WYDE)**.



Implement empowering campaigns: Implement projects such as Plan International’s **“Girls Get Equal”** campaign, which engages youth activists globally to support girls and young women in claiming power over their own lives and shaping their communities. This campaign is designed to empower girls and young women by providing them with the skills and opportunities needed to take on leadership roles in their communities and beyond. It focuses on fostering leadership qualities, enhancing advocacy skills, and creating networks that support sustained personal and professional growth.

Private Sector:



Support female candidates: Encourage businesses to sponsor and mentor young women running for office, fostering partnerships that promote gender diversity in leadership roles.

Government and Policy Makers:



Implement gender quotas: Enforce gender quotas in political institutions to ensure a minimum percentage of seats for women, drawing inspiration from **successful models in Rwanda and Sweden**.

LAW AND POLICIES

Significant gaps remain in the legal and policy frameworks in the Asia-Pacific region. Many countries lack comprehensive laws addressing key issues such as child marriage, equal pay, sexual harassment in employment, and domestic violence.

Prioritized countries:

Bangladesh, Malaysia, Maldives, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Myanmar, Brunei Darussalam, Marshall Islands, Micronesia, Federated States, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Palau, Tonga, Nauru, Tuvalu

Development Advocacy and Initiatives

Civil Society & Development Communities:



Advocate for comprehensive gender-sensitive legislation: Implement programs like **UN Women's Policy Advocacy Program**, which campaigns for the adoption and enforcement of essential gender-related laws, including those prohibiting child marriage, ensuring equal pay, and addressing domestic violence.



Facilitate youth access to sexual and reproductive health services through supportive policies: Advocate for the implementation of initiatives like Plan International's "**Youth Community-Based Distribution Agents (YCBDAs)**" program in Malawi by enacting supportive policies that address barriers such as long distances, lack of comprehensive sex education, and harmful social norms. Supporting the training of YCBDAs to connect with communities, organize youth clubs, and facilitate access to health services will enhance the utilization of youth-friendly health services and reduce teenage pregnancies.

Private Sector:



Adopt gender-inclusive policies: Encourage businesses to adopt internal policies that support gender equality, such as equal pay for equal work and anti-harassment measures. Collaborate with companies participating in the **UN Women's Empowerment Principles (WEPs)** to align corporate practices with international gender equality standards.

Government and Policy Makers:



Strengthen and enforce gender laws: Enact comprehensive gender-related legislation and ensure effective enforcement and monitoring. Draw inspiration from successful models like Rwanda's gender quota system.

CLIMATE ACTION

Prioritized countries:

Timor-Leste, Lao PDR, Brunei Darussalam, Federated States of Micronesia, Tuvalu, Marshall Islands

The Asia-Pacific region still faces significant challenges in fully transitioning to a sustainable, low-carbon economy. High rates of deaths, missing persons attributed to disasters, and inadequate coverage of terrestrial and marine protected areas continue to impede climate resilience and environmental sustainability.

Development Advocacy and Initiatives

Civil Society & Development Communities:



Support Youth Leadership in Climate Policy: Adopt an initiative like the Plan International's **Youth Leadership in Climate Policy Workbook and Facilitator's Guide** to enhance young people's knowledge and skills in climate policy. The workbook provides tools for climate empowerment, facilitates access to decision-making spaces, and incorporates concepts of climate justice, equity, and fairness. Key activities include developing national climate action plans, stakeholder mapping, and preparing Climate Policy Action Plans for young people aged 14 and above.



Promote sustainable agriculture practices: Adopt initiatives like the **Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)'s Climate-Smart Agriculture (CSA)**, which enhances agricultural productivity, resilience, and reduces emissions through sustainable farming techniques.

Private Sector:



Support renewable energy projects: Partner with the **United Nations Environment Program (UNEP)'s Clean Energy Initiative** to develop and invest in renewable energy sources. This collaboration fosters a transition to low-carbon economies and reduces dependency on fossil fuels.

Government and Policy Makers:



Expand terrestrial and marine protected areas: Implement policies that increase the coverage of protected areas to preserve biodiversity, enhance ecosystem services, and provide natural barriers against climate-induced disasters.

CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES:

Priorities for Targeted Actions

Several critical observations emerge regarding the interconnectedness of issues impacting girls' leadership and empowerment across various domains.

Child Marriage

Child marriage is defined as, “Any marriage carried out below the age of 18 years, before the girl is physically, physiologically, and psychologically ready to shoulder the responsibilities of marriage” (Inter-African Committee - IAC 1993)

Child marriage severely compromises a girl's development by leading to early pregnancy and social isolation, which interrupts her education and adversely affects the Education domain. This disruption limits her opportunities for career and vocational advancement, ultimately exacerbating Economic opportunities and increasing her dependency on her husband. Coupled with social norms and customary or religious laws, this dependency places her at greater risk of domestic violence. Child marriage is reflected in the Protection domain through the sub-indicator measuring marriage before age 18 and rates of domestic violence by intimate partners. It also impacts the Law and Policies domain, particularly regarding the existence or absence of laws prohibiting child marriage. This issue is prevalent in countries like Afghanistan, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Papua New Guinea, where low GLI 2024 scores across multiple domains demonstrate the extensive effects of early marriage. Across the Education, Economic, Protection, and Law and Policies domains, these countries rank in the bottom half, signifying dire need for action to improve the situation for girl leadership.

Gender Inequality

Gender inequality affects every facet of girls' lives, encompassing educational opportunities, economic empowerment, and protection from violence. This underscores the necessity for comprehensive, cross-sectoral strategies to attain genuine gender parity.

Disparities in Education and Economic opportunities restrict girls' potential for both personal and professional development. In the Health domain, unequal access to healthcare and increased vulnerability to violence jeopardize girls' well-being and their ability to lead. Regarding Voice and Representation, the underrepresentation of women in political and decision-making positions limits the advocacy for policies that promote gender equity. Additionally, in the domain of Laws and Policies, insufficient legal

frameworks fail to address deep-rooted gender biases, thereby perpetuating inequality across all areas.

The gender inequality issue is widespread in countries such as Afghanistan, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Brunei Darussalam, the Solomon Islands, and Papua New Guinea. Low GLI 2024 scores across multiple domains in these nations highlight the profound impact of gender disparities on girls' leadership.

Inadequate Access to Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR)

“Good sexual and reproductive health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being in all matters relating to the reproductive system. It implies that people are able to have a satisfying and safe sex life, the capability to reproduce and the freedom to decide if, when, and how often to do so.” (UNFP)

Limited access to SRHR negatively impacts the Health domain. Without adequate SRHR support, girls face higher risks of morbidity and mortality, significantly diminishing their overall health and life expectancy. Inadequate access to SRHR leads to unintended pregnancies among girls, which might disrupt their education and career paths, affecting their Educational and Economic opportunities. When girls are healthy and educated, they are more likely to enter the workforce, contribute to economic growth, and achieve financial independence. This economic empowerment reduces their dependence on others and fosters greater participation in leadership roles within and beyond their communities. Understanding their reproductive rights and having access to contraception enables girls to assert control over their bodies and prevent forced or early marriages.

Inadequate access to SRHR is prevalent in countries such as Afghanistan, Timor-Leste, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, Nauru, and the Marshall Islands, where low GLI 2024 scores are particularly evident in the Health domain.

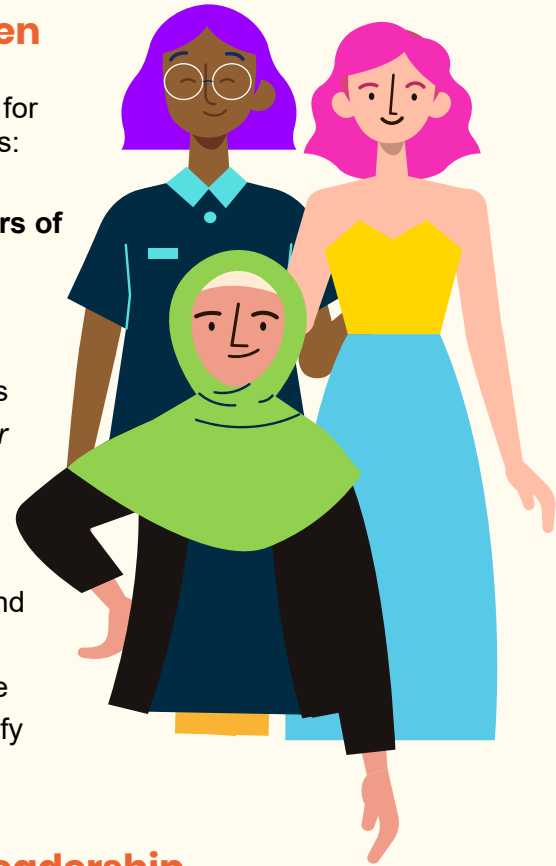


CATALYZING CHANGE: Building Better Futures for Girls

Collective Action for Girls and Young Women

Empowering girls and young women to organize and advocate for their rights is essential to building their leadership. This requires:

- **Engaging young people, especially girls, as active drivers of change:** Plan and allocate resources to support meaningful youth involvement in the design, implementation, and evaluation of projects and initiatives.
- **Adopting youth-centered program models:** Utilize models like *Champions of Change*, *Young Citizen Score Card*, *Safer Cities*, and *Girls in Crises* to strengthen youth engagement.
- **Using participatory and girl-centered methodologies:** Bring young people, especially girls, to the forefront through approaches such as participatory action research and girl-centered design.
- **Resourcing girls' organizations and movements:** Provide targeted funding and support for girls' organizations to amplify their voices and sustain their movements.



Creating Environment that Support Girls' Leadership

To support girls' leadership amid current regional trends, stakeholders should focus on:

- **Developing inclusive policies:** Establish and uphold policies that ensure gender equality and enable girls to access education, economic resources, and leadership opportunities.
- **Ensuring safe spaces for expression:** Create protected environments where girls can safely voice their perspectives and participate in civic activities.
- **Adapting to regional challenges:** Address issues like shrinking civic space and climate change holistically, recognizing their cross-cutting impact on girls' ability to lead.

Further Areas for Studies

Future research should delve into emerging trends, such as the impact of climate change on girls' educational and economic prospects and the influence of shrinking civic spaces on young women's activism.

For further resources and recommendations, please refer to [Plan International Resources](#)

REVIEWS

“This report that provides us with a good understanding of girls’ situation is especially precious for researchers, since research on girls are difficult because of the ethical hurdles that researchers need to clear. Research on children need to take extra care so that the research will not affect negatively on very vulnerable population such as children. This report helps us in identifying what research is needed, and gives us a good head-start and focus on research, so that we can have minimum disturbances to the girls’ lives through research actions.”

The report not only has statistics to show the ranking of the countries, but also has put recommendations for change. This is the strength of this report, which is published by a NGO like Plan International, which has wealth of knowledge on ground realities and strong experience in problem solving. It has also included good practices (successful and scalable models), which are useful for policy makers and practitioners, but also to researchers to gain more insights into understanding what can make changes.”

Kyoko Kusakabe

Professor, Gender and Development Studies
Asian Institute of Technology

“I must say that I enjoyed reading this report and think it is an excellent report, much needed at this stage when there is no comparable global benchmark for defining the framework to determine the girl’s leadership. This report’s combined index and constituent indicators provide a fairly exhaustive idea of what must be done to address vulnerabilities in varying contexts. Differentials are essential parameters for stimulating policy discourses. Countries should use the report to undertake Indigenous exercises to asses contextual relevance and local dynamics that help manifest those vulnerabilities to generate appropriate response mechanisms and prevention strategies.”

Ravi Verma, PhD

Executive Director
International Center for Research on Women (ICRW), Asia

“As an alliance of civil society organizations working together to ensure that human rights are fulfilled and fundamental freedoms are protected, Civicus recognizes the roles that different sectors play in shaping a future characterized by genuine and lasting peace, and sustainable development. The role of young human rights defenders, including girls and young women have evidently contributed in the fight for an open civic space. Sadly, as shared in the Girls’ Leadership Index the platform for girls’ meaningful and safe political participation has been impacted by the global trend of shrinking civic space. There are compounding factors that resulted this which largely points to state and non-state anti-rights actors who have launched organized attacks against gender equality and gender equality advocates. This is why the Girls’ Leadership Index becomes more important as it systematically analyzes the factors affecting the fulfillment of girls’ right and puts forward specific recommendations not only on political participation but on domains that influence the enabling environment for girls’ leadership.

We stand in solidarity with girls and young women globally, and the organizations that support them including Plan International. We remain an ally and a champion of gender equality, human rights and fundamental freedoms. We commend Plan International Asia Pacific for this highly relevant report. This is a work worth celebrating and using as we continue the fight for human rights and gender equality, in such a time as this.”

Reylynne Dela Paz

Global Advocacy and Campaigns Manager
Civicus: World Alliance for Citizen Participation

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PLAN INTERNATIONAL is an independent development and humanitarian organisation that advances children's rights and equality for girls. we strive for a just world, working together with children, young people, supporters and partners. using our reach, experience and knowledge, we drive change in practice and policy at local, national and global levels. we are independent of governments, religions and political parties. for more than 80 years, we have been building powerful partnerships for children and are active in more than 75 countries.

Girls Get Equal

Plan International has been campaigning for girls' rights for more than a decade. Our current Girls Get Equal campaign aims to ensure girls and young women have power over their own lives and can help shape the world around them. Promoting young female leadership is central to the campaign. While this includes access to formal positions of power and authority, such as increasing the numbers of young women and girls in decision-making roles in public life, it also looks beyond these formal positions. Girls Get Equal, with its iconic warpaint-style equal sign, seeks to redefine leadership to better reflect how girls, young women, and young advocates and activists are choosing to lead by working with them to ensure leadership is feminist, gender-transformative and inclusive. It means not reinforcing a narrow male-defined set of leadership skills and behaviours or replicating the male-dominated power and leadership structures that currently exist. Throughout the campaign there will be ongoing research, partnering with girls and young women to fully understand what it means to them to be a leader.

Partner with us!

Plan International intends to partner with a range of leading and contributing actors to promote and support investment in adolescent girls in the region. We welcome new partners who are willing to join our effort and combine resources and technical expertise to invest in adolescent girls' development and their successful transition from childhood through adolescence into adulthood.

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