STUDY

Ammar A. Malik and Noor Un Nisa
March 2026

Advancing Feminist Principles in the Asia-Pacific through International Policy

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Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Nepal Office
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P.O. Box 11840, Kathmandu, Nepal
info.nepal@fes.de

Publishing Department
Asia and Pacific Department

Responsibility for content and editing
Sarah Klaussner | Director
Priyanka Kapar | Program Manager

Contact
Gender Justice Competence Center Asia-Pacific
geha@fes.de

Copyediting
Bikram Timilsina

Design/Layout
Light Trail Studio

Front page design
Faishal Shakya

Printing and production
Kazi Studios

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Foreword

This study, *Advancing Feminist Principles in the Asia-Pacific through International Policy*, emerges at a moment of profound transformation in the global order and in the Asia-Pacific region. As geopolitical competition intensifies, multilateralism is questioned, and social inequalities deepen, the need for approaches that can address these evolving challenges through inclusive and coherent policymaking has never been more apparent. Feminist principles—centered on rights, representation, and resources—offer precisely such a lens. Yet the ways in which these principles are interpreted, adapted, or resisted in diverse political and cultural contexts across the Asia-Pacific remain underexplored.

Against this backdrop, the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) Gender Justice Competence Centre Asia-Pacific and the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD) jointly commissioned this study to generate evidence-based insights into how feminist principles are reflected in international policy across the region. Drawing on desk research, data analysis, and expert interviews, the report examines six key domains—trade and economic justice, climate diplomacy and disaster response, development cooperation and humanitarian aid, migration and labour mobility, peace and security, and foreign policy and diplomacy. The study aims not only to map current practices but also to identify viable entry points for strengthening gender-just approaches within national, regional, and international arenas.

At its core, this publication reflects our shared belief that feminist perspectives are indispensable for shaping international policies capable of addressing today's interconnected crises. The findings show that while few Asia-Pacific countries explicitly adopt the term "feminist" in their international engagement, feminist principles are nonetheless being applied—sometimes cautiously, sometimes innovatively—in governance reforms, diplomatic practice, and regional cooperation. These dynamics underscore the importance of context-sensitive approaches that recognise the region's political diversity, historical legacies, and rich traditions of feminist organising.

This study was made possible through the dedication, expertise, and collaboration of many individuals. We express our deep appreciation to the authors **Ammar A. Malik and Noor Un Nisa** from Shared Pathways, whose rigorous analysis and nuanced understanding of the region shaped this report from the outset. We would like to thank **Priyanka Kapar**, Program Manager, FES Gender Justice Competence Centre Asia-Pacific for her comprehensive project management and oversight of the study. She led the organisational framework and served as the primary lead for research support, institutional feedback, and editorial guidance. We would also like to thank **Anna Eknor Ackzell**, Research Analyst at UNRISD, for her contribution in the review and editorial process.

We are profoundly grateful to the peer reviewers—**Prof. Naila Kabeer, Prof. Elisabeth Prügl, and Dr. Lata Narayanaswamy**—who contributed their intellectual leadership and expertise to strengthen the conceptual, methodological, and analytical foundations of this study. Their review brought critical insights, ensuring the study's conceptual integrity and regional policy relevance.

We also extend our sincere thanks to all expert interviewees who generously shared their experiences, reflections, and knowledge. Their contributions enriched the study with grounded realities from government institutions, civil society, academia, and policy networks across the Asia- Pacific. Without their engagement, this publication would not have been possible.

Finally, we acknowledge the dedication of the many colleagues and collaborators across the FES and UNRISD networks who supported this process.

It is our hope that this study will serve as a valuable resource for policymakers, practitioners, researchers, and feminist movements working to embed equality and justice within international policy frameworks. We offer it as an invitation to deepen regional dialogue, support ongoing policy conversations, and provide concrete insights for strengthening gender-responsive and inclusive international policymaking in the Asia-Pacific region.

Natalia Figge
Director [2023-2025]
Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) Gender Justice Competence Centre Asia-Pacific

Magdalena Sepulveda Carmona
Director
United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD)

List of Abbreviations

ACW	ASEAN Committee on Women
ADB	Asian Development Bank
AIPR	ASEAN Institute for Peace and Reconciliation
APEC	Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
AQRF	ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework
AUKUS	Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States Security Partnership
BISP	Benazir Income Support Programme
BLA	Bilateral Labour Agreement
BPfA	Beijing Platform for Action
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
COP	Conference of the Parties
COVID	Coronavirus Disease
CPTPP	Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
CRPD	Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DFAT	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
DRR	Disaster Risk Reduction
EC	European Commission
E-GBV	Electronic Gender-Based Violence
EU	European Union
FFP	Feminist Foreign Policy
FRDP	Framework for Resilient Development in the Pacific
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GEM	Global Entrepreneurship Monitor
GHG	Greenhouse Gases
GRB	Gender-Responsive Budgeting
G20	Group of Twenty
HDI	Human Development Index
ICESCR	International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
ILO	International Labour Organization
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IPU	Inter-Parliamentary Union
IWDA	International Women's Development Agency
KII	Key Informant Interviews
LGBTIQ+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex or Queer
MOUs	Memoranda of Understanding
MSMEs	Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises
NAP	National Action Plan
NCGE	National Committee on Gender Equality
NDCs	Nationally Determined Contributions
ODA	Official Development Assistance

OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OHCHR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
OIC	Organisation of Islamic Cooperation
OWWA	Overseas Workers Welfare Administration
PERKESO	Pertubuhan Keselamatan Sosial; in English: Social Security Organisation (SOCSO)
P/CVE	Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism
POEA	Philippine Overseas Employment Administration
PQF	Philippine Qualifications Framework
RCEP	Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership
RTA	Regional Trade Agreement
SAARC	South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SRHR	Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights
SSC	South-South Cooperation
SSS	Social Security System
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCAP	United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNHRC	United Nations Human Rights Council
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WEF	World Economic Forum
WPS	Women, Peace and Security
WRO	Women's Rights Organisation
WTO	World Trade Organization

Executive Summary

Inclusive and gender-responsive policymaking is gaining gradual traction across the Asia-Pacific region. Several governments are attempting to align their diplomacy, development cooperation, and security strategies with broader goals of equality and social justice. This report showcases how four countries—namely Australia, Mongolia, Pakistan, and Indonesia—are applying feminist principles in their international policies as part of an evolving practice. These principles—centred on fairness in rights, representation in decision-making, and equitable access to resources—are increasingly visible in national strategies, albeit unevenly. The analysis suggests that governments are adapting ideas of inclusion and accountability to their own political and cultural realities, producing diverse and often modest pathways towards more inclusive policy systems. This is not unexpected given the highly diverse nature of this region. Yet, the region, home to over half of the world's population, is a decisive frontier for global gender equality trends, and progress—or lack thereof—in these contexts has implications far beyond its borders.

The purpose of this study is to explore how gender equality and social justice are reflected in the Asia-Pacific's international policy landscape. Using desk-based research, data analysis, and expert interviews, it identifies where and how principles of equality and participation are being integrated into policies on economic justice, development aid, trade, peacebuilding, climate change adaptation, labour migration, and diplomacy. The report approaches this question through the "3Rs" framework of rights, representation, and resources, while remaining attentive to contextual factors such as institutional capacity and political will. The findings suggest that feminist principles are advancing incrementally through practice rather than formal declaration, as states respond to global norms and domestic demands for more inclusive governance. The findings also reveal that feminist ideas increasingly inform the language and logic of policy, even when framed in terms such as "gender-responsive" or "inclusive" governance to align with local contexts. Avoiding the term 'feminism' does not necessarily signal rejection of feminist values, but rather reflects their localisation and translation within diverse political and social realities.

Inclusive policymaking depends on a balance between domestic reform and international engagement. Across the region, governments are introducing new gender and development priorities at home, such as political quotas for women, gender-responsive climate strategies, and inclusive peace and security plans, which, in turn, shape how they engage internationally. Countries with stronger gender institutions and legal frameworks at home, such as Australia, tend to translate these commitments more effectively into their external policies. In countries where domestic institutions are less developed, progress has often been driven by civil society or international partnerships. In Indonesia, for example, such partnerships have driven the localisation of WPS and gender budgeting agendas, while in Pakistan, advocacy networks have sustained visibility for women's rights despite limited state leadership. National histories and political traditions also influence the adaptation of global ideas about equality to local circumstances. In all cases, the pace and direction of change are shaped by internal politics, administrative structures, and wider geopolitical dynamics. Regional organisations such as ASEAN and the Pacific Islands Forum have also played an increasingly supportive role. Their initiatives provide a framework for collective action, enabling knowledge sharing and greater policy alignment across national borders.

The understanding of security in the region is expanding beyond military protection to include human well-being. Pressures from economic instability, climate change, and migration are prompting governments to reassess what constitutes national security. Fourteen countries in the region have developed Women, Peace and Security National Action Plans (NAPs), with the Philippines and Indonesia offering regionally distinctive examples. The Philippines' plan highlights insecurities arising from displacement, trafficking, and gun culture, while Indonesia adopts an expansive definition of "social conflict" to address structural and communal violence. Mongolia's plan, currently under development, aims to clarify institutional responsibilities and allocate funding to address gender-based violence, as well as strengthen women's participation in peacekeeping. However, feminist ideas continue to be overlooked in much of the region's security discourse. Major powers such as India have yet to implement a WPS national plan, despite the gendered impacts of internal conflict and their significant geopolitical influence. More broadly across the Asia-Pacific region, rising authoritarianism, populism, and militarisation have further limited policy space for feminist peacebuilding, and women are largely absent from defence and foreign policy leadership. The continued prioritisation of military spending over social investment highlights the neglect of feminist principles that advocate for demilitarisation, mediation, and non-violent conflict resolution as the foundation of comprehensive security. Collectively, these dynamics reveal a region in

transition; one in which human-centred approaches to peace and security are emerging but remain constrained by entrenched power structures and competing policy priorities.

Economic policy continues to be an area where progress on equality is constrained. Although women's educational attainment has improved significantly in the region, this has not yet translated into equal opportunities or pay. In Mongolia, women account for almost 60 per cent of the labour force but earn around one-fifth less than men. Similar disparities exist elsewhere in the region. Women make up over half the workforce in Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Thailand, yet earn 15 per cent less than men for equivalent work. Informality compounds these inequalities: in Indonesia, nearly 75 per cent of the workforce in 2019 was engaged in informal roles, with limited protection or benefits. Gender-responsive budgeting, equitable taxation, and assessment of the gendered impact of trade agreements are still rare. Only 14 per cent of regional trade agreements contain gender-related provisions, which is far lower than in other regions. Meanwhile, the region's heavy reliance on women's unpaid and undervalued care work continues to restrict their participation not only in the labour market but also in public, community, and political life. Notably, countries such as Indonesia, the Philippines, and Fiji have institutionalised gender-responsive budgeting, linking fiscal planning to redistribution and social justice. In Pakistan, government-run social safety net programmes alongside civil society initiatives have strengthened their gender-responsive design to better identify and support women who fall outside formal support systems, enhancing both their access to cash transfers and their prospects for financial inclusion. The report observes that sustainable progress in the economic sphere will therefore require comprehensive fiscal and labour-market reforms that redistribute both income and care responsibilities more equitably.

Representation in decision-making across the Asia-Pacific is expanding, yet the depth and quality of that inclusion remain uneven, shaped by institutional, cultural, and political contexts. Women's participation in parliaments and foreign services has increased, but numerical inclusion alone does not guarantee influence; institutional culture, promotion systems, and accountability mechanisms also matter. Countries such as Australia, New Zealand, Timor-Leste, and Vietnam have surpassed 30 per cent representation in parliament, while Mongolia's recent elections saw women's representation rise from 13 to 32 seats—nearly a quarter of the total seats—exceeding the regional average. Female leadership has highlighted transformative potential: Australia has achieved near parity among diplomats, though intersectional inclusion remains a work in progress. Governments and activists are drawing on national traditions to articulate approaches that resonate with their societies. India's 73rd Constitutional Amendment on Panchayati Raj reserves seats for women in local governance, transforming rural political participation; Nepal's constitutional guarantee of 33 per cent parliamentary representation for women, and Mongolia's gender quotas similarly institutionalise women's inclusion in public life. In Pakistan, reforms allowing joint diplomatic postings for married couples demonstrate a locally grounded feminist approach that recognises shared caregiving responsibilities.

Civil society continues to play an important role in linking equality agendas with state policymaking. In all four case study countries, non-governmental organisations, research institutes, and advocacy networks act as vital intermediaries between citizens and the state, translating feminist and rights-based priorities into practical policy action. In Australia, private sector actors have contributed to advancing accountability and transparency in development assistance, pushing the government to move from gender-inclusive to genuinely gender-transformative approaches. In Mongolia, women's movements and NGOs have been instrumental in increasing women's representation in parliament and strengthening policy dialogue on gender equality. In Pakistan, grassroots initiatives exemplify how feminist humanitarianism is being localised, shifting from top-down aid delivery towards community-led responses that prioritise women's agency, dignity, and care. The study finds that where governments institutionalise collaboration with civil society through formal consultation mechanisms, participatory planning, and transparent reporting, equality initiatives tend to be more inclusive, credible, and sustainable over time.

Cultural norms and institutional inertia remain substantial barriers to gender equality. Traditional expectations regarding leadership and family roles continue to restrict women's participation in politics, diplomacy, and the economy. Bureaucratic systems that appear gender-neutral often replicate these biases in recruitment, training, and promotion. Implementation gaps also persist; laws are not always backed by sufficient resources or enforcement capacity. In many countries, feminist and gender-diverse movements are portrayed as threats to national or religious identity, echoing global right-wing populist discourses. In some settings, political or religious narratives cast gender reforms as external influences, reducing their legitimacy. Addressing these constraints requires not only new policies but also sustained efforts to change institutional behaviour and public attitudes. Meanwhile, Mongolia's inclusion of men's health in its gender policy, in response to a stark male-female life expectancy gap, illustrates an emerging, holistic approach that recognises how gender equality benefits all members of society.

New policy areas are creating opportunities for more inclusive approaches to security and governance. Climate change, digital governance, and disaster management are emerging as key entry points for equality-oriented innovation. Mongolia's Vision 2050 strategy links environmental sustainability with community resilience, while new cybersecurity legislation establishes protections for data and privacy. The Philippines and Indonesia have integrated gender perspectives into disaster-risk management. The Pacific

Island states' links between gender equality and environmental stewardship also illustrate efforts to root inclusion in domestic contexts. Although these measures are limited in scale, they show that inclusive governance can be advanced through sectors that have a broad political consensus. However, most Nationally Determined Contributions in the region—including those of Australia, China, Japan, and the Republic of Korea—make only superficial references to gender responsiveness, with little recognition of women's leadership or the intersectional dimensions of climate justice.

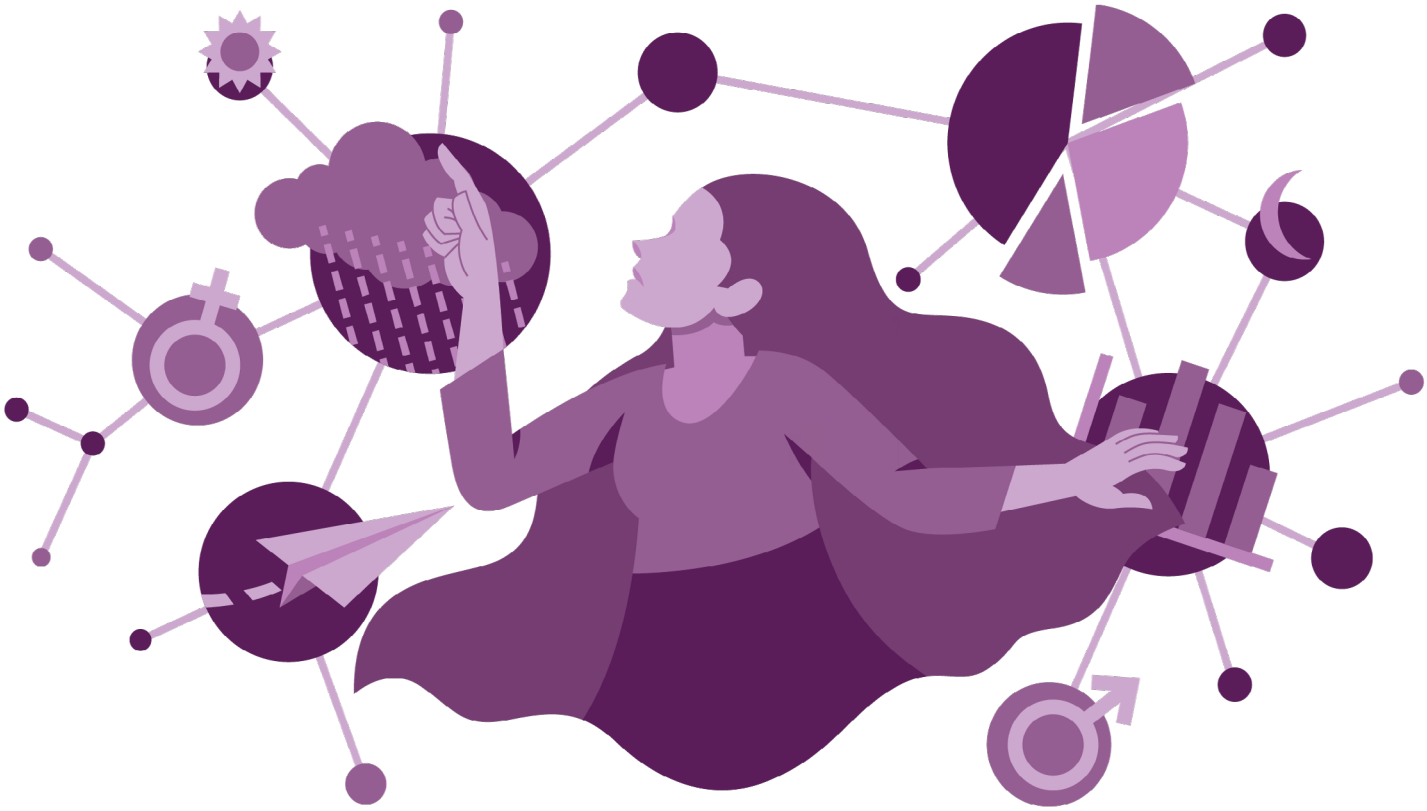
Intersectionality is now widely recognised but rarely integrated systematically. Legislation on disability inclusion, minority rights, and gender equality exists in several countries, yet coordination remains weak. Policies tend to address each category in isolation, limiting their effectiveness. As a result, groups facing multiple forms of discrimination often remain invisible in national statistics and policy evaluations. While NGOs increasingly employ intersectional approaches, state policies predominantly rely on gender-binary frameworks, excluding sexual and gender-diverse communities from formal consideration. More consistent data collection and cross-sectoral coordination would make equality initiatives more responsive to social diversity.

Overall progress across the region is gradual, uneven, and often driven by practical adaptation rather than explicit ideology. Some countries demonstrate relatively coherent frameworks linking rights, representation, and resources, while others leverage development and humanitarian sectors to advance gender-responsive practices. In settings with structural challenges, an active civil society and growing representation in governance help sustain momentum. Across the region, each context illustrates a unique pathway shaped by governance structures, cultural norms, and institutional capacity.

Three broad priorities emerge for policymakers seeking to strengthen inclusive international policy in the region. First, fiscal and economic reforms should integrate gender analysis to ensure that public budgets and tax systems reduce rather than reinforce inequality. Second, representation in public institutions should be accompanied by structural reforms that make participation substantive, including leadership targets and anti-harassment safeguards. Third, regional organisations such as ASEAN, SAARC, and the Pacific Islands Forum could play a more active role in promoting equality through cooperation on trade, climate, and migration. Finally, rebuilding trust in multilateralism and reversing international funding cuts will be critical to sustaining feminist and equality agendas in a shifting global order.

The experiences reviewed in this report indicate a steady, context-specific evolution of more inclusive governance in international affairs. Progress depends on the alignment of domestic reform, institutional capacity, and civil society participation. The countries examined here are not converging on a single model, but collectively they demonstrate that efforts to integrate equality and justice into policy can coexist with diverse political and cultural traditions. Sustained investment in evidence, dialogue, and cooperation will be essential for maintaining these gains and for translating principles of fairness and inclusion into enduring practice.

Chapter 1:
Introduction and Analytical Framework



Across the Asia-Pacific, questions of gender justice are inextricably linked to the region's most pressing international challenges. From the intensifying climate crisis to shifting patterns of economic interdependence and rising geopolitical rivalries, the policies governments pursue beyond their borders are deeply connected to struggles over equality, representation, and human rights within their own borders. This region—home to immense cultural diversity, sharp inequalities, and a complex mix of governance systems—provides both fertile ground and significant barriers for embedding feminist principles in international policy.

The animating questions for this study flow from these realities: **How are feminist principles being interpreted, adapted, or resisted in Asia-Pacific international policies? What political, institutional, and socio-cultural barriers shape the possibilities for integration? Where are the most viable entry points for advancing gender justice in foreign, development, and regional agendas? And what localised strategies or best practices can inform global frameworks and debates?** These questions matter not only for women, girls, and the marginalised groups whose lives are directly affected, but also for the broader project of reshaping international relations in ways that privilege human security, solidarity, and sustainability over narrow state-centric imperatives.

This report critically examines how feminist principles are advancing within the Asia-Pacific's international policy landscape, connecting the domestic and the global. Across the region, governments are adopting new gender and development priorities at home, whether through quotas for women in politics, national climate strategies that acknowledge gendered vulnerabilities, or peace and security plans that commit to women's inclusion. These domestic frameworks shape how states project themselves abroad, influencing their positions in climate negotiations, trade talks, aid strategies, and migration governance. We analyse how these principles transition from the national to the international arena, and how states, civil society movements, and regional organisations adopt, adapt, or resist feminist approaches.

In reality, though, the regional context is diverse and highly complex. On the one hand, the Philippines was the first Asian country to adopt a Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) National Action Plan (NAP), and Mongolia has pledged to adopt a Feminist Foreign Policy (FFP). Indonesia has spearheaded United Nations (UN) resolutions on women's participation in peacekeeping, while Australia has launched a comprehensive International Gender Equality Strategy. On the other hand, India has not adopted a WPS National Action Plan, while Nepal has imposed paternalistic restrictions on women migrants, and several states in the region have seen backlash from conservative and

populist movements that frame feminism as a foreign intrusion. These dynamics illustrate both the potential and fragility of feminist approaches in the region: progress in one arena often sits uneasily alongside resistance or regression in another.

Within this context, this report examines how feminist principles can be integrated into international policy across the region. By analysing state policies and the role of civil society, we seek to:

- → Contribute to knowledge by providing a grounded, context-specific, and evidence-based analysis of how feminist principles are currently interpreted, adopted, or resisted across the region's various international policy frameworks.
- → Evaluate opportunities and barriers to embedding feminist approaches across key international policy domains, with particular attention to political, institutional, socio-cultural, and geopolitical dynamics across the region.
- → Identify entry points and best practices where feminist principles are already influencing policy outcomes in key domains, such as trade, development cooperation, climate diplomacy, peace and security, migration, and regional integration.
- → Engage with regional specificities by applying intersectional, decolonial, and feminist perspectives that account for local contexts, sensitivities, and histories of activism.
- → Generate actionable recommendations for policymakers, practitioners, and civil society actors, offering practical strategies for embedding feminist principles into governance frameworks at both national and regional levels.
- → Foster dialogue among policymakers, international organisations, and feminist movements, bridging global debates on feminist foreign and development policy with the realities and priorities of the Asia-Pacific to advance the adaptation of feminist principles in policymaking.

This report assesses the intersection of feminist international relations (IR) theory, international policy domains, and the Three Rs analytic framework. Chapter 1 sets out the conceptual foundations, defining what we mean by international policy, outlining the relevance of feminist IR theory, introducing the Three Rs of rights, representation, and resources, and explaining the research methodology. Chapter 2 provides a current state analysis, beginning with the Asia-Pacific's geopolitical context, mapping regional trends in gender equality, and surveying how feminist principles have been adopted or resisted across trade, climate change and disaster response, diplomacy, development cooperation, peace and security, and migration. Chapter 3 presents case studies of Australia, Indonesia, Mongolia, and Pakistan, providing in-depth examinations of national contexts, policy approaches, and constraints. Chapter 4 highlights existing best practices and localised strategies, including models of successful implementation and civil society innovations that demonstrate how feminist principles are being adapted across the region. Chapter 5 synthesises these insights into a comprehensive set of policy recommendations and domain-specific entry points, identifying where and how feminist principles can be effectively embedded within Asia-Pacific governance and international cooperation.

1.1 Feminist international relations theory

Feminist International Relations (IR) scholarship provides more than a theoretical foundation for this study; it offers analytical tools for understanding how power operates and how gendered inequalities are sustained or challenged through international policy. Since the late 1980s, feminist thinkers have shown that conventional IR—with its focus on military power, sovereignty, and "protector" myths—has systematically overlooked the lived realities of women and marginalised communities. Cynthia Enloe's (2014) reminder that "the personal is international" reveals how unpaid care work, the exploitation of women's labour in global supply chains, and the gendered politics of military bases are not peripheral issues but the very essence of global power relations. Ann Tickner (1992) argued that dominant conceptions of security have sidelined human needs and entrenched gendered hierarchies, showing how state-centric doctrines often produce insecurity for women and communities. Feminist political economists also show how divisions of labour, austerity policies, care deficits, and the burdens of social reproduction shape the outcomes of international trade, development, and security policies. The adaptation of feminist principles in international policy—whether through regional agreements or global compacts—has informed the approaches of early proponents of FFP, including Sweden and Canada.

But today, these interventions are directly relevant to the Asia-Pacific policy context. The Filipino women migrant workers sustain economies across the Gulf and East Asia but remain inadequately protected by international labour regimes. Similarly, in Pakistan, a deep-rooted security doctrine in a conflict-prone region continues to dominate foreign policy, leaving limited room for human-centred, gender-responsive approaches. In contrast, the Maldives has pioneered gender-responsive climate financing, reflecting women's heightened vulnerability to rising seas and offering a model of feminist-informed policy innovation in the region. Feminist IR gives us the language and analytical depth to

connect these domestic realities to the international agendas that flow from them. This is relevant across a wide range of international policy domains, including trade, climate diplomacy, migration policy, development cooperation, and peace and security frameworks.

Crucially, feminist IR is not only a critique of existing frameworks. More recent contributions in the academic literature emphasise its role as a knowledge project that generates alternative ways of interpreting and participating in international politics. Elisabeth Prügl (2016), for example, shows how reflexivity, a core feminist practice, "can help foster democratic deliberation in a context of bureaucratic rationality by self-consciously and critically interrogating both organisational processes and epistemic commitments". In doing so, reflexivity can produce knowledge that is directly usable by policymakers without diluting its capacity to challenge entrenched orthodoxies. This perspective underscores that feminist IR is about developing practical, workable frameworks to embedding feminist principles within international policy. It also suggests that policymakers' horizons can be broadened by adapting proven domestic strategies for promoting gender equity—whether through gender-responsive budgeting, ensuring meaningful representation in negotiations, or strengthening accountability for international commitments—and applying them to regional or global governance arenas.

This study focuses on how feminist principles are being operationalised across the Asia-Pacific to advance gender equality. It examines the broader substance of feminist principles—rights, representation, and resources—while also incorporating intersectionality and reflexivity. Within specific country contexts, the analysis considers how these principles manifest across critical policy domains, including trade, climate diplomacy, migration, aid and humanitarian response, peace and security, and regional cooperation. The study identifies enabling conditions that make feminist integration possible, such as quotas for women parliamentarians in Pakistan or civil society activism on Indigenous rights in Australia, alongside the structural barriers that block progress, from patriarchal political cultures to authoritarian backlash. We focus on cases where feminist principles and approaches have created a "win-win" for countries, such as in trade negotiations, where sectoral tariffs might disproportionately harm women-dominated segments of the economy already facing challenges like high inflation and limited market access.

Feminist IR provides a framework for connecting domestic and international policy arenas, enabling an assessment of whether countries' domestic policy priorities influence their foreign policy positions and international engagements. Often, effective domestic policy reforms—like gender quotas or national action plans—have been shown to directly enhance countries' credibility and influence in multilateral spaces as champions of women's rights. Conversely, international commitments such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) or the WPS agenda can empower local activists to demand accountability at home. These forums therefore provide important avenues for country-to-country peer learning, intermediated through international policy forums, intergovernmental institutions, or multilateral development banks that advance these policies and programmes through lending and technical assistance priorities. This two-way dynamic—principles beginning domestically but gaining force abroad—forms a central focus of the analysis throughout the study.

Moreover, feminist IR literature both critiques existing frameworks and highlights opportunities for shaping international policies that improve women's conditions. It enhances the ability to document how feminist principles are already shaping policy in the Asia-Pacific, even when they are not explicitly labelled as such, and to identify concrete pathways for strengthening that influence. By situating domestic and regional developments within this scholarship, the study generates actionable recommendations for embedding feminist principles across international policy domains. The aim is to inform policymakers, amplify feminist perspectives, and contribute to reimagining international relations in ways that prioritise justice, equality, and human security.

1.2 What do we mean by international policy?

In this report, international policy refers to the full range of state actions and frameworks that govern a country's engagements beyond its borders. This includes not only foreign policy and diplomacy, but also trade and economic agreements, development cooperation and humanitarian aid, peace and security commitments, climate and environmental diplomacy, migration and labour mobility, and participation in multilateral and regional organisations. Defining international policy in this broad sense allows the study to capture how feminist principles are, or are not, embedded across multiple domains that directly affect people's rights, resources, and representation.

International policy cannot be neatly separated from domestic policy. Decisions about aid, trade, climate, or migration are not abstract external acts; they are shaped by and feed back into national political debates, legislative frameworks, and social struggles. Domestic gender equality laws, welfare regimes, and political representation influence not only a state's credibility abroad but also the types of international commitments it can uphold. At the same time, international obligations—such as the WPS agenda, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), or multilateral trade agreements—can create leverage for domestic reform. This interdependence is particularly pronounced for feminist principles, which lose legitimacy when promoted internationally without corresponding reforms at home.

As Sylvia Ostry (1992) observed in her work on globalisation, "Most of the policies which will be the subject of this new international initiative are in the domestic domain: the new international policy arena." Globalisation has blurred the distinction between domestic and international policy. Capital, technology, and supply chains flow across borders, creating pressures for states to converge on specific standards and policies. International competitiveness is no longer solely a matter of foreign tariffs or diplomacy, but increasingly depends heavily on domestic regulation of markets, education, research, and labour standards. Ostry called this "system friction"—the conflicts that emerge when domestic systems and institutions interact with the demands of a globalised economy.

For feminist analysis, this means that structural barriers such as patriarchal political cultures, unequal labour markets, or restrictions on women's mobility are not merely national issues but have international dimensions. In South Asia, for example, restrictions on women's labour migration—often justified by traditionalists as protection—limit economic opportunities at home and undermine the rights of migrant women abroad, even as remittances remain vital to national economies. In Nepal, gender quotas guaranteeing 33 per cent representation for women in parliament have reshaped domestic politics and strengthened the country's credibility when advocating for inclusion and equality in multilateral forums. By contrast, Pakistan's nascent feminist movements, such as the Aurat March, have faced severe backlash from conservative groups, reducing the government's space to take strong positions on the WPS agenda internationally. These examples demonstrate that domestic social reforms and societal struggles influence the extent to which feminist principles can be effectively projected abroad, while international commitments, in turn, empower local activists to demand accountability at home.

The focus on domestic developments—including political shifts, legislation, systemic barriers, and social movements—is not a detour from the study of international policy but is central to it. International policy today is deeply entangled with domestic systems of governance and regulations, especially in a globalised Asia-Pacific where states compete for investment, influence, and legitimacy. Analysing domestic and international levels together allows for a better understanding of how feminist principles are interpreted, adopted, or resisted in practice, and where the most promising entry points lie for advancing gender justice across the region.

1.3 Three Rs as the analytical lens

A central analytical tool for assessing the integration of feminist principles into international policy is Sweden's Three Rs framework—Rights, Representation, and Resources. Introduced in Sweden's 2014 Feminist Foreign Policy, the framework provides a structured way to evaluate whether policies move beyond rhetoric to advance gender equality in measurable and sustainable ways (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2019). The approach has since been adopted by scholars and practitioners as a practical benchmark for evaluating feminist commitments in foreign affairs.

The conceptual roots of Sweden's Three Rs can be traced to broader feminist theories of justice, most notably Nancy Fraser's three-dimensional model of redistribution, recognition, and representation. Fraser's framework integrates economic, cultural, and political dimensions of inequality, arguing that genuine social justice requires addressing injustices of distribution (economic marginalisation), recognition (cultural devaluation and misrepresentation), and representation (political exclusion) simultaneously (Fraser, 1995; 2008). As Fraser (2004) observes, "What previously looked like the personal problems of isolated individuals are actually injustices rooted in structural features of society."

While Fraser's framework offers a powerful theoretical foundation, the Swedish approach effectively operationalised these ideas within the policy sphere. In particular, Sweden's emphasis on rights can be seen as a concrete policy translation of Fraser's notion of recognition. Rather than affirming group identities, the rights dimension centres on recognising individuals' equal social standing and their capacity to participate as full partners in political and social life—an idea central to Fraser's concept of "participatory parity."

- → **Rights** refer to the protection and promotion of human rights for all women and marginalised groups, including freedom from gender-based violence, equality before the law, and the recognition of sexual and reproductive health and rights.

- → **Representation** emphasises the need for women's meaningful participation and leadership in political decision-making, diplomacy, peace processes, and multilateral institutions. It moves beyond tokenism to ensure women have substantive influence in shaping outcomes.

- → **Resources** underscore the importance of allocating financial, technical, and institutional support to gender equality objectives. This includes applying gender-responsive budgeting, directing aid to women's organisations, and systematically tracking investments to ensure accountability.

In this sense, Sweden's Three Rs framework bridges theory and practice: redistribution is reflected in its commitment to equitable allocation of resources for devalued identities; recognition is articulated through the protection of rights, dignity, and equality; and representation remains a direct throughline from Fraser's original formulation, emphasising inclusion and voice in decision-making.

Sweden operationalised this framework across its diplomacy, development cooperation, and peace and security engagements. For example, the Handbook on Feminist Foreign Policy required embassies to report annually on how they advanced the Three Rs, thereby creating an accountability mechanism within the Ministry for Foreign Affairs (Ministry for Foreign Affairs, 2019). Although the government formally abandoned the "feminist" label in 2022, this shift reflected a change in political priorities rather than a substantive critique of the policy's effectiveness. The incoming administration argued that the term "feminist" risked overshadowing the principle that Swedish foreign policy should rest on Swedish values and national interests (Thomas, 2022; Human Rights Watch, 2022). However, the framework continues to shape global policy debates, demonstrating the durability of the Three Rs approach as a normative benchmark even beyond its official lifespan.

Applied to other contexts, the Three Rs provides a versatile lens for analysis. In the Asia-Pacific, rights may be assessed through a country's engagement with international norms and commitments, such as CEDAW or the WPS agenda, and the extent to which these are translated into domestic practice. Representation can be examined by tracking women's participation not only in ministerial posts but also in peace negotiations, trade delegations, and regional organisations such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the Pacific Islands Forum. This goes beyond numerical inclusion to consider whether women's participation enables substantive shifts in priorities and outcomes. Resources require scrutiny to determine whether gender equality is embedded in national budgets, aid allocations, and climate finance mechanisms, ensuring that commitments are matched with tangible support.

While no framework is exhaustive, the Three Rs offers a coherent, policy-relevant entry point that connects normative principles with practical measures. In practice, the Three Rs serves as a connective mechanism between principle and implementation, allowing policymakers to trace how legal and normative commitments to gender equality are reflected in participation, budgeting, and programme design across sectors. It allows comparative analysis across regions and regimes, while also highlighting the persistent gaps between commitments and outcomes. For this study, this framework provides a foundation for assessing how feminist principles are embedded in Asia-Pacific international policies, complemented by broader feminist insights on intersectionality and reflexivity, which are crucial to understanding the nuances of regional contexts.

1.4 Research methodology

This study employs a qualitative research approach to generate rigorous and policy-relevant insights into how feminist principles are interpreted, adopted, or resisted across international policy domains in the Asia-Pacific. The methodology combines systematic desk-based research with qualitative key informant interviews and comparative policy analysis to ensure both breadth and depth in the evidence that underpins the core findings.

The desk-based research involved a structured review of academic and policy literature, including peer-reviewed scholarship, regional think-tank publications, civil society reports, and official government documents such as foreign policy frameworks, ministerial speeches, and gender action plans. Sources were catalogued and coded to identify recurring themes and gaps in existing analyses, with attention to intersectional perspectives. Keywords were identified and applied across popular academic and grey literature search databases, including JSTOR, Web of Science, Google Scholar, and the publication pages of leading multilateral institutions and non-profits working in relevant thematic areas. This review provided the evidentiary foundation for the study and informed the design of the interview guide.

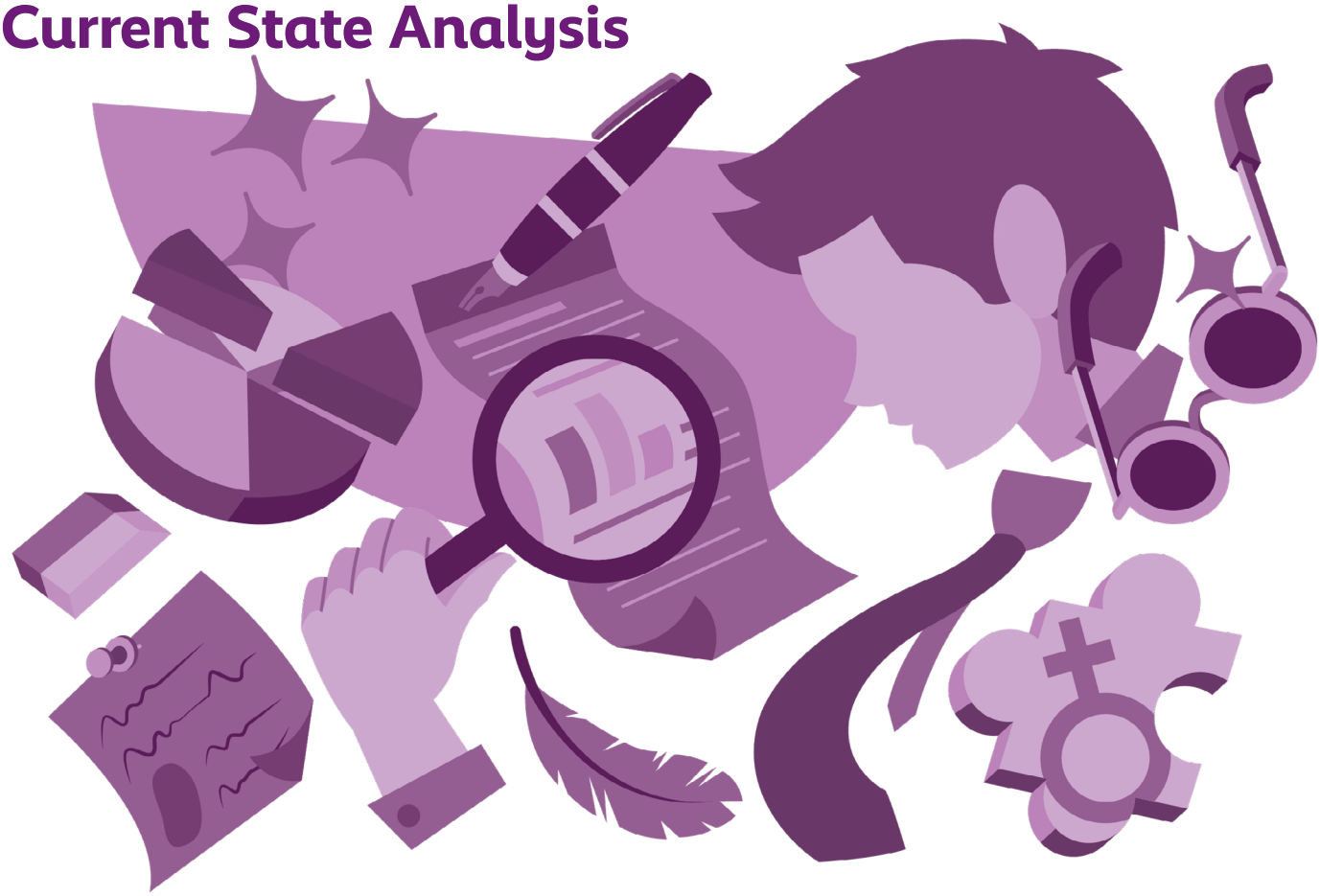
To complement the desk research, we conducted key informant interviews (KII) with two to three experts in each case study country. Respondents were drawn from government ministries, academia, civil society organisations (CSOs), and advocacy networks to capture a diversity of perspectives. Each interview lasted approximately 45 minutes and followed a semi-structured format, with questions adapted to the respondent's expertise, professional background, and relevance to the study's analytical focus. A core set of guiding questions ensured comparability across cases, while the flexible design allowed for deeper exploration of respondents' specific expertise. All interviews were recorded after respondents' informed consent to support accurate note-taking, and transcribed using Otter. Notes and transcripts were then analysed thematically to identify patterns, divergences, and country-specific nuances. The recordings were permanently deleted upon completion of the study. Verbatim quotes in the report have been lightly edited for clarity while retaining the intended meaning.

The findings from the desk review and interviews were synthesised through comparative policy analysis across six domains: economic justice, peace and security, climate and disaster response, development cooperation and humanitarian aid, labour migration, and diplomacy. This triangulation strengthens the validity of the study's conclusions and ensures that recommendations are grounded in both evidence and the lived realities of practitioners and stakeholders.

As with all qualitative and policy-oriented research, this approach has limitations. Interview samples, while diverse, are necessarily small and shaped by access to available experts; desk-based sources also reflect gaps in official reporting and academic coverage. Nevertheless, the combination of structured literature review, targeted expert interviews, and cross-country comparison represents the most appropriate and widely accepted approach in this field. It enables us to strike a balance between rigour and practicality, and to generate actionable insights that are both evidence-based and sensitive to regional context.

The analytical framework and methodology outlined here provide the foundation for examining how feminist principles are being interpreted and operationalised across the Asia-Pacific. The next chapter builds on this foundation to situate these dynamics within the region's geopolitical, social, and economic contexts, offering a baseline for understanding where feminist principles have gained traction and where structural barriers remain.

Chapter 2:
Current State Analysis



2.1 Asia-Pacific: Regional context and geopolitical realities

The Asia-Pacific region typically refers to the geographic area that includes the sub-regions of East and North-East Asia, South-East Asia, South Asia, South-West Asia, Central Asia, and the Pacific. Although the number of countries in the region varies depending on the definitional context, the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific lists 58 countries within this grouping (UNESCAP, 2025a). This large and diverse region is home to 60 per cent of the world's population and includes four of the world's top five most populous countries: China, India, Indonesia, and Pakistan (UNFPA, 2025a). Since 2000, the region's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) has risen from USD 9 trillion to USD 40 trillion, accounting for 35 per cent of the world's GDP in 2025 (IMF, 2025). Much of this growth has been driven by China, alongside other emerging and developing economies in Asia, particularly the ten member states of ASEAN.

Despite rapid economic growth in the region, stark disparities remain both among and within countries. The average income inequality in Asia—as measured by the Gini coefficient—is 44.7, placing it among the highest globally. South Asia (50.5) and East Asia (41.5) are the most unequal subregions, while Central Asia and the Pacific are comparatively better off (UNDP, 2022). Wealth inequality is even more pronounced: the top 10 per cent of the population controls about half of the total national income. In South Asia, this share increases to around 56 per cent, while in East Asia it falls to just under 50 per cent. The highest wealth disparities are seen in China, India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, and Thailand (UNDP, 2024b). The Asia-Pacific region has roughly 500 million people living in multidimensional poverty, accounting for half of the global total (UNESCAP, 2024b).

Labour market disparities deepen these divides. About two-thirds of the global informal workforce—1.3 billion people—are based in this region. In South Asia, 87 per cent of workers are in the informal sector, compared to 50 per cent in East Asia (UNDP, 2024b). According to ILO estimates, the region's share of income going to labour is below the global average, reducing workers' capacity to save and invest, thereby deepening inequality. Corruption, weak tax policies, and a lack of effective social security systems further exacerbate these issues. Educational inequality remains deeply rooted: even before COVID-19, one in four young people (144 million) in the region were not engaged in education, employment, or training. Young women face even greater disadvantages, being three times more likely than men to be excluded from these opportunities (UNESCAP, 2024b).

Politically, the Asia-Pacific region is characterised by considerable diversity, including strong democracies as well as closed and electoral autocracies. Currently, only four per cent of the region's population lives in liberal democracies, and eight per cent in electoral democracies. By comparison, 47 per cent reside under electoral autocracies and 41 per cent under closed autocracies, largely due to China (Boese et al., 2022). Overall, the level of democracy in the region has declined in recent years to levels last observed in 1986. This decline is particularly concerning because democratisation has historically been considered instrumental in expanding access to public goods and services. Countries across South and Southeast Asia, for instance – Afghanistan, Nepal, Bangladesh, Cambodia, Thailand, the Philippines and others, have experienced democratic setbacks over the past decades, reflected in erosions of freedom of expression and media independence, increased censorship, and weakened judicial and legislative checks on executive power. Hong Kong, the Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China, has similarly faced challenges to democratic governance and civil liberties. These regressions have been observed across both democratic and autocratic contexts, underscoring the region's broader trend of shrinking civic space and rising authoritarianism.

The World Bank classifies eight Asia-Pacific countries as conflict-affected or fragile (Hill et al., 2025), but this oversimplifies the region's complex security issues. Historically, the region has been highly susceptible to conflicts rooted in riparian resource disputes, terrorism, and ethnic or religious tensions. Competition over scarce natural resources, such as water and arable land, has triggered long-standing disputes, particularly in transboundary river basins. The South China Sea remains a flashpoint for overlapping territorial claims involving China, Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia, and Brunei. India and Pakistan continue to face heightened antagonism over Kashmir, marked by periodic military escalations and strained diplomatic ties. Similarly, Thailand and Cambodia have endured protracted disputes over border demarcation, leading to intermittent armed clashes. Internal conflicts include Myanmar's violence after the 2021 military coup, humanitarian crises, and displacement. The Philippines' Mindanao conflict reflects ethnic and religious tensions, although some peace progress has been made. Bougainville in Papua New Guinea seeks independence despite peace accords. Afghanistan remains unstable under Taliban rule, posing regional security and human rights challenges.

The energy landscape remains dominated by fossil fuels, which account for 85 per cent of total energy consumption in the region. Over the past three decades, the Asia-Pacific region's share of global CO_2 emissions has doubled, from one-quarter to one-half (UNDP, 2024b). Yet the region's per capita and historical contributions to global warming remain limited. Although China and India are currently major contributors to global emissions, they remain far behind other industrialised nations on a per-capita basis. Per capita calculations are essential for understanding the fairness of global climate accountability, as they reflect individual-level contributions rather than aggregate national totals. The per capita greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions across the region vary widely, exposing stark inequalities in both responsibility and vulnerability. While the global average per capita emission stands at 6.7 tonnes, Asia-Pacific countries such as Brunei (37 tonnes), Mongolia (27 tonnes), and Australia (22 tonnes) are among the world's highest emitters per person (Jones et al., 2024).

In contrast, populous nations such as Pakistan, the Philippines, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and Nepal emit less than 3 tonnes per person (Jones et al., 2024), yet remain among the most climate-vulnerable due to their geography, limited adaptive capacity, and dependency on climate-sensitive sectors. It is also important to acknowledge the enduring impact of colonial legacies on emissions. Although India and Indonesia have recorded notable emissions growth in the post-colonial period, their historical responsibility remains relatively limited. According to Evans and Viisainen (2023), when adjusted for colonial-era dynamics—such as centralised decision-making and resource control by colonial powers—their shares of cumulative emissions decline sharply, with India at -15 per cent and Indonesia at -24 per cent. In contrast, former colonial powers like the Netherlands and the United Kingdom rank among the top historical emitters per capita, followed by Russia, the United States, and Canada.

"Middle powers"[1] such as Japan, South Korea, Indonesia, and Australia have assumed growing influence in regional and global governance debates. Their diplomacy adds a layer of complexity to the region's geopolitical landscape, as they often seek to balance their economic ties with China against their security and political partnerships with the United States and other Western actors. Through ASEAN, its 10 Southeast Asian economies play a vital role in fostering dialogue, economic cooperation, and regional stability. Despite pressures from the U.S.–China rivalry and rising tariffs imposed on member economies, ASEAN has largely maintained its relevance as a neutral convener and a key driver of regional development. In contrast, the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC)—established to promote economic, social, and cultural development in South Asia—has struggled to achieve comparable influence or integration. Persistent political and economic tensions among member states—particularly between India and Pakistan—have repeatedly stalled collective action and undermined its effectiveness (Bhattarai, 2026; Majid, 2017 and Mukherjee, 2014). As a result, the bloc has found it difficult to translate its founding vision into tangible regional progress, standing in sharp contrast to ASEAN's relative success in managing diversity and advancing regional cooperation.

[1] "Middle power, in international relations, [is] a state that holds a position in the international power spectrum that is in the "middle"—below that of a superpower, which wields vastly superior influence over all other states, or of a great power, but with sufficient ability to shape international events" (Britannica, 2025).

2.2 Overview: State of gender equality in the Asia-Pacific

Gender equality and women's empowerment are not only fundamental human rights principles but also cornerstones of sustainable, inclusive, and equitable development (UNESCAP, 2020). Given that the Asia-Pacific region is home to more than half of the world's population, progress—or lack thereof—in gender equality is a critical driver of global trends. What happens in this region's national and international policy domains therefore has direct implications for worldwide outcomes.

Governments across the region have reaffirmed their commitment to gender equality through ratification of various international frameworks, including the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPfA) (1995), the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, CEDAW, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), and the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on WPS. At the regional level, organisations such as ASEAN and the Pacific Islands Forum have introduced gender mainstreaming frameworks that offer institutional entry points for integrating gender equality in national and regional policy discussions. Yet, despite these commitments, substantial gaps persist between norms and practice, as feminist advocacy efforts to challenge power relations, structural inequalities, and patriarchal norms that underpin policy outcomes remain limited. According to the Asia-Pacific SDG Progress Report (UNESCAP, 2025b), progress towards achieving the 17 SDGs across the region remains significantly off track. In particular, a persistent data gap for Goal 5 (gender equality) continues to hamper effective monitoring and policymaking.

While the policy and normative architecture for gender equality is well established, the translation of commitments into tangible outcomes remains uneven across and within subregions. Over the past three decades, the Asia-Pacific has demonstrated the most rapid progress in human development globally, with its Human Development Index (HDI) increasing by 19 per cent—driven by improvements in life expectancy, education, and income (UNDP, 2024b). However, these gains have not been evenly shared.

In 2022, the HDI score for women in South Asia was 0.58, compared to 0.67 for men. In contrast, the scores for women and men in East Asia and the Pacific were 0.74 and 0.77, respectively. Similarly, the Global Gender Gap Index 2025 (World Economic Forum, 2025) reveals wide subregional variations: East Asia and the Pacific ranked fifth, while South Asia ranked seventh out of eight global regions, having closed 69 per cent and 64 per cent of their overall gender gaps, respectively. Both regions have achieved near parity in education and health, closing over 90 per cent of these gaps. However, progress varies across other dimensions. In line with global trends, where gender parity in economic participation is at 61 per cent and in political empowerment at 22.9 per cent, the Asia-Pacific region shows similar disparities, reflecting its distinct socio-political contexts rather than a uniform trajectory of progress.

East Asia and the Pacific have achieved 71.6 per cent parity in economic participation, compared to only 40.6 per cent in South Asia. Conversely, South Asia performs better in political empowerment at 26.8 per cent, compared to 15.3 per cent in East Asia and the Pacific. These differences highlight how structural and institutional factors influence women's access to power and resources differently across subregions. While East Asia's stronger economic integration and labour market participation provide women with greater economic opportunities, South Asia's higher representation of women in political leadership points to divergent pathways towards gender equality.

Approximately 800 million women remain excluded from the workforce. Participation rates vary sharply across the region: only 14 per cent of women in Iran and 25 per cent in Pakistan are economically active, compared to 69 per cent in Vietnam (UNDP, 2024b). Even when women participate in the labour force, they are overrepresented in informal, low-paid sectors—such as home-based production, agricultural labour, or small-scale trade—and underrepresented in emerging industries. In Indonesia, for example, informal employment accounted for nearly 75 per cent of total employment in 2019, with many women operating household-based enterprises that lack access to credit, insurance, and labour protections (Ablaza et al., 2023).

On average, women in the region spend four times more hours on unpaid care work than men, limiting their participation not only in the labour market but also in the public domains of community and politics (ILO, 2018). Public underinvestment in care infrastructure and healthcare further deepens these inequalities, leading to what Rai et al. (2017) call "depletion"—the exhaustion of women's physical, emotional, and temporal capacities that sustain economies without commensurate recognition or compensation. While family-friendly policies such as maternity leave, childcare support, and flexible working hours are often presented as evidence of progress, they primarily cover formal-sector employees, leaving the majority of women in the informal sector excluded. Consequently, such measures risk reinforcing rather than transforming the structural conditions that perpetuate women's economic marginalisation.

Political representation has also improved incrementally but remains insufficient. According to the IPU-UN Women Women in Politics Map, published by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) (2025a), the proportion of women in executive and legislative roles has increased but still falls below the global average of 25 per cent. A few countries—including Australia, New Zealand, Timor-Leste,

and Vietnam—stand out, having reached or surpassed 30 per cent representation in parliament. However, across most of the region, men continue to dominate political decision-making.

Beyond the political and economic spheres, gender inequality manifests in everyday violence and exclusion. One in four women in the region is estimated to experience domestic violence in her lifetime (Cai & Aissi, 2024). Online spaces have become new frontiers of insecurity, where women and minority communities face heightened exposure to online hate speech, disinformation, and image-based abuse. Studies indicate that they experience significantly higher rates of psychological violence (+18 per cent) and sexual violence (+6 per cent) compared to other groups (IPU, 2025b). Moreover, a 6 per cent gender gap in internet usage (ADB, 2023b) limits women's access to digital technologies, digital skills, and online economic opportunities, further reinforcing cycles of exclusion.

Structural and cultural barriers continue to entrench inequality across the region. Patriarchy, sexism, toxic masculinity, and rising misogyny persist in both public and private spheres, reinforcing discriminatory norms and restricting women's agency. Vulnerable populations—such as informal workers, rural women, indigenous peoples, sexual and gender minorities, and migrant workers—face multiple, intersecting forms of exclusion, often operating at the margins of legal protection and social policy. Women are disproportionately represented in precarious and unregulated forms of work, including domestic labour, caregiving, and sex work, where exploitation and abuse are common and access to justice remains limited.

Gender mainstreaming efforts remain slow, not only because of policy gaps but also due to entrenched political and ideological resistance. The rise of conservative and populist movements across several countries has reframed feminist agendas as elitist or Western impositions, thereby delegitimising equality discourse and constraining institutional reform. These dynamics erode public and political commitment to gender-responsive policymaking, leading to fragmented, underfunded, and poorly implemented gender frameworks. Indeed, only nine countries in the region have established systems to monitor and allocate resources for gender equality (UNESCAP, 2024a), reflecting the chronic disconnect between policy rhetoric and institutional practice.

Despite these challenges, feminist civil society organisations (CSOs) remain vibrant across the region, continuing to push boundaries, mobilise communities, and influence policy discourses in several ways. They play a critical role in advancing gender justice, from advocating legal reforms on gender-based violence and labour rights to strengthening women's leadership in peacebuilding, climate action, and local governance. Through their grassroots networks, these organisations mobilise communities to demand equitable access to resources and representation, effectively translating global commitments into locally relevant action.

Taken together, these dynamics reveal a region at a crossroads: widespread normative commitments to gender equality exist, but progress towards gender equality is uneven and multidimensional, often hindered by politically contested and inconsistent implementation. Mainstreaming efforts frequently remain procedural rather than transformative, resulting in gender plans and strategies that do little to redistribute power or resources.

2.3 Mapping feminist principle adoption in various international policy domains across the Asia-Pacific

Globally, the space for advancing feminist policymaking is under increasing strain. The rise of populist leaders and authoritarian governments has fuelled anti-gender movements and backlash against women's rights. Furthermore, ongoing conflicts—such as the Russia-Ukraine war, genocide in Gaza, and the 2025 military conflict between the nuclear-armed states of Pakistan and India—have further entrenched militarism, crowding out feminist calls for demilitarisation, inclusion, and justice.

Feminist principles in international policy encompass a range of perspectives that seek to transform unequal power relations and ensure that both women and men can meaningfully contribute to development, security, peace, and sustainability in addressing global challenges. As UNESCAP (2020) notes, "Policies and programmes with a gender-responsive, inclusive, and intersectional approach consider gender alongside other identity categories (e.g., age, geography, socioeconomic status, racial or ethnic group, ability, gender identity, etc.) in their design and implementation."

In the past decade or so, several European Union (EU) member states—including Sweden,[2] France, Spain, and Germany—as well as non-EU countries like Canada, Chile, and Mexico, have formally adopted FFPs, signalling their strong commitment to gender equality and women's rights as central to their external engagement. Other nations support feminist perspectives through commitments of official development assistance (ODA) and active leadership at international forums. While FFPs represent an important institutional innovation, they are not the only—nor necessarily the most comprehensive—pathway to integrating feminist principles into governance. Yet, contradictions remain: although explicitly feminist in their framing, these policies do not fully embrace pacifist ideals (Rosamond, 2024), and their credibility is challenged by rising militarism, arms exports, and increased defence spending during conflicts and crises. This reflects a broader tension between rhetorical commitments to feminist principles and the

[2] Revoked in 2022.

realpolitik of global governance, where security and economic interests frequently override equality commitments. Evidence from the Feminist Foreign Policy Collaborative (2025), shows that countries such as Australia, the United Kingdom, Ireland, New Zealand and Iceland, none of which formally identify their foreign or development policies as feminist, allocate a greater percentage of their ODA in gender equality-focused aid than the average among countries with official FFPs. This trend suggests that substantive feminist practice depends less on labels and more on the political will, resources, and institutional mechanisms that drive implementation.

The Asia-Pacific region has not yet witnessed the formal adoption of FFPs; however, feminist principles are increasingly visible in practice through a mosaic of gender-responsive initiatives and policy mechanisms. Governments across the region have pursued a range of strategies to advance gender equality, often without using the "feminist" label. These approaches include the ratification of core international human rights treaties, such as CEDAW, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPfA), and the WPS agenda under UN Security Council Resolution 1325. As part of their obligations to report on progress to treaty bodies, ratifications have been complemented by the development of National Action Plans (NAPs) and the integration of gender strategies into domestic policy agendas. These legal and normative frameworks have thus served as foundational anchors for gender equality initiatives in the region.

In parallel to global efforts, regional organisations have played an important role in translating global commitments into regionally relevant frameworks, albeit under broader development agendas. For example, ASEAN has introduced the ASEAN Committee on Women (ACW) Work Plan 2021-2025 and incorporated gender equality into the ASEAN Community Vision 2025, aligning with the 2030 SDG Agenda's call to "leave no one behind" (ASEAN, 2021). Similarly, the Pacific Islands Forum and other subregional initiatives have developed mechanisms to integrate gender equality into climate resilience, peacebuilding, and governance agendas.

Women's leadership in diplomacy and politics has also slowly gained visibility, supported by a growing ecosystem of civil society organisations and networks. Across the region, civil society remains a powerful driver of feminist integration, pushing agendas on gender-based violence, digital rights, land rights, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex or queer (LGBTIQ+) rights, often filling the gaps left by governments. Feminist activism by local movements consistently highlights the contradictions between state policies that claim to promote gender equality and the persistence of gender inequalities. Furthermore, feminist civil society actors often hold more expansive and transformative visions of feminism than what states are willing to endorse (Achilleos-Sarll et al., 2022). Grassroots movements often demand intersectional approaches that address structural inequities, such as patriarchy, militarism, and neo-colonialism, whereas governments tend to instrumentalise gender equality for diplomatic or economic gains.

However, the integration of feminist principles in policymaking remains uneven, selective, and often symbolic. Many governments adopt gender-sensitive language in aid, diplomacy, or peacebuilding but stop short of embedding intersectional feminist frameworks in areas such as trade, security, and climate finance (Achilleos-Sarll et al., 2022). National security and economic diplomacy priorities frequently override feminist commitments, particularly in contexts of geopolitical competition or regional security tensions. Policies operate within domestic political debates and social norms, which often influence the degree of acceptance or resistance to feminist ideas. Without recognising and addressing the underlying gendered dynamics that structure economies and institutions, policy interventions risk reproducing existing hierarchies. For instance, industrial and trade policies that prioritise capital-intensive, export-oriented sectors—typically dominated by men—often neglect women's employment in care, services, and small-scale enterprises. This not only limits women's participation in new growth sectors but also reinforces a two-tiered economy, where women remain concentrated in informal or undervalued forms of work, with limited access to protection and opportunity.

Another key difference lies in language and political framing. Although the approach is not universal across the region, a few European governments have openly identified their foreign or development policies as "feminist." By comparison, governments in the Asia-Pacific more consistently avoid the term, opting instead for more neutral expressions such as "gender responsive" or "inclusive policy." This reflects the context-specific sensitivities around feminism, as identified in this study's primary research, where respondents noted that the term is often perceived as foreign, elite, or culturally inappropriate. Avoiding the terminology, however, does not necessarily signal a rejection of feminist values; rather, it demonstrates pragmatic adaptation to domestic political realities. As a result, while Asia-Pacific states may adopt feminist principles, they do so under more cautious terminology. Civil society actors in the region also navigate this sensitive environment strategically, often working discreetly to avoid getting backlash from anti-gender actors.

The remainder of this section explores how Asia-Pacific governments are adopting and operationalising feminist-aligned practices, albeit cautiously, or resisting them across key domains of international policy. These domains include economic justice, peace and security, climate change and disaster response, development cooperation and humanitarian aid, labour migration, and foreign policy and diplomacy. Together, this illustrates the scope of international policy challenges in the region and the nuanced ways in which feminist principles are interpreted, applied, or contested.

2.3.1 Representation in Domestic Politics, Foreign Policy and Diplomacy

Feminist perspectives underscore the vital role of women's leadership and participation in shaping more representative, equitable, and effective governance. The inclusion of women in traditionally male-dominated fields such as diplomacy, security, and international policymaking broadens the range of experiences and perspectives that inform decision-making, ultimately enhancing institutional performance and legitimacy. As Goldstein and Pevehouse (2013) observe, advancing gender equality enhances "national capabilities by giving the state a better overall pool of diplomats, generals, soldiers, and politicians." Representation extends beyond mere symbolism functioning as a transformative mechanism to ensure that public institutions genuinely reflect the diverse needs of the population they serve.

While it is essential to recognise that not all women in leadership positions advocate for a feminist agenda or function as "transformational leaders" (D'Aoust & Châteauvert-Gagnon, 2017), many women across the Asia-Pacific have demonstrated leadership that has advanced gender equality through diplomacy, governance, and norm entrepreneurship. Figures such as Hansa Mehta of India and Begum Shaista Ikramullah of Pakistan—both instrumental in drafting the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948)—helped embed gender equality in the foundations of international law. Contemporary leaders such as Jacinda Arden, Fiamē Naomi Mataʻafa, Julia Gillard, Penny Wong, Retno Marsudi, Batmunkh Battsetseg, Sania Nishtar, and Sherry Rehman exemplify how women have shaped foreign, social welfare and climate policy agendas grounded in inclusivity, dialogue, and human security. Their leadership has often emphasised collaboration and empathy and has also challenged entrenched gender and heteronormative norms. Some have broken historical barriers, becoming the first women to hold senior diplomatic or ministerial positions or leading despite not conforming to traditional gender expectations or identities. Their visibility and advocacy, whether through public stands against misogyny or by normalising diverse forms of leadership, represent both symbolic and substantive progress towards transforming how power and authority are understood in political life.

Recognising the lag in female representation in politics, many countries in the region—including India, Nepal, and Mongolia—have taken measures to institutionalise representation and establish precedents for inclusive governance. India's 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments of 1992, which reserved one-third of seats for women in the Panchayati Raj institutions and urban local bodies (municipalities), represent perhaps the most significant legislative effort to promote gender parity in global history. The reform envisioned a transformative change in rural governance; by 2022, nearly 300,000 units of local self-government had been established, electing approximately 3.2 million representatives, of whom 1.2 million were women (Bose, 2022).

Nepal incorporated gender equality into its 2015 Constitution, which guarantees women's rights and mandates proportional inclusion in political, economic, and social institutions. Women are required to hold at least 33 per cent of parliamentary seats (Article 84(8)) (UN Women, 2023a). Additionally, alternative arrangements ensure that executive positions—such as those of President and Vice President—are held by individuals from diverse genders and communities. Similarly, several other nations have initiated incremental reforms to encourage women's participation in the workforce. Over the past five years, Malaysia has introduced legal reforms across several pay and parenthood indicators (World Bank, 2024c) to improve gender equality and work-life balance.

Across the region, countries have committed to achieving gender equality in external relations, with some expressing this commitment in rhetoric and others implementing practical measures. For instance, Indian Foreign Minister S. Jaishankar acknowledged the necessity of developing a "gender-balanced foreign policy," identifying three primary priorities: "getting more women to engage with foreign policy issues, reflect[ing] women's interests in foreign policy, and bring[ing] in a feminist perspective to foreign policy" (Panicker, 2021).

Mongolia stands out as the only country in the region to have explicitly committed to adopting a "feminist" foreign policy (Stamm, 2023). The formal adoption of the "feminist" label is significant, as it establishes benchmarks and advances discourse beyond gender mainstreaming towards a deeper examination of power dynamics (Civil Society Dialogue Network, 2023). Several other countries have also introduced modest yet meaningful measures to integrate gender considerations within their foreign ministries and bureaucratic structures. Pakistan's Wedlock Policy, for instance, which explicitly guarantees co-location for married diplomats[3], embodies a feminist principle of equality by recognising caregiving and family responsibilities as shared rather than gendered burdens.

Despite these gains, deep-rooted gendered hierarchies and inequities remain embedded within political and institutional systems. Women often face tokenism or structural barriers that limit their ability to exercise genuine power. Women diplomats are often confined to "protocol," hospitality, and administrative roles (Pandey, 2025), functions stereotypically perceived as extensions of caregiving, rather than substantive policy domains. Furthermore, women leaders face heightened risk of

[3] Pakistan's Wedlock policy states that "Married Government Servants shall, as far as possible, be posted at the same station to enable them to live together, unless there are compelling reasons to do otherwise" (Government of Pakistan, Establishment Division, Office Memorandum No. 10/30/97-R-2, dated 16 March 2020, 'Wedlock Policy for Married Government Servants').

political violence and harassment: according to an IPU (2025b) survey, 60 per cent of women parliamentarians from the Asia-Pacific reported experiences of hate speech, disinformation, image-based abuse, or doxing. Even in countries with relatively high gender parity in politics, such as Australia, representation remains limited by intersectional inequities.

These dynamics reveal that achieving gender parity in numbers does not automatically translate into feminist transformation. Substantive equality requires more than representation alone; it demands deep institutional reforms—in policies, cultures, and power structures—that enable women to lead, not merely participate.

2.3.2 Economic Justice

A feminist perspective on economic justice calls for moving beyond narrow metrics of GDP growth towards a deeper understanding of how economies are structured—whom they serve, who benefits, and whose labour they invisibilise. Rather than treating growth as a neutral process, feminist economics emphasises the political nature of economic choices, revealing how policies around taxation, labour, and trade systematically privilege certain groups while marginalising others. It calls for political commitment, the removal of legal and institutional barriers, and the fair allocation of resources to address deep-seated inequalities that disproportionately favour one gender in economic participation.

Feminist economics also recognises that economic justice requires transforming power relations, both in formal markets and within households, so that social and reproductive labour—historically performed by women—is no longer excluded from systems of economic measurement. As Wright (1995) notes, the private sphere of home, care, and domesticity remains invisible to the public realm of law and governance and is consequently neglected by conventional economic frameworks.

From a feminist standpoint, fiscal systems are also a critical site where gender inequality is reproduced. Taxation is not gender-neutral: it operates within a gendered economic structure that reflects and reinforces existing disparities between men and women (Dawn, 2015). Women, who are disproportionately represented among lower-income groups and burdened by unpaid domestic and care work, are particularly affected by regressive tax systems reliant on value-added taxes (VAT) and indirect taxes levied on essential goods. These taxes consume a larger share of women's limited income, while personal income tax systems often favour male breadwinners through deductions for dependent spouses, effectively penalising women's economic independence (Dawn, 2015; Hungwe & Balsera, 2025). A feminist vision of fiscal justice thus calls for progressive, gender-responsive taxation and measures that redistribute wealth, recognise unpaid care work, and enable equitable access to public goods and services.

Across the Asia-Pacific, countries have adopted a variety of strategies to advance feminist economic principles, including the elimination of discriminatory labour laws, the reduction of occupational segregation, and the integration of gender provisions in trade and investment frameworks. Many of these measures are directly linked to the ratification of global commitments, such as the CEDAW and the International Labour Organization's (ILO) Decent Work Agenda. Regional trade agreements (RTAs) increasingly reflect such efforts, incorporating gender-explicit provisions[4] on equal employment opportunities, capacity-building, access to healthcare and childcare, and protections against gender-based violence. As Boghossian (2023) notes, many RTAs now explicitly reference CEDAW or incorporate relevant ILO conventions on decent work, recognising the link between trade, social norms, and gender equality. She argues that this trend offers a pathway for translating international commitments into national trade policies through a "blended approach," strengthening coherence between global frameworks and domestic implementation.

Despite this progress, the Asia-Pacific continues to lag behind other regions in gender-responsive trade. Only 14 per cent of RTAs in the region contain gender provisions[5], which is far lower than in Europe (78 per cent), North America (38 per cent), or South America (20 per cent) (Kuhlmann & Bahri, 2023). Moreover, while North American and European agreements tend to frame women primarily as economic actors and African agreements often emphasise female entrepreneurship and political representation, Asia-Pacific RTAs focus more on social dimensions, such as maternity benefits, family welfare, and healthcare, without challenging the deeper structural inequalities (Kuhlmann & Bahri, 2023). These structural gaps include the gendered division of labour, unequal access to productive assets, weak collective bargaining mechanisms, and the concentration of women in informal, low-wage, export-dependent industries.

In both the Asia-Pacific and other regions, most gender-related clauses in RTAs cast women as recipients of assistance or social protection, focusing on inclusion within existing trade regimes rather than on redistributing power or redefining the rules of exchange. Moreover, it is debatable whether commitments to mainstreaming gender in trade agreements actually result in meaningful adoption. Bahri (2021) contends that "adoption of an action would require countries to take an affirmative action to strengthen women empowerment or reduce gender inequality."

[4] "Those provisions which use terms directly related to 'gender', 'women', 'female', 'maternity' or a similar expression in an explicit manner are considered as 'gender-explicit provisions'" (Bahri, 2021).

[5] Gender provisions are provisions in agreements that focus on women's interests or gender equality. They may be binding or non-binding in nature and their content can be broken down into aspirational and affirmative provisions (Kuhlmann & Bahri, 2023).

Encouragingly, some countries in the region are showing leadership in operationalising feminist economic principles. Thailand stands out globally, with more women starting new businesses than men (Global Entrepreneurship Monitor, 2025), signalling a gradual shift towards women-led enterprise ecosystems. India and Indonesia also feature among the top ten economies with conducive environments for women entrepreneurs, despite modest GDP per capita levels (Global Entrepreneurship Monitor, 2025). In New Zealand, the Equal Pay Amendment Act (2020) was enacted following research that revealed wider gender wage gaps in exporting firms compared to non-exporting ones, providing a model for addressing pay disparities through legal reform (Boghossian, 2023). Similarly, Pakistan has enacted laws such as the Workplace Harassment Act and the Protection of Women against Violence Act, alongside establishing a national women's ombudsperson to reduce discrimination and strengthen workplace protections (Government of Pakistan, 2022).

Aid for Trade programmes further exemplify how feminist principles can be embedded within economic cooperation. By embedding gender equality as a core objective rather than a peripheral concern, these programmes integrate feminist values of inclusion, empowerment, and structural transformation into trade assistance. They enhance women's participation and agency by funding capacity-building, strengthening market linkages, and improving access to finance for women entrepreneurs and producers, thereby shifting power over resources and trade opportunities (WTO, 2022a). Australia's Aid for Trade programme, for instance, illustrates this approach through its support to the ILO Better Work initiative in Cambodia, Indonesia, Pakistan, and Vietnam, which contributed to reducing gender wage gaps and promoting safer, more equitable workplaces. Joint OECD-WTO evaluations demonstrate that such initiatives have effectively fostered environments free from sexual harassment by explicitly requiring attention to gender-based violence in the workplace as a criterion for programme funding (Boghossian, 2023).

Fiscal reform has also become an arena where feminist ideas are being negotiated and reinterpreted. Across the Asia-Pacific, there is growing—but uneven—momentum to link tax justice with gender-aware public spending. Civil society actors and governments are increasingly questioning reliance on regressive consumption taxes and advocating for progressive tax bases to fund public care and social protection (ADB, 2023a). The Philippines has institutionalised gender-responsive budgeting (GRB) at national and subnational levels, with local governments such as Zamboanga City and Sorsogon City embedding gender analysis into revenue and spending decisions, allocating funds for childcare, health, and livelihood programmes that reduce women's unpaid care burdens (Moreno, 2023). Similarly, Fiji's Gender Responsive Planning and Budgeting Manual (2024) mandates all ministries to assess how revenue and spending affect women and men differently, linking fiscal planning to redistribution and gender justice (MoFSPNDS Fiji, 2024).

Still, the benefits of economic globalisation remain unevenly distributed. Women's ability to capitalise on trade and growth opportunities is constrained by unequal access to credit, assets, and an underdeveloped care and social protection system. Deeply rooted gender norms and the unequal division of unpaid care work limit women's participation in formal and export-oriented sectors. Even when women dominate export industries, such as garments or tourism, they remain concentrated in low-paid, insecure, and informal roles. In the tourism sector, for example, women make up over half the workforce in Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Thailand, yet earn 15 per cent less than men for equivalent work (World Trade Organization, 2022b). These structural barriers are further reinforced by regressive fiscal systems that ensure that the benefits of trade and liberalisation remain unevenly distributed, limiting women's substantive economic empowerment.

A truly feminist approach to economic justice in the Asia-Pacific requires reimagining taxation, trade, and fiscal policy through a redistributive and care-centred lens; strengthening collective bargaining and labour rights; and embedding women's voices and lived realities at the heart of economic governance.

2.3.3 Climate and Disaster Response

Asia and the Pacific are experiencing accelerated warming, nearly twice the global average, resulting in significant adverse effects. In 2024, the region experienced record-breaking heatwaves exceeding 45°C, severe flooding, destructive typhoons, prolonged droughts, and bushfires. The region contributes half of the world's CO_2 emissions, underscoring its vital role in global mitigation and adaptation efforts (UNDP, 2024b). Women, who are disproportionately represented among populations living in extreme poverty, already experience the gender-specific impacts of poverty. For instance, floods in Bangladesh in August 2024 affected 3.05 million women, including 78,000 pregnant women, who were left vulnerable due to disrupted healthcare services. In Vietnam, Typhoon Yagi devastated 251,000 hectares of crops, directly affecting the majority of women agricultural workers, who make up most of the workforce in this sector (Pandey, 2025). The ASEAN Gender Outlook report published by UN Women (2024a) indicates that while ASEAN economies have successfully reduced extreme poverty (from 31 per cent in 2000 to 3 per cent in 2022), these achievements are at risk of regression. If global temperatures rise by 3°C by 2050, millions worldwide, including up to 160 million women and girls, could revert to poverty.

A feminist perspective on climate change recognises that the crisis is not gender-neutral. The existing structures of gendered inequalities in societies are exacerbated when

climate stressors and shocks manifest. The feminist perspective considers climate change a shared priority and an issue of human security, emphasising that resilience cannot be strengthened without transforming the unequal power relations that shape access to resources, opportunities, and decision-making. Feminist analyses also underscore that a just transition must extend beyond phasing out male-dominated, high-emission industries. It must also reform the systems that perpetuate economic insecurity, informal labour, and undervalued care work (Harmeling et al., 2023). These structural barriers ultimately constrain women from attaining their rightful social and economic rights.

Policy frameworks within the Asia-Pacific increasingly acknowledge these dynamics. The Paris Agreement and the SDGs serve as the foundation for national climate strategies, emphasising the integration of gender-responsive approaches into adaptation, capacity building, and disaster risk reduction (DRR). For example, the Maldives has implemented a gender-responsive climate change strategy, establishing a significant model for other small island states. Globally, female leadership from the region has demonstrated transformative influence. Sherry Rehman's instrumental role in negotiations for the Loss and Damage Fund at the Conference of the Parties (COP) illustrates how women's leadership can shape inclusive and justice-oriented climate diplomacy.

Nonetheless, significant oversights persist. The complexities of gender inequalities, exacerbated by climate change, necessitate context-specific, intersectional approaches to translate commitments into tangible action (UNESCAP, 2023). While many governments in the region employ gender-sensitive language in climate and disaster strategies, these references often remain rhetorical, falling short of embedding feminist frameworks that recognise power relations, agency, and differentiated vulnerabilities. This gap limits the transformative potential of climate policy. For instance, Australia, China, Japan, New Zealand, the Republic of Korea, in their Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) plans, make no reference to gender or women, nor do they acknowledge women's agency and leadership in climate change mitigation and sustainable resource management (Papagioti, 2023). Such omission reflects a technocratic and depoliticised approach to climate governance, prioritising economic efficiency and carbon metrics over social justice and participation. Embedding feminist principles, by contrast, would shift the focus from narrow mitigation targets to more inclusive, people-centred approaches that enhance both social and ecological resilience.

Women continue to be significantly underrepresented in leadership roles related to environmental issues throughout Asia and the Pacific region. Only seven per cent of ministries associated with the environment—such as those overseeing agriculture, energy, climate, fisheries, and transportation—are led by women, compared to a global average of 12 per cent (UN Women, 2023). This underrepresentation hampers the integration of feminist perspectives into climate governance, as evidenced by the limited gender considerations in just energy transition initiatives. Although women are primary energy consumers and managers and are uniquely positioned to promote the adoption of cleaner and more sustainable energy technologies, independent evaluations by CSOs highlight several persistent gaps. These include inadequate identification of gender-specific issues, the absence of gender-disaggregated data, limited consultation with women, local women's rights organisations (WROs) and other marginalised groups, and an overall failure to address entrenched gender norms during implementation (UNESCAP, 2024a; Victorio & Lauranti, 2025).

Therefore, Asia-Pacific countries' selective strategies weaken the transformative power of feminist approaches to climate justice. A genuinely transformative climate agenda must centre lived experiences, community knowledge, and social equity, and prioritise the redistribution of power, voice, and resources—especially to those most affected by environmental degradation. By recognising women not merely as passive victims but as active agents such as farmers, negotiators, and community leaders, the region can move towards a fairer, more resilient, and more sustainable climate future for everyone.

2.3.4 Peace and Security

Traditional security frameworks have long prioritised the protection of state sovereignty and military defence. However, feminist scholarship challenges this narrow conception and argues for a redefinition of security; one that encompasses human security, economic and social stability, and protection from threats such as domestic violence, rape, poverty, gender subordination, and ecological destruction (Caprioli & Boyer, 2001). Feminist literature also illuminates that the "security of the state" often coincides with the insecurity of women and marginalised groups, as state-centred approaches overlook the structural and everyday forms of violence that shape people's lives (Wibben, 2020), especially when states themselves become agents of structural or physical violence. Feminist perspectives also critique the neoliberal practices and capitalist modes of production, which are themselves sources of gendered insecurity, as they reproduce hierarchies and economic exclusions.

For feminist scholars, security is a global and multidimensional concept, encompassing political, economic, and ecological facets that are as important as its military dimensions. Analyses of the "continuum of violence" across the individual, state, and international levels enable a more nuanced understanding of how insecurity operates in both peacetime and wartime (Wibben, 2020). A feminist vision of security emphasises gender equality, women's rights, demilitarisation, accountability frameworks, and the recognition of misogyny as a security risk (Cheung et al., 2021).

The realities of modern conflict emphasise the urgency of this issue. Contemporary conflicts in the Asia-Pacific are increasingly intra-state and identity-driven, blurring the boundaries between war and peace. New wars—often based on ethnic, racial, or religious divisions—increasingly target civilians using guerrilla and insurrectionary tactics. Civilians now make up as much as 75 per cent of casualties, compared to just 5 per cent at the beginning of the 20th century (Moser & Clark, 2001). Women and children suffer disproportionately, not only as direct victims of violence but also through indirect effects such as livelihood disruption, food insecurity, gender-based violence, malnutrition, and reduced access to education, mental health, and reproductive health services.

The WPS agenda, rooted in UN Security Council Resolution 1325, has been decentralised across the Asia-Pacific region. The fourteen countries that have developed WPS NAPs are the Philippines (2010), Nepal (2011), Australia (2012), Indonesia (2014), South Korea (2014), Afghanistan (2015), New Zealand (2015), Japan (2015), Timor-Leste (2016), Solomon Islands (2017), Bangladesh (2019), Sri Lanka (2023), Vietnam (2024), and Malaysia (2025).

Martel et al.'s (2021) extensive research highlights varied interpretations of conflict and insecurity across the region. For example, they found that the Philippines recognises insecurities caused by displacement, poverty, trafficking, sexual violence, and "gun culture," while highlighting the needs of Moro and Indigenous women. Indonesia adopts a broad definition of conflict, encompassing "social conflict" that disrupts stability and development. Bangladesh considers gendered aspects of climate change, disaster relief, violent extremism, and the vulnerabilities of migrant and refugee women. South Korea concentrates on "comfort women" and North Korean refugees, including trafficking and sexual exploitation. Importantly, several NAPs, including those of the Philippines, South Korea, Bangladesh, and Timor-Leste, explicitly identify the role of militaries in perpetuating gendered violence, with South Korea and Bangladesh acknowledging sexual misconduct and structural sexism by military personnel.

At the regional level, ASEAN Regional Plan of Action on WPS (UN Women, 2022) marks an important institutional step, complemented by initiatives such as the Korea-Australia partnership on Women, Peace, and Cybersecurity, and the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade's (DFAT) WPS Pillar of the Regional Framework (2023-2027) (UN Women, 2023b). These initiatives collectively indicate a growing but uneven institutionalisation of feminist approaches to peace and security.

Despite progress, implementation gaps remain stark. India has not adopted a WPS national plan of action, a notable omission given the documented impact of internal conflicts on women and its geopolitical influence. Across the region, women remain underrepresented in decision-making roles and are largely invisible in mainstream representations of foreign and defence policy. Rising authoritarianism, populism, and militarisation have further constricted the policy space for feminist peacebuilding.

True security necessitates demilitarisation, mediation, and non-violent conflict resolution mechanisms (Cheung et al., 2021). However, the allocation of substantial military budgets towards weapons and personnel across the region, combined with the diversion of resources away from social investments essential for safeguarding safety and dignity of women in domestic contexts, reveals a continued neglect of feminist considerations.

Moreover, events in 2025 offered clear examples of how feminist discourse can be appropriated to advance nationalist or militarized agendas. In various contexts, initiatives that place women at the forefront of state security are often framed as empowerment. However, feminist analysts like Agarwal (2025) and Sarkar (2025) have criticized it for weaponising feminist language to justify state violence and consolidate authority. This is one of the dangers of performative feminism, in which representation and visibility are instrumentalised to reinforce state power rather than to challenge the structural roots of violence and inequality.

Prioritising women's rights and addressing gendered insecurities should not be treated as peripheral concerns but recognised as central to achieving peace and stability. Embedding feminist principles into security governance through demilitarisation, inclusive diplomacy, and gender-responsive economic justice is vital not only for women's safety but also for sustaining peace over the long term.

2.3.5 Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Aid

The Asia-Pacific region comprises nine of the fifteen countries most at risk of disaster, according to the World Risk Index 2025 (Bündnis Entwicklung Hilft, 2025). Between January and October 2024, more than 140 conflicts, humanitarian incidents, or natural disasters affected the Asia-Pacific region, impacting over 87 million individuals and resulting in nearly 6,000 fatalities. In the past year alone, the region's disasters have incurred economic damages estimated at USD 85 billion (Humanitarian Action, 2024).

The region's exposure is further heightened by its geography: it sits atop the world's two most seismically active fault lines, and many of its disasters are inherently transboundary. Yet, humanitarian crises do not impact everyone equally. Pre-existing inequalities in power, access to resources, and privileges exacerbate vulnerabilities in crisis environments. These vulnerabilities lead to a higher risk of losing livelihoods, diminished access to vital services, breakdown of social networks, and greater exposure to multiple forms of gender-based violence (Salud Everywhere, 2025).

A feminist perspective on humanitarian action challenges the structural inequalities that shape both the experience of crises and the systems that respond to them. While mainstream humanitarian responses often see crises as isolated, time-bound shocks, feminist perspectives understand them as deeply interconnected with longstanding social, political, and economic inequalities (Daigle, 2024). Therefore, feminist humanitarian approaches do not merely aim to make existing systems gender-sensitive or gender-responsive but also seek to be gender-transformative—that is, explicitly aiming at dismantling patriarchy, colonial legacies, and structural inequalities (Daigle, 2024). This involves shifting from reactive crisis management to long-term structural change that redistributes power and resources.

Feminist humanitarianism is also grounded in the principles of women's rights and leadership. It prioritises community-based and participatory methods, intersectionality, and non-linear responses that recognise the continuum of crisis and recovery. It further requires critical power analyses of the aid system, examining hierarchical, often neo-colonial, relationships between funders and grantees. Feminist principles call for not only adequate but high-quality, adaptable funding that enables local women's organisations to lead, rather than merely implement, humanitarian response and recovery efforts.

Across the Asia-Pacific, donor governments and regional frameworks have made incremental progress in mainstreaming gender equality into humanitarian and development aid. The BPfA 1995 laid the groundwork for the proliferation of "gender mainstreaming" in the sector (Daigle, 2024), prompting agencies to subsequently adopt gender markers and accountability requirements. In recent years, ODA for gender equality has expanded significantly in the region. By 2022, an estimated 47 per cent of ODA in ASEAN was directed towards advancing gender equality, up from 14 per cent in 2013, reflecting both policy and priority shifts. This included USD 3.8 billion for programmes with gender equality as a significant objective, and nearly USD 178 million for initiatives with gender equality as their principal goal. Within ASEAN, the Philippines stands out, with 74 per cent of its ODA portfolio tagged as having a gender focus (UN Women, 2024a). Australia's International Development Policy published in 2023 similarly reinstated the performance target of ensuring that 80 per cent of ODA investments address gender equality, reaffirming its commitment to inclusive, gender-responsive recovery (Australian Government, 2023). Myanmar, meanwhile, received the largest share of ODA targeting gender equality as a principal objective (UN Women, 2024a).

Crucially, the adaptation of feminist principles in humanitarian action across the region is increasingly visible through the work of grassroots women-led organisations that ground their responses in lived realities. For instance, the distribution of sanitary pads in flood relief packages in Pakistan by the local organisation *Mahwari*[6] Justice aimed to meet the menstrual hygiene needs of women affected by the floods, demonstrating awareness of women's specific needs in crises (Hassan, 2022). Such initiatives exemplify how feminist humanitarianism is being localised, shifting from top-down aid delivery to community-driven approaches that centre women's agency, bodily autonomy, and dignity in crisis response. They also demonstrate the transformative potential of feminist leadership at the community level when local women are not merely beneficiaries but decision-makers, and when they embed care ethics within humanitarian response frameworks.

Despite these advancements, the adoption of feminist humanitarian principles remains uneven and, at times, deeply compromised. Funding frameworks are often criticised for echoing neo-colonial dynamics, as donors impose restrictive conditions that limit local autonomy and define priorities externally (Wood, 2021; Meki & Tarai, 2023; Malherbe & Oladejo, 2024). This conditionality undermines the feminist objectives of empowerment and self-determination. Furthermore, the credibility of donor governments is undermined by policy contradictions: the same states that fund gender equality initiatives overseas may also supply arms or maintain military partnerships with actors engaged in rights violations, often in the same countries or regions.

Significant thematic gaps also persist across the region. For instance, comprehensive sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) are still sidelined, often perceived as controversial or incompatible with "needs-based" humanitarian principles (Daigle, 2024). Pakistan's policy on the forced repatriation of Afghan refugees has drawn widespread criticism for alleged human rights violations, particularly for depriving women and girls of safety, education, and healthcare (OHCHR, 2025). Meanwhile, rights and funding for LGBTIQ+ remain contested, facing opposition from conservative factions. UN Women reports that some states in the Asia-Pacific have enacted legislation banning what is termed LGBTIQ+ or homosexual "propaganda," making it nearly impossible for LGBTIQ+ organisations to operate without government interference. In addition, other countries have increasingly restricted LGBTIQ+ organisations' ability to register, organise, and receive foreign funding under laws prohibiting "foreign influence" (UN Women, 2024b).

Geopolitical isolationism and the ascendance of populist leaders are further eroding the gains of feminist humanitarianism in the region. The emergence of heightened geopolitical isolationism, exemplified by the shutdown of USAID activities, threatens sharp cuts in ODA and funding for sectors vital to social justice (Oxfam, 2025).

[6] Mahwari is an Urdu word that translates to menstruation or monthly period in English.

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) projects a decline of nine to 17 per cent in total ODA by 2025, alongside an anticipated widening of the financing gap for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), expected to reach USD 6.4 trillion by 2030 (OECD, 2025a). These shifts risk reversing hard-won progress in gender justice and local leadership, as feminist and civil society organisations struggle to sustain operations amid shrinking fiscal space and political backlash.

2.3.6 Labour Migration

Migration today constitutes one of the most complex international policy challenges due to its scale, transnational nature, and entanglement with other global issues—labour, security, gender, and climate change. As Rhacel Salazar Parreñas (2015) argues, migrant women's domestic labour underpins what she calls the international division of reproductive labour, a global system in which care work performed by women from poorer countries sustains the social and economic reproduction of wealthier societies. Mainstream migration policymaking, however, continues to construct migration in gender-neutral terms, typically from "the standpoint of a universal, undifferentiated 'male' subject" (Aguis & Clark, 2019, as cited in Pallapothu, 2024).

In contrast, feminist migration scholarship situates mobility within systems of power, recognising migration as a deeply gendered process embedded in the global political economy and intersecting hierarchies of class, nationality, and race. In the global economy, migrant women's labour is predominantly concentrated in informal and undervalued sectors that reproduce patriarchal divisions of labour. As Bridget Anderson (2000) famously describes, they dominate the "three Cs" of global care chains: cooking, caring, and cleaning. Even when men are the primary migrants, women frequently become the economic and social anchors of their households and communities (Wright, 1995). The social dimensions of migration, including the well-being of children in transnational families, further demonstrate how mobility intersects with education, social protection, and gender policy (Fu et al., 2024). When migration policy fails to recognise these interlinkages, it deepens structural inequalities, amplifies vulnerabilities, undermines migrants' human security, and strains welfare systems (Haas et al., 2020).

The Asia-Pacific region is both a major source and destination of global migration, accounting for roughly one-third of the world's international migrants (ILO, 2024a). Most of these movements are intra-regional, facilitated by economic interdependence, demographic shifts, and regional labour mobility frameworks. Migration in the region has become increasingly gender-balanced (ILO, 2024a), as women's participation in cross-border work and remittance flows continues to rise, challenging gendered assumptions about who migrates and why. Across the region, remittances remain a vital source of economic resilience and household income. In 2023, the top recipients in the Asia–Pacific were India, China, the Philippines, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Vietnam, Indonesia, Thailand, Nepal, and the Republic of Korea (ILO, 2024a).

To improve migrant protection, many Asia-Pacific countries have adopted bilateral labour agreements (BLAs) and memoranda of understanding (MOUs) that clearly outline the rights and obligations of sending and receiving states. These instruments establish standards for recruitment, employment contracts, dispute resolution, and repatriation—key mechanisms for reducing exploitation and strengthening accountability (ILO, 2015). A notable example is the Philippines–Saudi Arabia BLA (2013) for domestic workers, which introduced standardised contracts, minimum wages, and grievance mechanisms. This reform significantly reduced recruitment abuse and contract substitution while improving access to legal aid and timely wages. At the regional level, frameworks such as the ASEAN Declaration on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Migrant Workers and the Colombo Process have promoted ethical recruitment, information sharing, and fair labour mobility corridors, thereby creating safer and more transparent migration systems ((International Organization for Migration (IOM), 2024), aligned with feminist principles of care, dignity, and rights-based governance.

The Philippines stands out as a regional leader in gender-responsive migration governance. Through the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA) and the Overseas Workers Welfare Administration (OWWA), it has developed portable social protection mechanisms—covering health insurance, death benefits, and reintegration loans—that travel with workers abroad. Its Social Security System (SSS) has negotiated bilateral agreements with Austria, the United Kingdom, France, Canada, and Japan, enabling migrants to combine contribution periods and access benefits without double coverage (Pasadilla & Abella, 2012; ILO, 2015). Moreover, initiatives like the Philippine Qualifications Framework (PQF), aligned with the ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework (AQRF), ensure regional recognition of skills and certifications. Together, these measures strengthen the economic agency of migrant women and help address their structural exclusion from formal employment—a key driver of gendered precarity in migration. Moreover, these innovations in migration governance must be situated within the wider global division of reproductive labour, where racialised women from the Global South, particularly Filipinas, fill care deficits in wealthier households abroad. As feminist scholars note, this structural demand for low-paid domestic labour underpins the very migration flows that Philippine policies seek to regulate and protect.

Similarly, Malaysia's 2024 policy reform, which extends its national social security scheme administered by the Social Security Organisation (PERKESO/SOCSO) to foreign migrant workers, represents a significant institutional shift towards

inclusive labour governance. Previously limited to employment injury coverage, the inclusion of Invalidity and Survivors' Benefits now ensures compensation for families in cases of death or permanent disability, aligning Malaysia's system more closely with international labour and human rights standards (ILO, 2024b). Given that the country hosts nearly two million documented migrant workers, many in high-risk sectors such as construction, manufacturing and domestic work, this reform enhances migrant security, incentivises employer compliance, and promotes formalisation within labour markets.

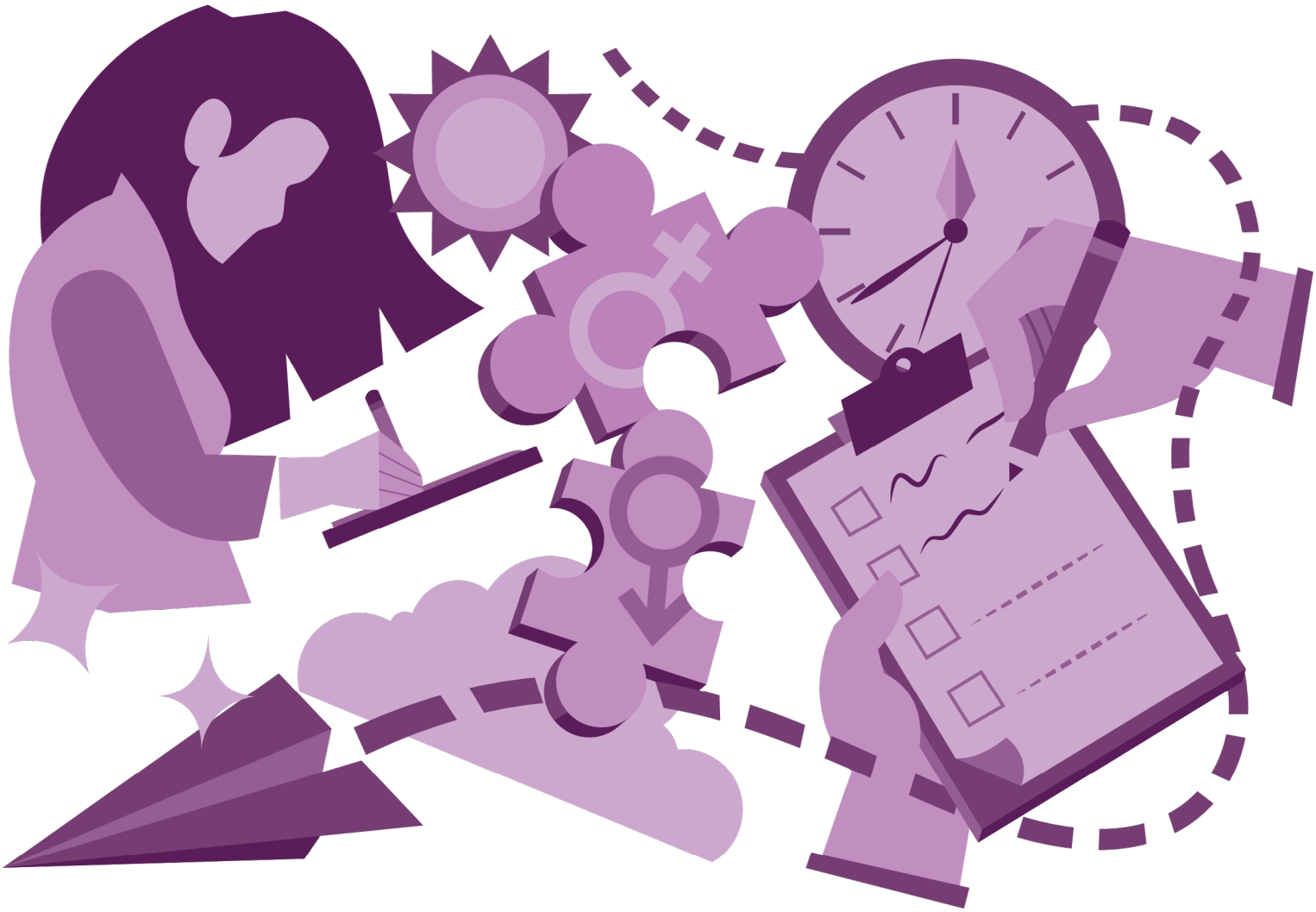
Despite these advancements, migration governance in the Asia-Pacific remains fragmented. Policy responsibility is often divided among multiple ministries—labour, home affairs, foreign affairs, and social protection—each pursuing distinct priorities, from economic growth and remittance generation to border control and national security. This institutional siloing produces contradictory migration regimes, weakens accountability, and limits coordination (Likić-Brborić, 2018; Piper & Foley, 2021). Furthermore, migration systems across the region are characterised by temporality and control: employer-tied visas, limited family reunification, and deportation-centred enforcement, which feminist scholars describe as forms of "protracted precarity" or forced transnationalism (Piper & Withers, 2018). These structures sustain gendered hierarchies in global labour markets, where women migrants often face intersectional discrimination as foreigners, as women, and as workers in undervalued sectors.

Across the Asia-Pacific, 71 per cent of domestic workers have no legal limits on working hours, 64 per cent have no legal entitlement to weekly rest, and 35 per cent remain excluded from paid annual leave provisions, including in Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore (ILO, 2021). Some countries go further, regulating women migrants' bodies as part of labour control regimes. For instance, in Singapore and Malaysia, pregnancy among migrant domestic workers is prohibited, effectively treating reproductive capacity as a condition of employability. Singapore's Employment of Foreign Manpower Act explicitly states that a female work permit holder "shall not become pregnant or deliver any child in Singapore," unless married to a citizen or permanent resident with official approval (ILO, 2021). These policies exemplify how migration regimes discipline labour through reproductive control and exclusion. As Parreñas (2000) observes, labour-sending states often frame women migrants as "heroines of the nation" while subjecting them to paternalistic regulation and moral surveillance, revealing how migration governance both enables and constrains women's mobility.

To move beyond control-oriented paradigms, migration governance in the Asia-Pacific must be reimagined through a feminist and human security lens, one that prioritises socioeconomic inclusion, decent work, and dignity for all migrants. Such an approach would align migration governance with the broader goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, especially SDGs 5 (Gender Equality), 8 (Decent Work), and 10 (Reduced Inequalities), while advancing feminist principles of autonomy, equality, and justice in one of the world's most dynamic migration corridors.

The trends highlighted in this chapter reveal both the diversity and unevenness of feminist integration across the region. While feminist approaches have begun to reshape economic, humanitarian, and security agendas—advancing more inclusive leadership, equitable aid systems, and gender-transformative policy frameworks—their adoption remains fragmented and context-dependent. These differences raise deeper questions about how specific national contexts, political economies, and institutional cultures continue to mediate the interpretation, prioritisation, and implementation of feminist principles across various national settings. The following chapter explores these questions through country case studies that offer detailed insights into how feminist ideas are adapted, contested, and institutionalised in practice, revealing the pathways and constraints that shape the region's evolving feminist governance agenda.

Chapter 3: Case Studies



The case studies in this chapter aim to inform and deepen the discussion on how feminist principles are applied across the Asia-Pacific region. Drawing on both desk research and interviews with policymakers, diplomats, and civil society leaders, they combine documented policy analysis with grounded practitioner perspectives. This approach enables the case studies to move beyond description, offering analytical insights that link national experiences to the broader regional and theoretical frameworks introduced earlier in the report.

The four countries featured—Australia, Pakistan, Indonesia, and Mongolia—were chosen to reflect the region's diversity in income levels, political systems, historical trajectories, and foreign policy orientations. They span different stages of economic development and governance, ranging from consolidated democracies to emerging and transitional contexts. Each case offers distinct lessons and innovations relevant to feminist policymaking, from institutional reforms and peacebuilding frameworks to strategies for integrating gender perspectives into foreign and development policy.

Each case follows a common structure: beginning with an overview of the national and foreign policy context, it examines feminist approaches in practice, identifies key entry points for embedding feminist principles, and concludes by analysing the barriers and contradictions that shape progress. This consistent structure helps connect domestic and international developments with the analytical lens of rights, representation, and resources, paving the way for the regional synthesis and policy recommendations that follow.

3.1 Australia

Australia stands as one of the world's wealthiest nations and a high-income OECD member, wielding significant global and regional influence in the Asia-Pacific. As a recognised middle power, Australia has historically balanced its relationships with major power rivals while positioning itself as a pragmatic, values-driven actor in regional and global governance. Among the top 15 global economies by nominal GDP (World Bank, 2024a), Australia is one of the region's longest-standing development donors, leveraging its aid and diplomatic networks to promote stability, governance reform, and inclusive growth, while also shaping much of the international policy agenda in the Indo-Pacific region.

Australia has made visible advances in women's leadership and representation domestically. According to the WEF Global Gender Gap Report 2025, it achieves near parity in senior diplomatic leadership roles (World Economic Forum, 2025). These gains are reinforced by successive female foreign ministers—Julie Bishop, Marise Payne, and Penny Wong—whose successive tenures signal a sustained political commitment to women's leadership in diplomacy. However, Australia appointed its first Indigenous female Ambassador, Julie-Ann Guivarra, only in 2018, and as recently as 2022, only 10 per cent of Australian parliamentarians were from non-European or indigenous backgrounds, despite these groups comprising roughly 24 per cent of the national population (Poole, 2022). This mismatch highlights that deeper intersectional inclusion in politics remains a work in progress.

Approximately a decade ago, Australia experienced a significant expansion in its gender focus when the government first introduced targets for gender equality programming in 2014, an effort driven by a remarkable coalition of policy entrepreneurs within the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT). However, the consistency of this agenda has fluctuated across administrations. Under current leadership, gender equality has been reinvigorated as a strategic priority, even as Australia's broader foreign and security policy continues to be shaped by its alliance with the United States.

In 2023, Australia unveiled a new International Development Policy, its first in nearly a decade. The document firmly positions gender equality at the heart of its strategy. The policy asserts that "gender inequality compounds the most pressing global development challenges" and that placing gender equality at the centre "creates opportunities for people to thrive, making our countries stronger, more secure, and more inclusive" (Australian Government, 2023). To operationalise this vision, the policy introduced a performance target requiring 80 per cent of ODA activities to integrate gender equality objectives, with annual progress reporting. Additionally, all projects over AUD 3 million must include a climate objective. As Dulhunty (2022) notes, "if gender equality is not measured and tracked, it will simply be overlooked." This measurable commitment reflects the resources pillar of the Three Rs framework, emphasising that adequate funding and accountability are essential for translating feminist development commitments into tangible outcomes.

One expert noted that at the time of the policy's launch, development stakeholders were briefed with an emphasis on gender and climate as priority areas, whereas security and media audiences were presented with its relevance to broader geostrategic dynamics, including competition with China (KII, October 2025). This dual framing demonstrates how feminist development rhetoric can operate within, and be aligned to, broader strategic considerations.

Complementing this, the Australian Government's (2025) International Gender Equality Strategy and International Disability Equity and Rights Strategy integrate gender and disability equity perspectives across all external programmes. The launch of the International Gender Equality Strategy, amid a global backlash against women's rights, signals Australia's commitment to maintaining progressive leadership (Pradela & Ridge, 2025). As one senior official reflected, "In some ways, just by not regressing, we have become a global leader" (KII, September 2025). The strategy prioritises sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) and sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), a bold stance that, according to one feminist advocate, included "a major win for us, we managed to get the word 'abortion' included in the strategy" (KII, September 2025). Earlier in 2023, Australia boosted its support for gender diversity and queer rights by launching its first dedicated fund for LGBTIQ+ civil society and human rights defenders in Asia and the Pacific—the AUD 3.5 million Inclusion and Equality Fund (Equality Australia, 2023). Taken together, these efforts reflect Australia's move towards an intersectional and inclusive feminist policy approach, one that recognises the interconnected nature of gender, sexuality, and rights-based protections.

Australia also excels in labour rights domestically. It is the only country in the Asia-Pacific region to have ratified all 11 fundamental ILO conventions on labour standards (ILO Normlex, 2025). This strong domestic foundation extends into Australia's global engagement, where labour rights and gender inclusion feature prominently in its development aid and trade policies. In her book chapter discussing strategies to overcome obstacles to women's decent work through trade policies for the World Trade Organization, Anoush Der Boghossian (2023) highlights how Australia's Aid for Trade initiatives exemplify the integration of gender considerations into economic and labour policies. In Fiji, programmes are designed to address "time poverty," which limits women's economic participation. At the same time, the ILO Better Work Programme in Cambodia, Indonesia, Pakistan, and Vietnam aims to mitigate workplace discrimination, sexual harassment, and gender wage disparities. Yet, as feminist

economists such as Marilyn Waring (1990) remind us, women's economic participation alone is not synonymous with empowerment. Much of their labour—particularly in unpaid, informal, and care domains—remains uncounted or undervalued, and where it is visible, it is often instrumentalised within exploitative or unequal global production systems.

Simultaneously, Australia's gender-integrated approach to development aid also extends to localisation. Its Amplify-Invest-Reach programme channels direct funding to women's funds and human rights actors across Asia and the Pacific. These partnerships strengthen the capacity of local women's rights organisations to manage grants and shape their own priorities. "Funding women's rights organisations is highly effective," said one expert, "But risk aversion leads governments and donors to overemphasise compliance and underfund these groups, when the real danger lies in not funding them at all" (KII, September 2025). In 2022-2023, women's rights organisations received less than two per cent of Australia's ODA (OECD, 2025b).

Despite its achievements, Australia's feminist agenda faces systemic constraints. As one expert observed, "because gender equality has become so prominent in our development policy, it's given the rest of the government—especially trade, foreign affairs, national security and intelligence communities—an excuse to deprioritise it in their own work" (KII, October 2025). While gender integration is mandated across aid, most projects still classify it as a "significant" rather than a "principal" objective, limiting transformative impact (OECD, 2025b).

Climate policy integration remains inadequate, particularly within the domestic sphere. Women and indigenous communities, most vulnerable to climate change, are still underrepresented in planning and decision-making. While Australia's international aid and development initiatives are founded on the recognition that climate and environmental issues have gendered impacts, more efforts are needed to embed gender, climate, and environment linkages into domestic policies and investment strategies (Women's Environmental Leadership Australia, 2024). For instance, Australia's Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) offer only superficial references to "gender responsive" actions, with no explicit mention of women or gender, thereby neglecting the intersectional facets of climate justice and failing to recognise women's agency and leadership in climate change mitigation and sustainable resource management (Papagioti, 2023). It was also cautioned that Australia's foreign policy is becoming increasingly transactional, mirroring China's Belt and Road Initiative, with short-term deals overshadowing gender, climate, and social safeguards. "Critical minerals dominate the agenda" (KII, October 2025), one respondent said, with issues like gender or environmental protection often taking a backseat.

Interviewees further emphasised that as Australia deepens engagement in the Pacific—through security deals with Papua New Guinea, migration compacts with Tuvalu, and telecommunications investments—gender equality remains absent from these negotiations. Leveraging its middle-power, pragmatic, and innovative positioning in these engagements would offer both a high-impact and low-cost way to integrate gender considerations (KII, October 2025). "These are not aid programmes. They're deals—and every one of them could include a gender angle" (KII, October 2025). "Imagine if, when backing a telecommunications deal, Australia set conditions that required increasing internet access in remote villages—the dividends for gender equality would be immense" (KII, October 2025).

Rising militarisation and securitisation contradict feminist principles. The AUKUS pact and the expansion of arms exports reinforce hard-power priorities, while offshore detention policies continue to expose women and children asylum seekers to harm (Agius et al., 2023; Hennessy, 2024). Respondents expressed frustration at the fact that politicians seemed immune to calls for adhering to humanitarian principles in the execution of Australia's refugee policy. Australia also lacks a comprehensive peacebuilding, conflict prevention or fragility strategy (Development Intelligence Lab, 2022) critical for building effective development partnerships, frustrating advocates of conflict prevention efforts in the country.

As global aid budgets contract and militarisation expands, Australian policymakers face pressure to justify gender investments within a geopolitical framework dominated by competition with China. "The case for development assistance in this geostrategic era hasn't been convincingly made" (KII, September 2025), one expert noted. "We need to show how it benefits donor countries socially, economically, and in terms of security." Nevertheless, officials emphasise the importance of quiet diplomacy and locally owned advocacy. "Big donor visibility isn't always helpful," explained one respondent. "What works is supporting queer or women's organisations to do their own advocacy, then stepping back" (KII, September 2025).

Although many of Australia's policies discussed above reflect feminist principles in substance, the government has deliberately refrained from formally adopting the label of a Feminist Foreign Policy (FFP). This hesitation persists despite active advocacy from civil society and think tanks, who argue that focusing on gender equality alone as a feminist approach is insufficient. They view FFP as a framework for transforming deeper systems of power that underpin inequality and injustice at a global scale (AFFPC, 2022). However, the reluctance reflects both domestic political sensitivities and the difficulties of reconciling feminist principles with a highly securitised foreign policy environment. As one respondent explained, "the naming of a feminist foreign policy is very important because it carries normative signalling power; it invites accountability" (KII,

September 2025). Without that formal commitment, it becomes challenging for observers to assess whether government practices meet feminist standards. Yet, symbolic commitments do not always translate into ethical consistency, as recent global experiences demonstrate. Countries that publicly champion FFP frameworks have simultaneously endorsed or enabled militarised and exclusionary actions, revealing the limits of performative feminism in foreign policy.

From this perspective, Australia's reluctance to adopt the label may reflect a pragmatic recognition that feminist transformation requires structural change and political courage, not just rhetorical alignment. One expert suggested that a formal FFP label could even undermine Australia's relations with key neighbours: "For countries most important to us—Indonesia, Papua New Guinea, Timor-Leste—pursuing a feminist foreign policy might not strengthen, and could even act as a barrier to, bilateral relations" (KII, September 2025). Thus, the absence of a formal FFP label reflects a deliberate political choice. "We concluded that using contentious words might close doors" (KII, September 2025). "It's better to focus on narratives that shift attention from labels to outcomes, like 'opportunity for all', 'safety for all', or 'choice for all'" (KII, September 2025). Consequently, Australia's policymakers have favoured quiet diplomacy on gender equality, prioritising outcomes over overt branding. As one interviewee put it, "Don't assume that if something isn't visible, it's not happening. Quiet diplomacy can be much more effective on sensitive issues" (KII, September 2025).

Australia's approach shows how institutionalising gender accountability within bureaucratic systems can translate feminist ideals into measurable outcomes. Yet it also illustrates how competing policy priorities can limit the effectiveness of feminist foreign and development policies. This duality echoes broader regional dynamics explored in Chapter 4.

3.2 Pakistan

Pakistan's international policy continues to be shaped primarily by security imperatives, national identity narratives, and tense regional rivalries, often leaving limited room for the pursuit of progressive normative agendas. Nevertheless, the country has a long history of women's leadership in diplomacy and international policymaking since the 1950s, and domestic feminist movements continue to demonstrate the institutional and societal potential to integrate feminist principles into governance and policy.

Women have shaped Pakistan's international and diplomatic landscape since its founding, contributing significantly to diplomacy, peacebuilding, and multilateral engagement. Begum Shaista Suhrawardy Ikramullah, one of the country's first diplomats, contributed to drafting the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) in 1948, advocating for women's and children's rights, including the inclusion of Article 16 on equal marriage rights (OHCHR, 2018). Decades later, Benazir Bhutto—the first female Prime Minister of a Muslim-majority country—stood at the forefront of the BPfA, reinforcing Pakistan's global leadership on women's rights. More recently, Sherry Rehman, as Minister for Climate Change, emerged as a leading negotiator on "loss and damage" at COP27, amplifying the Global South's voice on climate justice in the wake of Pakistan's devastating floods of 2022 (Noor, 2024).

As one senior expert reflected: "When Sherry Rehman was leading the climate change agenda at multilateral forums... There was a constant reaffirmation of support for women as stakeholders. Whenever there was an agenda, we requested an 'inclusive resolution' that recognised women's participation" (KII, September 2025). This illustrates how female leadership can embed feminist sensitivity within international negotiations, even in traditionally male-dominated and technocratic arenas such as climate diplomacy.

Pakistan has introduced several innovative, yet under-recognised, gender-inclusive practices. One example is the law permitting married couples in government service to be posted at the same diplomatic stations together, a policy originally designed to prevent women from having to choose between career and family. As one expert noted, "Women in Pakistan and South Asia, in general, are very family-oriented. If I am asked to choose between family and career, I would choose my family. To facilitate this, the law was created to ensure that husband and wife are posted together so that the family unit does not suffer, and the female workforce does not have to make a difficult choice", (KII, September 2025). This reflects a locally grounded feminist approach—one that advances equality not through imported frameworks, but by recognising caregiving and family responsibilities as shared rather than gendered burdens. By contrast, most European foreign services adopt a discretionary approach to co-posting, contingent on the absence of hierarchical conflicts. France and Germany provide formal family-support mechanisms—*rapprochement de conjoints* in France, and Germany's co-ambassador model, which promotes professional integrity alongside gender equity.

From a WPS agenda perspective, Pakistan's National Security Policy 2022–2026 explicitly recognises "gender security" as a pillar, emphasising the integration of women into law enforcement and peacekeeping. Legal reforms have also progressed, such as the Protection against Harassment of Women at the Workplace Act, 2010, amended in 2022 to extend protection to home-based workers and others in the informal sector.

Pakistan's recognition of a legally protected "third gender" through the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2018—which enshrines the right to self-perceived identity and builds on a 2011 Supreme Court judgement affirming the rights and dignity of gender-diverse communities (Zia, 2025)—represents a landmark step in legal protection for

gender-diverse populations. This milestone positioned Pakistan as the first Islamic country to formally recognise transgender persons—an achievement that even many Western states have not matched. Globally, only 17 countries currently grant legal recognition to non-binary genders, whereas 173 do not (Equaldex, 2025). Regression in legal protections has also been observed in countries such as Hungary, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom (Chiam et al., 2019). From a feminist perspective, this inclusivity and legal recognition challenge patriarchal structures, strengthening feminist struggles for justice by extending rights to all who experience gender-based marginalisation (Ali, 2023).

However, while Pakistan legally recognises transgender persons, same-sex relations remain criminalised—reflecting not only the legacy of colonial-era penal codes but also prevailing religious and constitutional interpretations that frame same-sex relations as incompatible with Islamic injunctions and societal norms. Similar legal inconsistencies persist in Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, and were only recently reversed in India. This coexistence of legal recognition and criminalisation underscores the need to differentiate between degrees of acceptance and stigma across the LGBTIQ+ spectrum, where gender identity may gain formal acknowledgement, but sexual orientation continues to face legal and social repression.

At the same time, Western-led measurement systems often overlook such localised and context-specific progress. As Khattak (2023) notes in her critique of global gender indices, these systems frequently fail to capture context-specific advances—illustrated by the SDG 5 framework's omission of transgender recognition, which effectively erases Pakistan's landmark legal achievement in acknowledging a third gender. Interviewees also expressed frustration with the WEF Gender Gap Index, which neglects grassroots advances in women's agency and participation. As one expert remarked, "International reports portray us as miserable. They count women in the parliament but overlook the rising numbers of women voters or the growing gender diversity of candidates in elections. That's where the real change (and progress) is" (KII, October 2025).

Pakistan's trade and economic policies also include provisions to support women's economic participation. The Textiles and Apparel Policy 2020–25, covering a sector responsible for over 50 per cent of exports, has launched large-scale training in industrial stitching for women, expanded Women Empowerment Centres, and introduced provisions for three-shift work, childcare facilities, and social security inclusion. Given that nearly half of women-owned businesses are concentrated in the textiles sector, these policies could significantly expand women's economic participation (Ministry of Commerce, 2020).

However, implementation remains constrained by what one policymaker termed a "deeply misogynistic mindset": "It is considered progressive that Pakistan employs female health workers or allows couples to serve together. But the mentality is still misogynistic—you are either a good mother or a good officer. The structural mindset hasn't changed" (KII, September 2025).

This tension is further compounded by patriarchal bureaucracy,[7] where gender justice efforts often face subtle but persistent resistance. As one participant recounted, even attempts to regularise Lady Health Workers from volunteer roles were met with derision: "Bureaucrats would say, 'If their husbands are drivers, how can their wives earn more? It would create rifts in families.' These are educated liberals, people who work with the UN or World Bank, and yet the double standard persists" (KII, October 2025). Such accounts reveal how institutional patriarchy operates even within ostensibly progressive policy environments, undermining efforts to advance gender equality in the labour market and social protection sectors.

Pakistan ranks 137th out of 183 countries for women's representation in the parliament, with women holding just 17 per cent of parliamentary seats (IPU, 2025a). Despite the existence of formal gender mainstreaming mechanisms—such as the National Security Policy 2022-2026 and the establishment of a Gender Mainstreaming Committee in 2025—most remain symbolic or tokenistic. "These committees are handed to political parties to tick boxes," one expert noted. "Gender mainstreaming becomes an add-on, not an agenda" (KII, October 2025).

Moreover, progressive women in policymaking spaces often face hostility. Feminist experts in Planning Commission consultations were reportedly "told not to become a nuisance" (KII, October 2025), and to focus only on "safe" economic issues, avoiding topics such as patriarchy, unpaid care, or structural inequality. This reveals how elite-controlled policy spaces marginalise transformative feminist voices, relegating gender equality to "women's economic participation" rather than power redistribution.

Violence and political exclusion further hinder women's participation. Political violence creates unsafe environments for women in public life. At the same time, online harassment is widespread: according to the Digital Rights Foundation (DRF) Pakistan annual report (2025), 3,171 cases of technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV) were reported nationwide in 2024, with women accounting for 56 per cent of these cases. The report also noted that during the 2024 elections, women political leaders were the main targets of gendered disinformation, which involved manipulated media, AI-generated content, and misleading

[7] "A patriarchally organised bureaucracy is structured to maximise the linkages between male-female inequality and bureaucratic inequality. This ensures that any fundamental challenge to bureaucratic hierarchy would also require a fundamental challenge to prevailing male-female power relations" (Martin, 1990).

or missing context. Such attacks discourage women and gender-diverse persons from seeking political office or leadership roles, perpetuating cycles of exclusion.

The rise of populism and global militarisation has further narrowed the space for feminist policymaking. While USAID-funded programmes worth USD 1.5 billion between 2018 and 2023 supported many women and children, the recent U.S. withdrawal has created significant gaps (Khan, 2025). "The world has become ugly," one expert observed. "Budgets everywhere are shifting into security, not social protection. The right-wing wave from Trump to Modi to Erdogan has emboldened anti-gender forces, including here" (KII, October 2025). This reflects a broader crisis of multilateralism and funding, where donor priorities shrink and feminist agendas lose traction amid securitised politics. As another interviewee put it, "It's not just about funding anymore—it's an ideological rollback" (KII, September 2025).

Meanwhile, the domestic funding climate also remains quite unprogressive. Domestic development priorities marginalise gender issues: women-focused projects accounted for just 0.2 per cent of Pakistan's Public Sector Development Programme (PSDP) in FY 2025–26. Additionally, contradictions emerge when there is a willingness to sacrifice human rights and environmental justice if they conflict with geostrategic interests. For instance, the formal nomination of Donald J. Trump for the Nobel Peace Prize by the government of Pakistan, despite his administration's regressive record and continued pushback on gender rights, demonstrates how states' (hard) security interests often outweigh feminist values.

Yet another expert emphasised that "feminism in Pakistan predates donors" (KII, October 2025), rooted in indigenous struggles against religious and patriarchal control since the Zia era. Pakistan's feminist movements remain among the most vibrant in the Global South. The Aurat March, Sindhiani Tehreek,[8] the Digital Rights Foundation (DRF), and women-led networks across the country continue to mobilise around digital safety, labour rights, and gender-based violence. As one expert noted, "The Aurat March's power lies in its creativity and defiance—it's not donor-funded, it's self-organised. Like the Women's Action Forum before it, it represents a new generation of resistance" (KII, October 2025). These contemporary feminist groups resemble those described by Cynthia Enloe (2014), known for their "internet savvy, feminist creativity, and convention-defying public performance."

However, their activism faces mounting opposition. Firstly, the Talibanisation of Afghanistan has intensified conservative ideologies within Pakistan, fuelling anti-feminist rhetoric. One expert observed, "The Taliban mindset is being exported from Afghanistan. Even in Geneva, people say, 'Your diplomacy is progressive, but your country is not.' Unfortunately, that contradiction is real" (KII, September 2025). Secondly, conservative actors globally increasingly frame gender equality and feminism as Western impositions, using anti-colonial narratives to dismiss feminist claims (McEwen & Narayanaswamy, 2023). In Pakistan, a similar pattern is observed. This outlook also targets the khwaja sira[9] communities who, despite their deep roots in South Asia, are frequently collapsed into LGBTIQ+ identities, blurring the distinction between indigenous third-gender traditions and Western sexual identity frameworks. Such narratives, portraying feminist and gender-diverse movements as threats to cultural and religious identities, echo global right-wing populist discourse (Zia, 2025).

In recent years, Pakistan's treatment of its Afghan refugee population has drawn widespread criticism for contravening feminist principles of equality, protection, and justice. Recent state actions affecting refugee populations—including women and children—have prompted concern among international organisations and humanitarian actors regarding compliance with the principle of non-refoulement, forcing many to return to Taliban-ruled Afghanistan, where they face gender persecution, denial of education, and loss of autonomy. Human Rights Watch (2025) reports that more than 70 per cent of returning Afghans are women and children, including adolescent girls and women who will no longer have access to education. Women activists and minority groups have been particularly vulnerable to detention, extortion, and sexual harassment. At the same time, many female refugees have lost access to work, schooling, and healthcare due to legal insecurity and police crackdowns. These actions disregard women's specific protection needs and undermine the feminist ideal of safeguarding bodily integrity and human dignity for all (Amnesty International, 2024).

Most interviewees agreed that a formal FFP label is neither realistic nor necessary for Pakistan. "Instead of chasing labels, we should focus on building solidarity around core issues—social protection, labour rights, care work, and climate justice" (KII, October 2025). For many, solidarity and intersectional practice—not rhetoric—constitute the real feminist foreign policy. As one senior expert put it: "We need strong men as allies. When men become gender champions, society listens. That's when real change happens" (KII, September 2025).

Consultation with experts also highlighted significant opportunities for regional feminist cooperation, particularly in areas such as labour rights and care economies. As one expert noted, "Feminists working on labour issues in Pakistan, Vietnam, or Malaysia share common struggles—low wages, informal work, exploitation. That's where solidarity should start" (KII, October 2025). Experts also emphasised the potential of digital networks and South–South learning—for example, improving Pakistan's social protection models (such as BISP) by learning from Southeast Asian experiences. They also emphasised the importance of showcasing regional

[8] A women-led political organisation formed by rural women in Sindh, Pakistan.

[9] Respectful term for a transgender and intersex community in South Asia, particularly in Pakistan.

advances—on domestic workers' rights, care economy reforms, and transgender rights—at international forums, identifying these as promising entry points for feminist solidarity (KII, September 2025).

3.3 Indonesia

Indonesia—Southeast Asia's largest democracy and an upper-middle-income country—occupies a strategic position in regional politics and diplomacy. As an influential member of ASEAN and an active mediator in regional peace and security processes, Indonesia plays a pivotal role in shaping the region's governance and development agenda. Over the past two decades, Indonesia has witnessed gradual progress in women's political representation and leadership, with an increasing number of women heading ministerial portfolios and participating in high-level diplomacy. However, entrenched patriarchal structures, cultural resistance to feminism, and gaps in legal protections reveal that the adoption of feminist principles remains uneven and contested.

Former Minister Retno Marsudi's appointment marked a historic first for Indonesia, with a woman leading one of the country's most traditionally male-dominated ministries. Under her leadership, Indonesia made visible advances in women's leadership in diplomacy and international affairs. At the 15th Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) Summit in Gambia, Marsudi called for narrowing development gaps among member states, noting that 21 of the 46 least developed countries are OIC members. She linked inclusive development to women's empowerment and access to quality education, offering scholarships for Afghan women and girls, sharing madrasa curriculum best practices with the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), and delivering 10 million doses of the polio vaccine for Afghan children (Antara News, 2024). Marsudi emphasised in her first speech as a member of the UN Human Rights Council (2020–2022) that "investing in women means investing in human rights," a statement that encapsulates her consistent message that women's empowerment is central to Indonesia's human rights diplomacy. Marsudi's tenure also contributed to a rise in female diplomats—from below 10 per cent under previous governments to around 13 per cent today (Chehab, 2023)—a modest but symbolically significant achievement. However, experts cautioned that gender mainstreaming within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs still "has a long way to go", and expressed concern that these gains may not be sustained under the current male-led administration (KII, October 2025).

Indonesia has also sought to institutionalise women's leadership in regional peacebuilding. It hosted the ASEAN Institute for Peace and Reconciliation (ASEAN-IPR) Women in Peace Processes Symposium in Jakarta in May 2025, bringing together women peacebuilders from across ASEAN and launching a digital catalogue of the ASEAN Women for Peace Registry to enhance women's leadership and advocacy in regional peacebuilding (ASEAN-IPR, 2025). These efforts reflect Indonesia's attempt to position itself as a moral and inclusive Muslim democracy, integrating gender equality into both South-South Cooperation (SSC) and Islamic diplomacy.

Domestically, Indonesia's gender mainstreaming strategy, first introduced in 2000, has provided a long-standing policy framework, but implementation remains uneven. Not all ministries have adopted gender mainstreaming, and coordination challenges persist, particularly because the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection lacks provincial branches and thus struggles to influence subnational governance. Still, Indonesia has made measurable progress through initiatives such as Gender-Responsive Budgeting (GRB) within its national budget (APBN) since 2000, aiming to integrate gender into planning, budgeting, monitoring, and expenditure tracking. GRB efforts are now expanding to subnational governments through initiatives like SKALA, which supports local administrations in adopting gender-based budget tagging (Antara News, 2021; SKALA 2024). According to SKALA's six-monthly progress report (July–December 2024), the programme has delivered critical improvements in the visibility and accountability of gender-responsive budgeting. It supported the development of Indonesia's first gender budget-tagging model, assisted the Ministry of Finance in revising its budget classification system to better capture gender, disability, and ageing dimensions, and facilitated capacity-building training for provincial actors across several regions. The improved tagging model is expected to be embedded in a new Ministry of Finance regulation aligning national and subnational budget categories. Together, these changes lay the structural foundations for better tracking of gender-sensitive expenditures and stronger governance of public financial flows (SKALA, 2024).

Indonesia has launched several frameworks to advance women's economic participation and digital inclusion, including the National Strategy for Women's Financial Inclusion (SNKI-P), Guidelines for Women's Digital Transformation and Entrepreneurship, and Women-Friendly and Child-Caring Villages (DRPPA). Collaboration between the Ministry of Indonesian Migrant Workers Protection and partners such as the ILO and EU has improved gender-responsive recruitment and inspection systems, especially benefiting women in domestic, manufacturing, and care sectors (ILO, 2025).

Indonesia's leadership in advancing the WPS agenda has also been notable. It became the first Southeast Asian country to adopt a National Action Plan on WPS in 2014, embedding gender equality and inclusive peacebuilding into national frameworks (ASEAN, 2023). These commitments were reaffirmed in 2023, when Indonesia's Minister of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection chaired the ASEAN Women, Peace and Security Summit, solidifying Indonesia's reputation as a reference point for WPS integration. This leadership has translated into measurable progress both domestically and internationally.

Between 2014 and 2023, the number of female mediators in Indonesia increased to over 14,800, alongside more than 1,000 women peace activists operating nationwide (Gayatri & True, 2025). Such institutionalisation of women's roles in peacebuilding reflects growing recognition of their contributions to conflict prevention and mediation. In recent years, Indonesia has reoriented its counterterrorism and Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (P/CVE) strategies. Traditionally dominated by "hard security" measures, Indonesia began integrating gender-sensitive, community-based approaches informed by women-led CSOs between 2016 and 2021. These groups advanced human rights-based and localised methods of engagement, embedding inclusion into security responses (Gayatri & True, 2025). Such collaboration demonstrates Indonesia's pragmatic adaptation of feminist principles within frameworks acceptable to state and religious authorities, emphasising community protection over individual rights.

However, several experts emphasised that patriarchal norms remain deeply entrenched across Indonesia's political and bureaucratic institutions. Women continue to face cultural and structural barriers to participation in politics and governance, often discouraged by perceptions that politics is "dirty" or "unsuitable for women." One respondent explained that gender equality in Indonesia is still largely framed as "empowerment," rather than as a challenge to the structural systems that perpetuate inequality (KII, October 2025). Economic policies prioritising growth over social justice and the dominance of informal and precarious work for women workers further entrench inequality. Indonesia's feminist-aligned reforms also remain constrained by cultural conservatism, bureaucratic inertia, and data gaps. During the interviews, experts lamented that when new social policy ideas are introduced, "the primary objections are usually: Where will the funding come from? How will it operate?" (KII, September 2025), pushing gender considerations down the list of priorities.

Furthermore, the lack of gender-disaggregated data hampers tracking progress. One expert observed, "At the statistics agency, they usually don't separate data by gender. Without that, it's difficult to highlight how budgets are allocated or appropriated" (KII, September 2025). These bureaucratic and technical barriers mirror deeper ideological divides. Feminism is often perceived domestically as incompatible with religion or national culture. One expert observed that while Indonesia projects itself internationally as a Muslim democracy, "domestically, this was not easily accepted. Some foreign policy positions were labelled 'liberal,' and the reaction was that you can never combine Islam and liberalism" (KII, September 2025).

Indonesia's application of intersectionality in policymaking remains limited. While NGOs and academics employ the concept to engage with multiple forms of marginalisation, official state documents prefer terms such as "gender-responsive" or "gender-awareness" policies, excluding explicit references to sexuality or queer rights. "We try not to address it formally," one respondent admitted. "Once you start discussing sexual orientation, it can be perceived as undermining women's or children's rights" (KII, September 2025). As a result, intersectionality in Indonesia's policy practice tends to focus on women, children, and persons with disabilities while avoiding more politically sensitive discussions around sexual orientation and gender diversity.

The interviewees emphasised that Indonesian diplomats actively distinguish their approach from Western feminist frameworks. As one expert explained, "Whenever diplomats discuss feminism or women's participation in foreign policy, their mindset is very clear: 'We are not Europe, not Scandinavia, not America.' The key message is: liberalism is not us. In Southeast Asia, rights are viewed at the communal level, not the individual level, as in Europe" (KII, September 2025). This approach also shapes how intersectionality is operationalised in policy: rather than focusing narrowly on gender, Indonesia's international and domestic policies increasingly acknowledge multiple vulnerabilities. As one respondent noted, "In ASEAN, for instance, human trafficking severely impacts women and children. But the issue is not solely about women; we also address other vulnerable groups—such as men working in the marine sector as crew members—whose exploitation is often difficult to detect" (KII, September 2025). This highlights a critical aspect of gender justice: that it is not confined to women's rights alone but extends to addressing the structural exploitation and discrimination experienced by people across genders who occupy marginalised positions in the socio-economic hierarchy. However, the framing of gender justice remains selective. It largely recognises only the two binary genders. This selective framing is consistent with the broader ASEAN human rights discourse, which conditions rights upon communal duties rather than universal entitlements. The ASEAN Declaration of Human Rights, promulgated in 2012, notes:

> *The enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms must be balanced with the performance of corresponding duties, as every person has responsibilities to all other individuals, the community and the society where one lives. It is ultimately the primary responsibility of all ASEAN Member States to promote and protect all human rights and fundamental freedoms (Principle 6, ASEAN Human Rights Declaration, 2012).*

Thus, ASEAN member states, and Indonesia in particular, have led the Asian values debate, which frames human rights and democracy as "western ideologies and cultural practices deemed inappropriate for the peoples of Asia" (Langlois, 2021). By prioritising inclusivity through a communitarian rather than individualist framework, Indonesia advances a form of contextual feminism—one

that aligns with democratic principles yet remains bounded by religious and cultural sensibilities. In this sense, Indonesia's feminist-aligned progress is deliberate but cautious, less about adopting labels and more about embedding equality into the everyday practices of governance, diplomacy, and development, on its own culturally resonant terms.

However, these gains are increasingly at risk amid shrinking civic space and resurgent conservatism. Civil society actors described funding shortfalls, growing restrictions on media and NGOs, and the rise of conservative groups, which are pushing for a Family Resilience Bill that would reinforce gender segregation and domestic roles for women. "All democratic movements are being impacted—not just women's, but also journalists' and queer movements" (KII, October 2025), lamented one respondent, noting that international funding cuts have weakened grassroots advocacy.

Despite these constraints, Indonesia's trajectory illustrates how feminist-aligned principles can be negotiated within complex political, religious, and regional realities. The country has integrated gender equality into governance, diplomacy, and development practices in ways that are both politically viable and culturally grounded.

3.4 Mongolia

Mongolia, a small democracy situated strategically between China and Russia, has sought to carve out a distinctive role in international affairs by advancing gender equality and embedding feminist principles within its domestic policies and foreign policy engagements. With an HDI value of 0.741, Mongolia ranks among the countries with "high human development" (UNDP, 2024c). Its pursuit of feminist-informed policy shows both promising initiatives and persistent constraints in institutionalisation and implementation.

Between 2024 and 2025, Mongolia's score on the Global Gender Gap Index improved significantly, rising from 85th to 65th place out of 146 nations (WEF, 2025). This rapid progress reflects not only policy reform but also increasing collaboration between government institutions and feminist civil society. Amendments to the Labour Law and Election Law in 2023 have increased women's participation in politics and the economy. Most notably, a gender quota was introduced, requiring at least 30 per cent of electoral candidates to be women in the 2024 elections, with a target 40 per cent by 2028. As one expert noted, this achievement "would not have been possible without the active involvement and engagement of civil society organisations such as Women for Change" (KII, October 2025), which successfully lobbied for gender quotas at both the parliamentary and political party levels. The impact was immediate and visible: the number of female politicians increased from 13 to 32 in the 2024 elections, making up nearly a quarter of the total seats, a figure exceeding the regional average of 21 per cent and closely approaching the global average of 27 per cent (UNDP 2024a; Tamang, 2024).

Mongolia's policy frameworks have grown more comprehensive and gender-inclusive in recent years. The country adopted a Cross-Sectoral Strategic Plan for Promoting Gender Equality (2022–2031), setting ambitious goals across multiple sectors, including health, education, economic participation, leadership, decision-making, and tackling gender-based violence (GBV). Complementing this, the Law on Promotion of Gender Equality (2011) integrated gender considerations into the mandates of state institutions such as the National Human Rights Commission and the Civil Service Council. In addition, Mongolia is advancing its commitment to the WPS agenda. The National Action Plan, currently under development, is intended to serve as a strategic framework for operationalising Mongolia's commitments to UNSCR 1325. One expert explained, "It aims to enhance the meaningful participation of women in domestic political, social, and peace and security processes, establish a clear inter-sectoral framework for preventing and responding to sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), and ensure the allocation of adequate financial resources for these initiatives" (KII, October 2025).

Nevertheless, persistent gaps in political will, financing, and institutional capacity remain. As one expert observed, "Implementation gaps are primarily due to weak political will and a lack of dedicated finance. Gender issues are viewed through a limited lens, with the government relying heavily on donor-funded programmes. Sectoral policies remain as documents rather than actions due to limited funding and reluctance to implement" (KII, October 2025). This donor dependence underscores the fragility of Mongolia's progress: policy sophistication has not yet translated into systemic institutionalisation. Institutional barriers, entrenched cultural norms, and policy implementation deficiencies further constrain progress. One expert explained:

> *Institutional barriers within public organisations and systems perpetuate gender disparities and restrict opportunities for women's advancement. These impediments can manifest as gender bias in recruitment and promotion processes, a lack of gender-sensitive policies and practices, and the insufficient allocation of resources for initiatives aimed at promoting gender equality (KII, October 2025).*

Similarly, one KII respondent noted that "cultural norms surrounding family, marriage, and caregiving often prioritise male authority, thereby creating and reinforcing unequal power dynamics within households and communities" (KII, October 2025). Another respondent highlighted persistent legal-practice gaps: "While laws designed to protect women's rights and ensure gender equality may be in effect, legal loopholes and

conflicts between formal and customary legal systems can obstruct access to justice and hinder women's ability to exercise their rights" (KII, October 2025).

Domestically, Mongolia has also sought to integrate feminist principles into its governance and development initiatives. Under the Digital Nation Strategy, the government launched the e-Mongolia platform to enhance access to public services. Community-based programmes and gender-sensitive disaster management strategies have also been implemented to protect vulnerable populations during times of crisis. The establishment of an E-GBV system by the National Police Authority demonstrates efforts to strengthen institutional responses to gender-based violence (UN, 2025).

In this process, civil society organisations have served as both partners and accountability actors. Experts highlighted their critical role: "These organisations often work directly with communities to empower women through education, training, and advocacy programmes. They also act as watchdogs, holding the government and other stakeholders accountable for their commitments to promoting gender equality and women's participation." (KII, October 2025) For example, the Defence Research Institute convenes scholarly forums on issues such as the challenges faced by female peacekeepers. As another expert noted: "A notable recent example of this was an open discussion on the Women, Peace, and Security agenda, organised in October in collaboration with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. This event convened a specialised audience comprising female officers from state military and law enforcement agencies, as well as leading gender specialists" (KII, October 2025). Importantly, the outcomes of these forums are systematically leveraged to influence public policy. Consolidated findings are formally submitted to the relevant governing bodies, creating a direct pathway for expert recommendations to be integrated into official policies and strategic decisions.

Despite progress, gender inequalities continue to manifest, affecting both men and women in distinct ways. For instance, men in Mongolia live on average 9.4 years less than women, the widest life expectancy gap in East Asia and the Pacific, and one of the largest globally (World Bank, 2024c). This gap stems from a combination of behavioural, cultural, and occupational factors. As one expert explained:

> *The main factor causing this gap is behavioural and traditional thinking. Traditionally, men often view themselves as the primary breadwinners of the household and are reluctant to visit the doctor or undergo regular medical checkups. This contributes to early mortality among men. Additionally, occupational segregation plays a role because the country's major sector—mineral mining—is physically demanding and predominantly employs men (KII, October 2025).*

These gendered patterns extend to Mongolia's labour and education systems. Boys in rural areas often face educational disadvantages, as many are expected to herd livestock and have limited access to schools (World Bank, 2024b). Meanwhile, more than half of workers in the informal economy are men, who also work significantly longer hours than women, averaging 54 hours per week—approximately 10 hours more than the national average (UN Mongolia, 2022). Such disparities underscore that gender inequality is multi-dimensional; it manifests across different aspects of life and affects all genders, though in different ways.

Recognising these challenges, the Mongolian government has begun adopting a more holistic approach to gender policy. The National Strategy to Promote Men's Health, approved in 2014, laid the groundwork for this shift (World Health Organization, 2016). Building on this, the government has introduced health sector action plans that mandate annual medical checkups for public employees and promote men's health awareness across institutions. One official reflected, "Public institutions now have their own employee health programmes promoting better health awareness among men and mandating annual health checkups to reduce this gap. The government is striving for a balanced approach—shifting away from policies that focus solely on empowering women towards a more inclusive strategy that also prioritises men's health" (KII, October 2025). This evolving focus on men's health and wellbeing in Mongolia represents an important step towards a more gender-inclusive understanding of equality, acknowledging that advancing gender justice requires addressing the social and structural conditions that disadvantage all individuals, women and men alike.

Beyond domestic reforms, Mongolia has demonstrated international leadership in embedding feminist principles into diplomacy and security. At the 2021 United Nations General Assembly, President Khurelsukh Ukhnaa pledged to increase female participation in peacekeeping by 15 per cent. This commitment has already borne fruit, with approximately 900 Mongolian female personnel deployed across seven UN peacekeeping missions, making Mongolia the eighth-largest troop contributor globally, the sixteenth-largest in terms of female participation, and the leading contributor in Northeast Asia (Byambakhand, 2025). Building on this, Mongolia hosted the first-ever Female Foreign Ministers' Meeting in 2023, which culminated in the "Ulaanbaatar Declaration," signalling its intent to champion feminist diplomacy. Scholars argue that Mongolia has a long-standing tradition of feminist diplomacy, consistently voting in favour of UN resolutions concerning women and children since joining the United Nations (Jargalsaikhan et al., 2022).

Mongolia's engagement with global climate and environmental agendas further illustrates its evolving understanding of gender-responsive governance. The country has one of the highest per capita GHG emissions in the world, largely due to its heavy reliance on coal for energy. Climate change was historically not approached through a

gender lens. This began to change only recently, as Mongolia integrated gender dimensions into its Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) under NDC 3.0 (UNFCCC, 2025). As one expert explained, “Previously, all NDCs were gender-blind, but through UNDP’s Climate Promise project, Mongolia is building technical capacity to ensure gender-responsive climate action” (KII, October 2025). This shift signals a broader alignment with feminist principles, particularly those that emphasise intersectionality and inclusivity in governance.

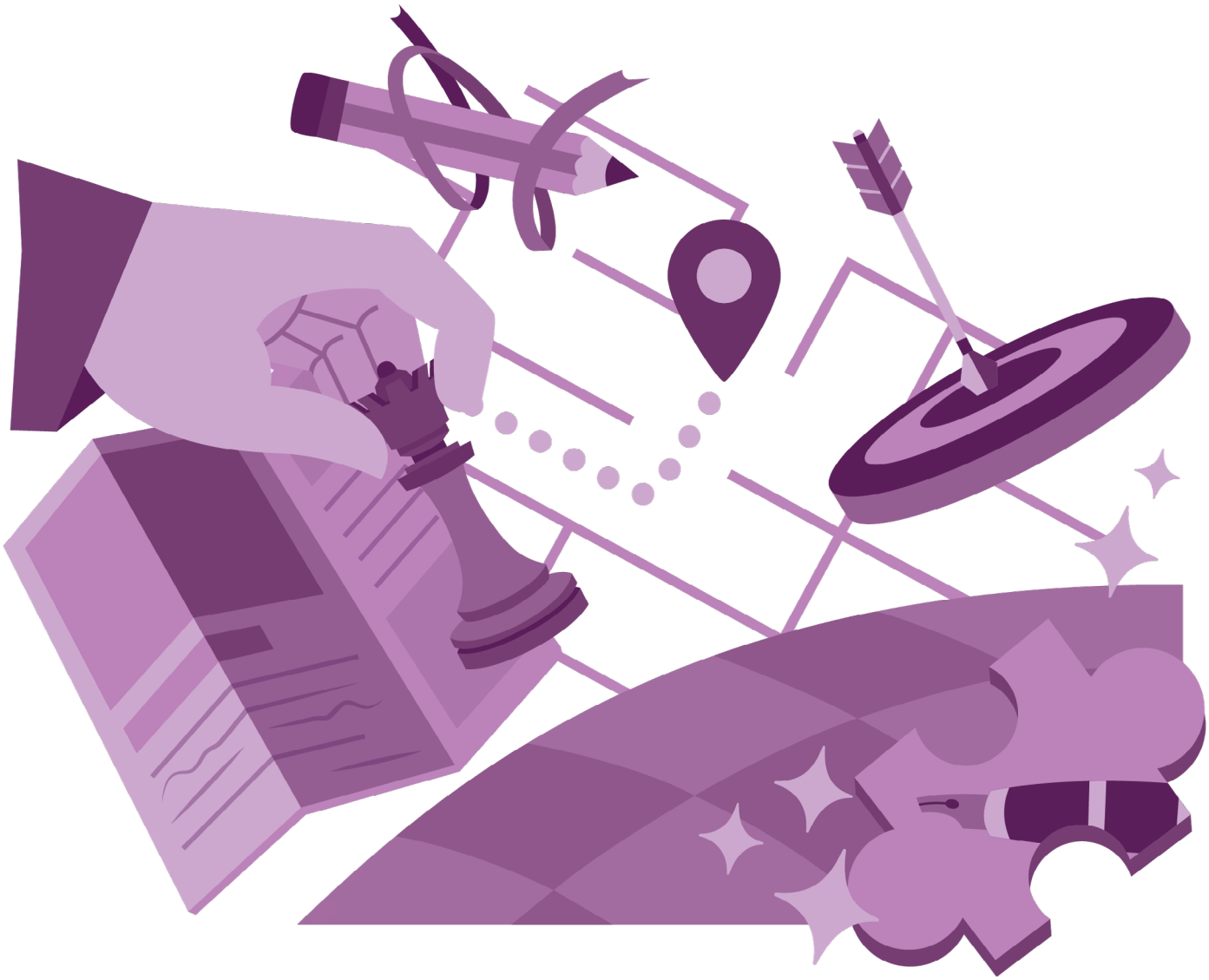
The country has also begun addressing non-traditional security issues, including climate change, environmental security, and cybersecurity, within national strategies such as the National Security Concept and Mongolia Vision 2050 (Government of Mongolia, 2025). The National Security Concept defines “Environmental Security” as a component of national security, highlighting challenges such as desertification and water scarcity, while the Vision 2050 policy devotes an entire chapter to “Green Development.” However, "budget and funding for this sector are still largely dependent on projects and programmes of international organisations and donor countries" (KII, October 2025).

However, intersectional inclusion remains uneven. While Mongolia’s policies often reference the principle of “leaving no one behind,” in practice, minority groups and gender-diverse communities continue to be marginalised and subject to public stigma. As one expert explained, “Intersectionality is narrowly understood—mainly in terms of sex, age, and disability—while issues related to ethnicity, sexuality, and other forms of marginalisation are rarely discussed or understood by policymakers” (KII, October 2025). This narrow framing results in partial inclusion, highlighting the gap between Mongolia’s international human rights commitments and its domestic realities. For instance, while homosexuality has been legal since 2002 and the right to change one’s legal gender is formally recognised, a 2018 amendment to the Law on Civil State Registration tightened requirements for gender marker changes, permitting them only with proof of complete medical transition, reversing earlier, more flexible provisions (World Bank, 2024b). One respondent further noted, “although the Law of Mongolia on Human Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Law of Mongolia on Ensuring Gender Equality are in place, and institutions such as the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection and the National Committee on Gender Equality (NCGE) are functioning, a comprehensive policy framework that addresses multiple forms of discrimination is still lacking” (KII, October 2025).

While Mongolia’s adoption of feminist foreign policy language and practice is noteworthy, structural weaknesses undermine its sustainability. No dedicated resources or budget have been allocated to feminist foreign policy initiatives, raising concerns about their seriousness and institutionalisation. Currently, much of the progress appears to be tied to political leadership and symbolic diplomatic actions rather than systemic reform. While these efforts enhance Mongolia’s international profile and normative standing, their transformative impact remains limited in the absence of mechanisms to translate commitments into practice.

Across these cases, the varying combinations of rights, representation, and resources reveal the tension between rhetorical commitment and the institutionalisation of feminist principles.

Chapter 4:
Existing Best Practices and Localised Strategies - Lessons from the Asia-Pacific



This chapter draws together insights from the country cases and wider regional evidence to highlight how feminist principles are being localised and institutionalised across the Asia-Pacific. It examines how rights, representation, and resources are advanced through concrete policies, programmes, and institutional innovations. These examples show that feminist integration into international policy often begins domestically, through actions like bureaucratic reforms, affirmative action, social protection frameworks, and partnerships between states and civil society. Over time, many of these initiatives find regional and global expressions through international policy frameworks adopted by leading multilateral institutions. Conversely, the process also occurs in reverse, with international commitments and ratifications serving as catalysts for domestic reform.

The country cases show that progress remains uneven but cumulative: national initiatives can create templates for regional cooperation, and regional frameworks can amplify local success stories into broader policy norms for worldwide adoption. Across each of the three R domains, which serve as the analytic north star for this report, there is clear evidence that best practices and localised strategies are emerging across the Asia-Pacific, as discussed below.

Building on the country analyses in Chapter 3, this chapter synthesises common patterns and innovations across these cases. It identifies how feminist principles have been institutionalised, which strategies have proven most effective, and how these approaches can inform regional policy frameworks.

4.1 Expanding Rights and Institutional Commitments

Across the Asia-Pacific, several governments are actively institutionalising feminist principles by embedding rights-based approaches into laws and governance frameworks. These efforts often originate in domestic reform but increasingly shape how states frame equality and inclusion in multilateral and regional cooperation (UN Women, 2023; UNDP, 2024b). In international forums, only countries with improved domestic gender equality conditions have the moral standing to take on strong policy positions, let alone lead new initiatives in these domains.

The Asia-Pacific region has emerged as a progressive leader in advancing legal recognition of gender diversity, accounting for six of the 17 countries worldwide that formally recognise non-binary or third-gender identities (Equaldex, 2025). These include Nepal, New Zealand, Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, and Australia, reflecting the region's growing commitment to expanding the legal and social understanding of gender beyond binary categories. Within this context, Pakistan's experience is particularly significant, as it is the only Muslim-majority country to have legally recognised gender diversity. Between 2009 and 2012, a series of Supreme Court rulings mandated the creation of a third-gender category in national registration and electoral rolls. The subsequent Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2018 affirmed the right to self-perceived gender identity, prohibiting discrimination in employment, education, and healthcare (Government of Pakistan, 2018). Although parts of the Act are under judicial review following a Federal Shariat Court verdict that deemed self-perceived identity as un-Islamic (Abbasi, 2023), Pakistan's recognition of transgender citizens remains a milestone among Muslim-majority states, expanding the region's legal understanding of gender rights beyond binary categories.

Some countries in the region have explicitly linked women's rights—such as inheritance and property ownership—directly to economic autonomy. India's 2005 amendment to the Hindu Succession Act, 1956 equalised inheritance rights between sons and daughters, recognising property ownership as central to women's empowerment. Nepal's constitutional and land reforms, including joint land titling, have similarly strengthened women's asset ownership. In Vietnam, the Land Law of 2013 requires both spouses' names on land certificates, embedding equality in state property systems. These reforms reflect a growing recognition that access to and control over productive assets is fundamental to women's economic independence and social status.

At the regional level, the ASEAN Gender Mainstreaming Strategic Framework 2021–2025 institutionalises a rights-based approach across ASEAN's three community pillars: political-security, economic, and socio-cultural (ASEAN, 2021). The framework requires member states to conduct gender-impact analyses for regional policies and programmes, thereby operationalising commitments first articulated in the 2017 ASEAN Declaration on the Gender-Responsive Implementation of the ASEAN Community Vision 2025 and Sustainable Development Goals. It also emphasises a shift towards deepening engagement with civil society by encouraging organisations to submit written statements, recommendations, and proposals to relevant ASEAN bodies, propose collaborative programme, and participate in their meetings. These provisions signal a regional shift from rhetorical endorsement of gender equality towards measurable institutional practice (ASEAN, 2021).

Taken together, these initiatives demonstrate that the rights dimension of feminist policymaking in the Asia-Pacific is advancing through multiple pathways:

- → Legislative reform, as in Pakistan, that broadens citizenship rights and strengthens protections for marginalised groups;
- → Legal and economic empowerment measures that embed gender equality within market and property regimes; and
- → Regional frameworks, such as ASEAN's, that translate domestic commitments into shared governance norms.

Each contributes to a cumulative regional trend in which rights are no longer confined to national law but are progressively codified within international policy processes, linking domestic gender justice to broader architectures of global governance (Aggestam & True, 2021).

While Southeast Asia's institutionalisation of gender equality through ASEAN offers a model of regional coordination, comparable mechanisms remain limited in South Asia and the Pacific. Building similar frameworks—whether through SAARC's Social Charter or the Pacific Islands Forum's gender equality initiatives—could help translate national reforms into shared norms of accountability. Regional cooperation on gender data, labour mobility, and climate resilience would enable these subregions to align domestic rights agendas with broader collective goals, ensuring that progress on equality becomes a common regional benchmark rather than a series of isolated national achievements.

4.2 Representation and Leadership Pathways

Representation—both in numbers and in influence—remains a cornerstone of feminist policymaking and a critical dimension of international engagement. The examples below highlight how representation is evolving from a symbolic gesture to a structural norm, demonstrating measurable changes in leadership, institutional culture, and accountability.

In Australia, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) has integrated representation into its performance framework through a gender equality target that requires 80 per cent of all aid investments to effectively address gender equality (Australian Government, 2023). This policy is accompanied by systematic monitoring, evaluation, and annual public reporting. The approach is intended to infuse a gender lens into all facets of international policy.

Mongolia provides an emerging model for feminist diplomatic leadership. In 2023, the Minister of Foreign Affairs hosted the first Female Foreign Ministers' Meeting in Ulaanbaatar, a forum bringing together women foreign ministers from across the world to discuss feminist foreign policy and gender-sensitive diplomacy (United Nations, 2024). This initiative amplified the voices of women leaders in international relations, promoting collaboration across states that have adopted or are considering feminist foreign policies. The meeting also positioned Mongolia, which is traditionally regarded as a small or middle power, as a normative leader in advancing feminist diplomacy around the world. As an added advantage, this initiative has also strengthened Mongolia's soft power both regionally and internationally.

Across South Asia, institutional mechanisms have been used to strengthen women's representation in political decision-making. Bangladesh, Nepal, and Pakistan have enacted constitutional or legislative quotas that reserve a minimum proportion of parliamentary seats for women, a reform shown to have enduring effects on political participation and policy agendas (Roy, 2023). In Nepal, constitutional provisions ensure that key state offices, including the president and vice president, must be held by individuals of different genders or communities (UN Women, 2023b). These measures advance descriptive representation while also generating substantive outcomes, as women legislators increasingly champion policies related to social protection, health, and education (Paxton et al., 2020).

Representation has also been strengthened through transnational civil society networks that bridge national advocacy and regional policymaking. The Australian Feminist Foreign Policy Coalition, affiliated with the International Women's Development Agency (IWDA) in Australia, convenes scholars, diplomats, and activists across the region to promote feminist perspectives in foreign and development policy (IWDA, 2021). Such coalitions reflect a core feminist international-relations insight that representation is relational and intersectional, requiring alliances that span borders and sectors (Aggestam & True, 2020). These networks have expanded the discursive space for feminist approaches to diplomacy and contributed to the diffusion of feminist policy norms across the Asia-Pacific through knowledge creation and sharing, policy dialogues, and the development of new technical assistance mechanisms to support governments seeking to improve gender equality through public policies.

Taken together, these developments signal a steady consolidation of representation as both a normative principle and a measurable policy goal. National performance targets, constitutional guarantees, and transnational networks are transforming the architecture of participation across the region. Where earlier efforts often relied on symbolic inclusion, contemporary feminist actors—both within governments and civil society—are embedding gender equality within organisational mandates, international diplomacy, and regional cooperation. This evolution from visibility to influence is reshaping the character of international policy in the Asia-Pacific and offers a replicable framework for feminist governance globally.

4.3 Redistributing Resources and Building Economic Agency

The redistribution of resources, whether financial or infrastructural, is a tangible indicator of feminist policymaking in practice at the national level. Across the Asia-Pacific, gender-responsive budgeting, social protection expansion, and reforms that value unpaid and informal work are beginning to align national development priorities with feminist economic principles (UNESCAP, 2018). These initiatives demonstrate how states and regional institutions are translating feminist theory into material outcomes that enhance women's economic security and autonomy.

One notable example is Nepal's effort to increase women's ownership of land and assets through gender-sensitive fiscal policy. In 2004, women's land ownership was only eight per cent. By 2014, this had risen to 26 per cent, following the Government of Nepal's policy of offering discounts on land registration fees for property titled in women's names (The Kathmandu Post, 2014). As of 2025, female landowners account for 39 per cent of the country's 11.47 million landowners, with nearly 50 per cent of property holders in urban areas being women (Sharma, 2025). The data show a steady increase in land transactions registered under women's names each year, illustrating the impact of targeted fiscal policies in promoting gender equality in asset ownership. By proactively easing the tax burden on female landholders, this policy redistributes a valuable productive asset to women and bolsters their economic agency within households and communities. It also signifies a broader recognition that property rights and inheritance laws must be reformed to achieve gender-equitable development outcomes.

In the Philippines, feminist principles have been embedded in public finance through a pioneering gender-responsive budgeting mandate. Since 1995, the General Appropriations Act has included what is informally known as a "Women's Budget," which requires all government agencies to dedicate a portion of their funding to women's empowerment initiatives. As the country's Budget Secretary explained, this "policy [directs] all government

agencies to allocate a minimum of five per cent of their total annual budgets for gender programs, projects, and activities" (Department of Budget and Management (DBM), 2024). In practice, this means that every year a fixed share of national and local expenditures is channelled into programmes that benefit women, from livelihood training and maternal health services to combating gender-based violence. The Philippine example demonstrates how public resources can be systematically earmarked and reallocated towards gender equality goals, making the state budget an instrument for social transformation. By institutionalising gender budget tags and accountability mechanisms, the policy ensures that women's needs are no longer an afterthought in fiscal decision-making but a core priority across all sectors.

Pakistan's experience with the Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP) provides a further illustration of resource redistribution that empowers women economically. Launched in 2008 as the country's largest social safety net, BISP delivers unconditional cash transfers to millions of low-income women as a form of direct economic support. The programme is widely recognised as one of the world's best in terms of targeting and coverage; it "provides cash assistance to 5.8 million families (ever-married women) with a quarterly stipend of PKR 5000 (approximately US $35)" (Hameed et al., 2024). By design, the payments are made to female heads of households, putting disposable income into women's hands at scale. Research on BISP finds that this influx of resources has translated into greater agency for beneficiary women. In fact, "the study observed that BISP... has brought improvement in women's mobility and women's participation in voting", contributing to "socio-economic and political empowerment" for women over time (Iqbal, Padda, & Farooq, 2020, p. 57). These outcomes show how even nominal cash stipends, when delivered directly to women, can enhance their decision-making power in the household and public sphere. In essence, Pakistan's experience illustrates how the cash transfer approach converts fiscal resources into tangible gains in women's welfare and autonomy, illustrating feminist policy in action through social protection.

Taken together, these initiatives demonstrate how feminist policymaking in the Asia-Pacific is beginning to convert abstract commitments into concrete redistributive mechanisms. Tax and land tenure reforms in Nepal explicitly aim to shift property ownership patterns in favour of women; budget mandates in the Philippines guarantee a steady fiscal injection into gender equality programmes; and social protection programmes like Pakistan's BISP funnel monetary resources directly to women. Each intervention addresses the resources dimension of the "Three Rs" framework by redefining what counts as economic value and who benefits from public expenditure. These cases collectively signal an emergent regional consensus that economic justice and gender equality are interdependent pillars of sustainable development.

4.4 Regional Cooperation and Multilateral Feminist Pathways

Regional and multilateral cooperation in the Asia-Pacific has evolved as a vital mechanism for translating domestic feminist reforms into collective policy innovation. Beyond formal institutions such as ASEAN, diverse platforms ranging from development partnerships to climate diplomacy and South-South Cooperation (SSC) are advancing feminist ideas through cross-border collaboration, technical exchange, and shared advocacy.

One key arena for feminist collaboration is climate and environmental diplomacy, where Pacific Island nations have emerged as regional leaders in linking gender equality to climate resilience. Under the Framework for Resilient Development in the Pacific (FRDP), governments are encouraged to incorporate women's leadership and local knowledge into national adaptation plans and disaster risk management (UN Women, 2016). Additionally, Fiji's National Gender Policy on Climate Change explicitly recognises vulnerable groups, including women, as "agents of sustainable social and environmental change" rather than "climate victims" (Government of Fiji, 2022). These approaches demonstrate how feminist environmental policy can be both locally grounded and internationally influential, shaping global negotiations under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

Another frontier for regional cooperation lies in trade and labour mobility frameworks that integrate gender perspectives into cross-border economic policy. Through partnerships with the ILO and ADB, several Southeast and South Asian governments are piloting gender-responsive trade facilitation measures and social protections for migrant workers (ILO, 2024a). Malaysia's recent expansion of social security coverage to migrant workers and Thailand's inclusion of domestic workers in its labour code illustrate how local regulatory reforms can converge into regional norms. These developments offer models for feminist approaches to labour governance that recognise care work, migration, and economic rights as interconnected policy domains.

SSC has also become a conduit for feminist knowledge exchange. The India-UN Development Partnership Fund has supported projects that advance women's entrepreneurship and gender-sensitive governance in the Pacific. Meanwhile, through the South-South and Triangular Cooperation Framework, Indonesia has delivered training and advocacy for family planning services in over 20 countries (UNFPA, 2025b). These initiatives reflect an emerging shift in feminist internationalism, where leadership and innovation are increasingly originating from the Global South rather than being transferred from the North to the South. In an era where foreign aid from traditional donors is being cut, this shows that feminist cooperation is no longer dependent on aid agencies, but on the desire to undertake mutual learning, shared capacity building, and solidarity across countries.

Civil society networks continue to act as connective tissue linking these regional and multilateral arenas. The Australian Feminist Foreign Policy Coalition and Pacific women's alliances, such as the We Rise Coalition, provide research, policy expertise, and advocacy that inform governments' positions in global forums. Their presence ensures that feminist policymaking remains accountable to local realities and that regional cooperation is guided by intersectional perspectives.

Together, these forms of collaboration have the potential to redefine what constitutes feminist regionalism in the Asia-Pacific. They could form a decentralised model of cooperation that values experience sharing, co-creation, and solidarity over hierarchy, much like the European Commission (EC) or OECD has been able to achieve among (mostly) European member states. By bridging local experience with multilateral institutions, these networks are laying the groundwork for new international forums that integrate gender equality into their operating logic rather than treating it as an external policy add-on.

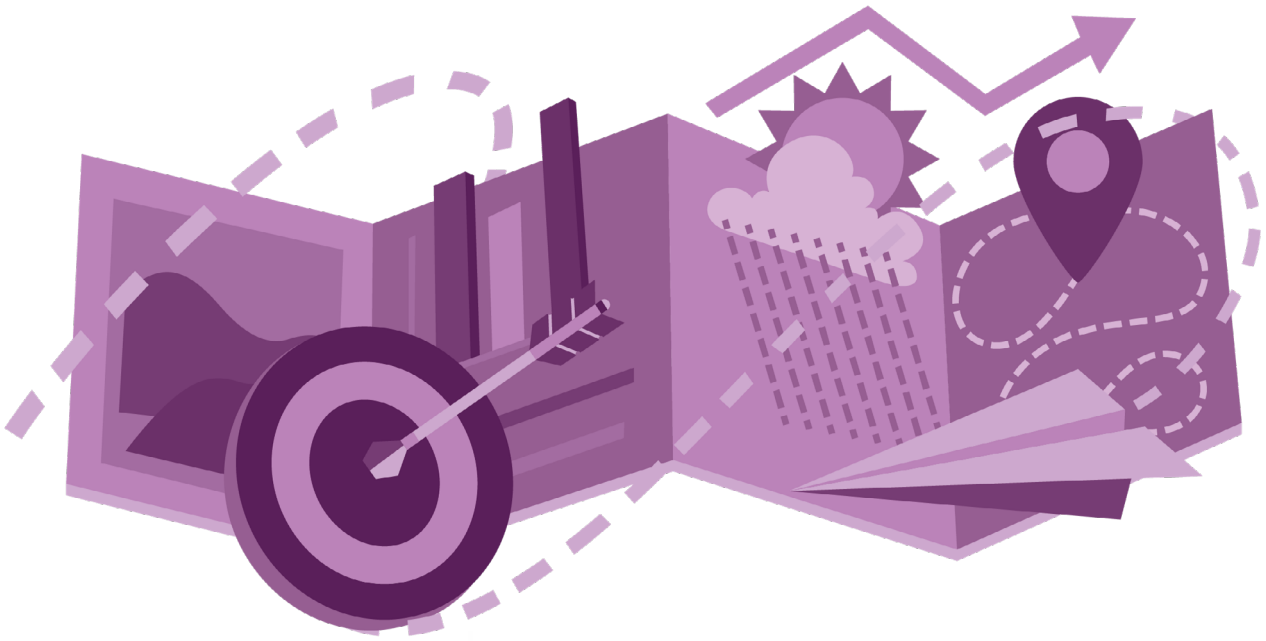
4.5 Feminist Pathways in Practice

While Europe has been the main driver of formal feminist foreign policy frameworks, the Asia-Pacific experience reflects a more practice-oriented and adaptive approach. European models tend to articulate feminism as a diplomatic identity anchored in foreign policy statements and global human rights norms (Kunz & Prügl, 2019; Aggestam & True, 2021). Across the Asia-Pacific, feminist policymaking is advancing through diverse, interconnected pathways. Feminist policymaking in the Asia-Pacific advances less through formal declarations and more through the gradual institutionalisation of gender equality within existing policy, legal, and bureaucratic frameworks.

The preceding sections illustrate that change rarely stems from top-down declarations; instead, it emerges from the steady institutionalisation of feminist principles across governance structures, both at the national and international levels. Whether through legal recognition of rights, performance-based gender targets, resource redistribution in infrastructure and trade, or feminist diplomacy in climate governance, the region demonstrates that gender equality can be embedded pragmatically within existing policy systems (UNESCAP, 2023). Asia-Pacific governments localise feminist principles by adapting them to religious, cultural, and political contexts, balancing universal equality norms with local legitimacy and intersectional realities.

These localised strategies are not isolated achievements. They are, in fact, building blocks for a broader transformation of regional and international policymaking. As governments, development partners, and feminist movements continue to adapt and share these models, new opportunities are emerging for cross-regional policy dialogue and norm-setting. For instance, the experience of Pacific Island states in gender-responsive climate adaptation could inform future negotiations at global climate summits; Indonesia's gender budgeting and property reforms could provide a template for SSC on feminist economics; and Pakistan's legal recognition of gender diversity could shape discussions on inclusive governance within the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and the UN Human Rights Council (UNHCR).

This region's experiences demonstrate that rights-based reforms achieve impact only when paired with equitable resource allocation and inclusive representation, i.e., the simultaneous advancement of the Three Rs in practical policy terms. The Asia-Pacific's evolving feminist landscape thus offers a vision of international cooperation grounded in pluralism and pragmatism. It suggests that feminist internationalism is not a fixed doctrine but an adaptive practice that links local innovation to global influence. By transforming domestic policy into shared frameworks for justice, equality, and sustainability, the region is carving out a distinct model of feminist policymaking—one that balances universal principles with contextual specificity and positions the Asia-Pacific as a driver of feminist transformation in global governance.



Chapter 5: Policy Recommendations and Entry Points for New Opportunities

This final chapter brings together the study's analytical findings and translates them into a set of actionable policy directions across the six international policy domains examined in Chapter 3. It builds on lessons learned from the experiences of other regions in implementing policy reforms grounded in feminist principles, using the rights, representation, and resources framework as a guiding lens. These policy recommendations are addressed to a multitude of stakeholders, each of whom has a distinct but interconnected role to play in translating feminist commitments into sustained and durable policy outcomes:

- **Governments** can embed gender equality within institutional mandates by reforming bureaucratic systems, setting measurable gender-performance targets, and institutionalising gender-responsive budgeting. Through leadership appointments, data transparency, and cross-ministerial coordination, they can ensure that feminist principles become structural features of governance rather than isolated initiatives.

- **Multilateral institutions and regional organisations** can facilitate coordination and standard-setting by creating regional peer-learning mechanisms, harmonising gender data systems, and institutionalising women's leadership within diplomatic and policy forums. By integrating feminist priorities into existing global platforms such as the UN, Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), and the Group of Twenty (G20), they can elevate Asia-Pacific innovations into globally recognised best practices.

- **Civil society groups and feminist networks** can act as bridges between policy and lived experience. By generating evidence, monitoring government performance, and advocating for intersectional and inclusive policies, they can help ensure that feminist policymaking remains accountable, context-sensitive, and responsive to diverse constituencies.

- **Development partners and donors** can strengthen this agenda through flexible, long-term funding, technical assistance, and capacity-building support aligned with national priorities. They can also promote policy coherence by aligning donor reporting standards and evaluation frameworks with existing feminist metrics and indicators in use across the region.

→ **Academic and training institutions** can sustain progress by embedding feminist theory and applied analysis into public policy education, foreign service training, and leadership development. They can also collaborate with governments and civil society in generating data and evidence to measure long-term policy impact.

Together, these actors form an interconnected and mutually reinforcing ecosystem for feminist policymaking, in which regional collaboration, local innovation, and global learning synergistically strengthen one another. Key entry points for advancing this agenda cover six international policy domains: foreign policy and diplomacy, peace and security, climate change and disaster response, trade and economic justice, development cooperation and humanitarian aid, and migration and labour mobility. Each domain highlights specific levers for reform and partnership through which feminist principles can be institutionalised and scaled within Asia-Pacific governance and beyond.

Recommendation 1: Foreign Policy and Diplomacy

→ **1a. Institutionalise feminist accountability within foreign ministries.** Governments can embed gender equality targets and transparent monitoring systems across aid, trade, and diplomatic portfolios, modelled on Australia's 80 per cent gender performance target, which requires this share of development investments to be directed towards gender equality. Even in non-donor countries, establishing gender focal units with authority over budgets, recruitment, and reporting, and linking senior officials' appraisals to progress on equality benchmarks, would make feminist accountability a structural feature of diplomacy. Development partners can continue to provide technical and financial support for gender-responsive budgeting, training, and the development of shared indicators aligned with global frameworks.

→ **1b. Build regional capacity and leadership pipelines for women diplomats.** Multilateral organisations such as UNESCAP, ASEAN, and the Pacific Islands Forum can convene structured mentoring, training, and exchange programmes to increase women's representation in senior diplomatic posts. Governments can contribute by allocating scholarships and secondment opportunities for early-career diplomats, while feminist networks and development partners can support recurring regional dialogues, such as Mongolia's Female Foreign Ministers' Meeting, transforming it into a permanent platform for feminist cooperation and agenda setting that goes beyond just promoting FFPs.

→ **1c. Strengthen inclusive policy design and transparency through multi-stakeholder collaboration.** Ministries of foreign affairs can institutionalise formal consultation mechanisms with feminist civil society networks to integrate intersectional perspectives into foreign policy design. Governments, multilateral institutions, and research organisations can jointly develop a regional Gender in Foreign Policy Dashboard to track representation, resource allocation, and rights commitments across the region. Publishing these metrics would reinforce accountability, promote regional learning, and embed feminist values into the operational culture of diplomacy.

→ **1d. Use quiet diplomacy for sensitive reforms, measured by policy signals showing prioritisation of issues, rather than claims of publicly visible outcomes.** In politically sensitive contexts, governments and partners should support locally led organisations to shape negotiations and policy language, while keeping donor visibility low. Progress should be tracked through prioritisation indicators, such as the presence of gender clauses or safeguard language in MOUs, instances of counterpart ministries requesting gender technical inputs in closed-door processes, budgetary set-asides or tagged lines for gender within non-aid agreements, and the share of funds channelled to local women's and LGBTIQ+ groups to lead advocacy. This mirrors Australia's practice of privileging substance over branding and outcomes over labels.

Recommendation 2: Peace and Security

→ **2a. Strengthen gender integration in peacekeeping, mediation, and national security institutions.** Governments can embed gender-responsive training in military, police, and peacekeeping academies, drawing on the experiences of Indonesia and the Philippines in implementing the WPS agenda. Multilateral organisations, such as UN Women and UNESCAP, can support curriculum development. Meanwhile, development partners and regional multilateral agencies can fund capacity building, monitoring, and ensure gender parity in deployment and leadership.

→ **2b. Institutionalise resourcing and accountability for WPS commitments.** National governments should move from project-based funding to dedicated WPS budget lines across ministries of defence, foreign affairs, and interior. CSOs can monitor allocation and outcomes through public expenditure tracking, and donors can harmonise funding mechanisms to support locally led women's peacebuilding initiatives.

→ **2c. Establish an Asia-Pacific Women Peacebuilders Forum.** Regional institutions such as ASEAN and the Pacific Islands Forum can convene annual gatherings of women mediators, negotiators, and security officials to exchange best practices and coordinate responses to emerging threats. Governments can nominate practitioners, while development partners and feminist networks ensure the inclusion of grassroots and indigenous women peacebuilders.

Recommendation 3: Climate Change and Disaster Response

→ **3a. Mainstream gender and intersectionality into national climate policies.** Governments can embed gender and social inclusion targets into Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) and climate adaptation plans. Multilateral institutions such as the UNFCCC and UNESCAP can require gender-impact assessments for Green Climate Fund projects, while development partners can fund technical assistance to operationalise these standards across the board.

→ **3b. Invest in women-led and community-based adaptation.** Governments and donors can allocate direct financing to women's cooperatives and local organisations leading renewable energy, water, and disaster response projects. Regional funds, such as the Pacific Resilience Facility, can earmark grant windows for women's initiatives, ensuring that grassroots innovations inform climate strategies.

→ **3c. Strengthen women's leadership in disaster risk governance.** National disaster management agencies can include gender focal points at all administrative levels, while regional organisations coordinate leadership training and peer learning networks for women in crisis response roles. Academic institutions can document and evaluate outcomes, building an evidence base to support replication and scaling of successful policies.

Recommendation 4: Trade and Economic Justice

→ **4a. Embed gender equality in trade and investment agreements.** Governments negotiating frameworks, such as the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) and the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), can include gender clauses that mandate equal access to markets, finance, and procurement. Regional bodies like APEC can monitor implementation through dedicated scorecards, and civil society groups can track the distributional impacts on women entrepreneurs and workers.

→ **4b. Expand financial inclusion and women's entrepreneurship.** National financial regulators can promote women's access to credit by removing collateral restrictions and incentivising banks to develop gender-responsive financial products. Development partners and donor banks, such as the ADB, can provide blended finance mechanisms to scale up women-led enterprises in both rural and urban markets.

→ **4c. Use gender data to drive macroeconomic and fiscal reform.** Governments can institutionalise time use surveys and pay gap analyses within national statistics agencies, feeding data into gender-responsive budgeting. Academic institutions and multilateral organisations can support comparative research to inform policy design and track progress in the redistribution of resources.

Recommendation 5: Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Aid

→ **5a. Align donor and recipient priorities through feminist accountability frameworks.** Governments and donors can jointly define gender outcomes and tracking mechanisms in development cooperation agreements, using performance indicators consistent with OECD's gender markers that classify foreign aid projects as being gender transformative or otherwise. Regional coordination through UNESCAP can harmonise reporting, enhance transparency, and reduce duplication; enabling civil society to hold governments and donors accountable.

→ **5b. Prioritise direct funding for women's rights organisations and feminist CSOs.** Donors and multilateral partners can allocate flexible, multi-year grants to women-led organisations engaged in service delivery and advocacy. Governments can facilitate access by simplifying registration and compliance requirements, recognising these groups as key implementation partners in national aid strategies. In the context of foreign aid cuts, innovative financing models, such as membership fee-based revenue streams, should be championed by leading regional feminist CSOs.

→ **5c. Mainstream gender-responsive budgeting in humanitarian response.** Humanitarian agencies and national disaster authorities can jointly design funding models that earmark a proportion of emergency and reconstruction budgets for women-led initiatives. Civil society actors can monitor expenditure through participatory audit mechanisms, ensuring accountability to affected communities. In many countries across the region, this can leverage existing gender budgeting processes.

Recommendation 6: Migration and Labour Mobility

- **6a. Integrate gender provisions into bilateral labour agreements and regional migration compacts.** Governments can negotiate equal pay, social-protection coverage, and safe working conditions for women migrant workers. Regional platforms such as the Colombo Process and the Abu Dhabi Dialogue (responsible for improving governance in the Asia–Gulf corridor) can facilitate harmonised policy and enforcement. At the same time, CSOs can monitor and provide support services for migrants.

- **6b. Establish a regional observatory on gender and migration.** Under the leadership of the ILO and UNESCAP, member states can create a shared platform to collect and standardise data on women's migration flows, employment sectors, and protection outcomes. Academic and policy institutions can analyse trends and disseminate findings to inform policy dialogue, bilateral negotiations, and regional initiatives.

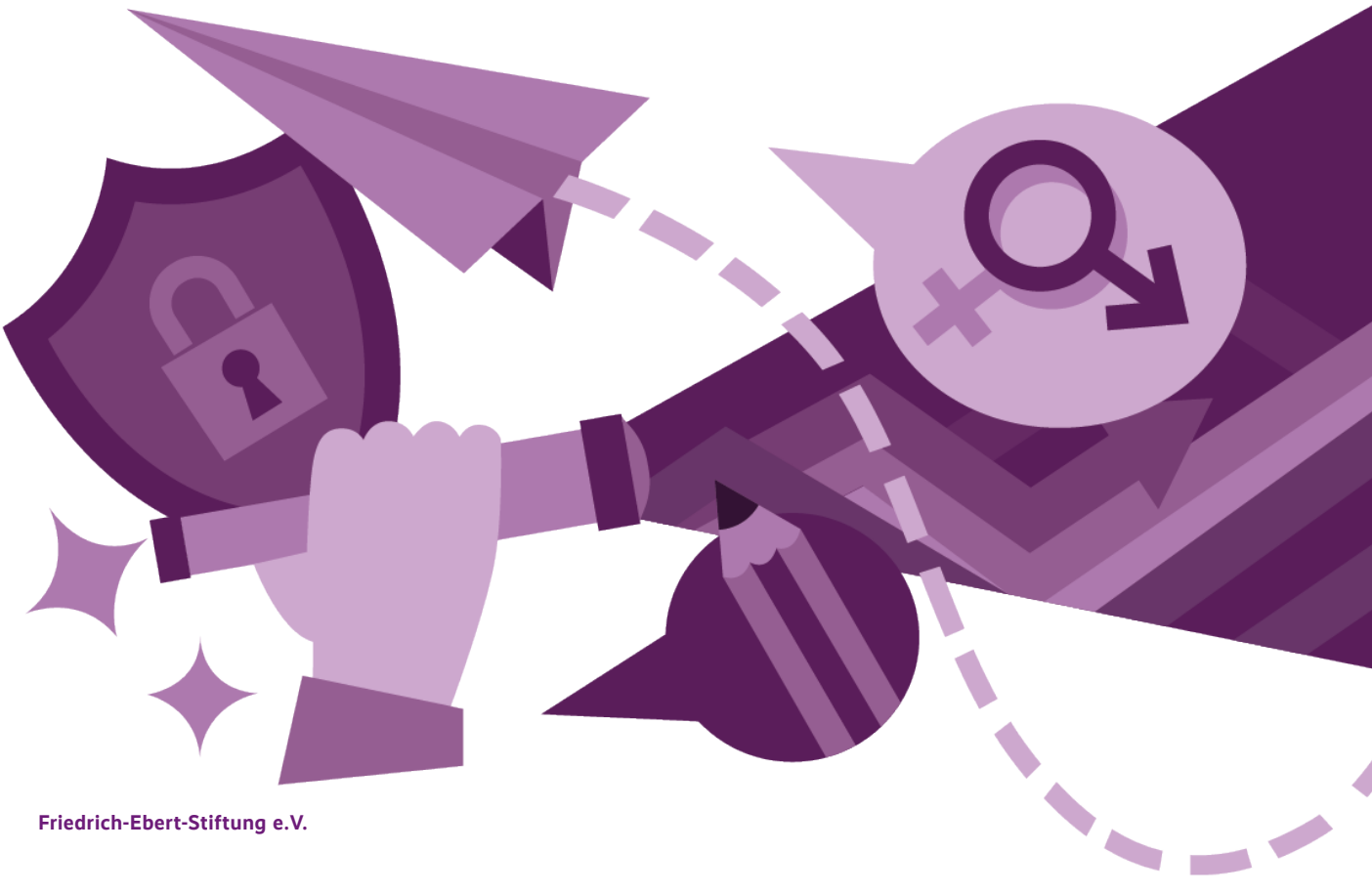
- **6c. Expand access to social protection, portability, and reintegration support.** Governments can collaborate with development partners to ensure that women migrant workers retain benefits, including pensions and health insurance, when returning home or moving across borders. Donors can fund reintegration programmes, including financial literacy, entrepreneurship training, and access to microfinance services.

Conclusion

This report finds that the **Asia-Pacific holds many of the building blocks needed for feminist policymaking to take deeper root in the coming years.** Across the region, promising reforms in law, budgeting, and diplomacy point to a gradual shift towards integrating feminist principles into governance. These experiences reveal growing potential to expand rights through inclusive legislation, strengthen representation within public institutions, and ensure a fairer distribution of resources that addresses structural inequalities. While progress remains uneven, each reform, dialogue, and local innovation contributes to a broader foundation for embedding gender equality within regional and international policy.

The approaches emerging across the region are diverse, pragmatic, and grounded in local realities. They may not yet amount to a cohesive regional framework, but they already offer valuable lessons for how feminist principles can be integrated into everyday governance. Moving forward, stronger collaboration among governments, civil society, and development partners can help sustain this momentum. As these partnerships deepen and knowledge circulates through regional and global forums, the region has the potential to play a growing role in shaping a more inclusive and equitable model of international policymaking.

The pathways identified in this study are intended not only to guide policymakers within the Asia-Pacific but also to contribute to global conversations on inclusive governance and feminist internationalism. By documenting and connecting these regional experiences, this report supports continued dialogue, collaboration, and innovation in advancing equality through international policy.



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Annexe - List of Experts Consulted

We extend our sincerest gratitude to the following distinguished experts for their valuable insights in the preparation of this report.

Name	Country	Affiliations
Alice Ridge	Australia	Senior Research, Policy and Advocacy Advisor at International Women's Development Agency (IWDA)
Sarah Goulding	Australia	Former Assistant Secretary and Principal Specialist on Gender Equality, DFAT Australia
Bridi Rice	Australia	CEO of Development Intelligence Lab, and co-founder of Asia-Pacific Development, Diplomacy and Defence Dialogue
Dinna Prapto Raharja	Indonesia	Executive Director, Synergy Policies
Athiqah Nur Alami	Indonesia	Researcher at the Research Center for Politics, the National Research and Innovation Agency (Badan Riset dan Inovasi Nasional-BRIN)
Jonta Saragih	Indonesia	Activist and Southeast Asia Project Manager for Outright International
Mariam Saeed	Pakistan	Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of Pakistan
Aliya Hashmi Khan	Pakistan	Labour Economist, Former Dean, Quaid-i-Azam University
Saba Gul Khattak	Pakistan	Gender Specialist, UNDP and World Bank
Uyanga Narantuya	Mongolia	Gender Analyst, UNDP Mongolia
Maitsetseg Dorjgotov	Mongolia	Senior Researcher, Defence Research Institute Mongolia's Peacekeeping Research Center

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About the authors

Dr. Ammar A. Malik is an award-winning researcher, policy advisor, and educator based in Washington, DC. He is a non-resident fellow at the Urban Institute, and affiliate of the Harvard Kennedy School. His work centres on women's economic empowerment, urban mobility, and entrepreneurship in low- and middle-income countries, combining rigorous research with policy-oriented analysis. He holds a PhD in Public Policy from George Mason University, an MA in Public Affairs from Sciences Po Paris, and an MA in Public Policy from the Lee Kuan Yew School at the National University of Singapore.

Noor Un Nisa is a development researcher with expertise in mixed-methods analysis, survey design, policy research, and project management across themes including gender, entrepreneurship, climate change adaptation, migration, digital inclusion, and social protection. Her work frequently centres on the experiences of marginalised and vulnerable groups such as Afghan migrants, female domestic workers, child beggars, and recipients of social protection schemes, approached through a gender-sensitive and contextually grounded lens. She holds an MA in Development Studies from the Institute of Development Studies (IDS), University of Sussex, and a BSc in Sociology and Anthropology from the Lahore University of Management Sciences (LUMS).

Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) is the oldest political foundation in Germany. The foundation is named after Friedrich Ebert, the first democratically elected president of Germany.

The Gender Justice Competence Center Asia-Pacific (GJCCAP) coordinates FES' work on gender justice in the Asia and the Pacific region. Together with colleagues, feminists, and partners in the region, we create spaces for exchange and mutual learning, and develop transformative strategies for a more gender-just future.

Advancing Feminist Principles in the Asia-Pacific through International Policy

creates a new starting point for understanding feminist principles and how they have been integrated into international policies across the region. Moving beyond the formal labels of Feminist Foreign Policy, the study reveals how nations have been pragmatically adapting to feminist values and principles. Through the conceptual framework of Rights, Representation and Resources, the authors explore how domestic reforms in quotas, gender-responsive budgeting, social protection, and related policy areas are reshaping foreign policy, trade, migration, and climate diplomacy. The study offers a policy roadmap and highlights that transformation happens more through pragmatic, localised adaptation than through ideology.

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