APRIL 2021

Bridging the Gap:

Mapping Gender Data Availability in Asia and the Pacific

KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

data2x

OPEN DATA WATCH

UNITED NATIONS
ESCAP
Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific

Overview

Bridging the Gap: Mapping Gender Data Availability in Asia and the Pacific is a regional deep dive assessing the availability and quality of data about women and girls in five countries in the Asia-Pacific region. The introduction of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) increased demand for disaggregated data to support decision-makers and implementers. Expectations for the information that data can provide on the lives of women and girls have risen. This report offers insights on where gaps in gender data exist, why gaps occur, and what can be done to fill them and deliver on commitments to improve the lives of women and girls.

This work builds on Data2X's *Mapping Gender Data Gaps* report, first published in 2014 and updated in early 2020, which launched efforts to find and test innovative solutions to fill gender data gaps. In addition, this work is a companion piece to *Bridging the Gap: Mapping Gender Data Availability in Africa* and *Bridging the Gap: Mapping Gender Data Availability in Latin America and the Caribbean*, published in 2019 and 2020 respectively.

This report differs slightly from the previous regional analyses. First, the set of gender indicators was expanded to include SDG indicators that have recently been upgraded from Tier III to Tiers I or II.[1] Second, as this analysis was conducted later, additional data were included to cover the period from 2010–2020. Finally, this report, like the Latin America and Caribbean regional analysis but unlike the Africa one, includes a discussion of national gender equality plans and policies in the five focus countries, along with an assessment of how the studied indicators can support these plans.

In this project, we set out to answer the following questions:

- Which domains of women's and girls' lives do we understand well from existing data, and which remain unclear because of missing or poor-quality data?

- What are the sources of available data and where can they be found in national and international databases? What can we learn from these patterns of availability?

- What can we learn from these five countries, including their national policies and programs, about closing systemic gender data gaps?

Fig. 1: Figure 1: The Asian and Pacific countries selected for this study

Mongolia
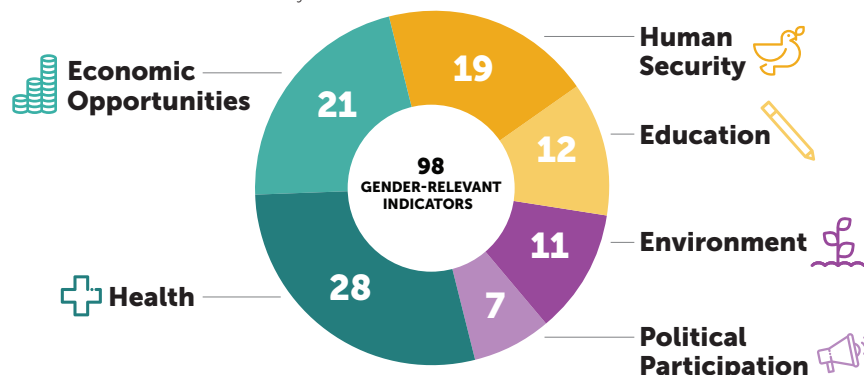Armenia
Bangladesh
The Philippines
Samoa

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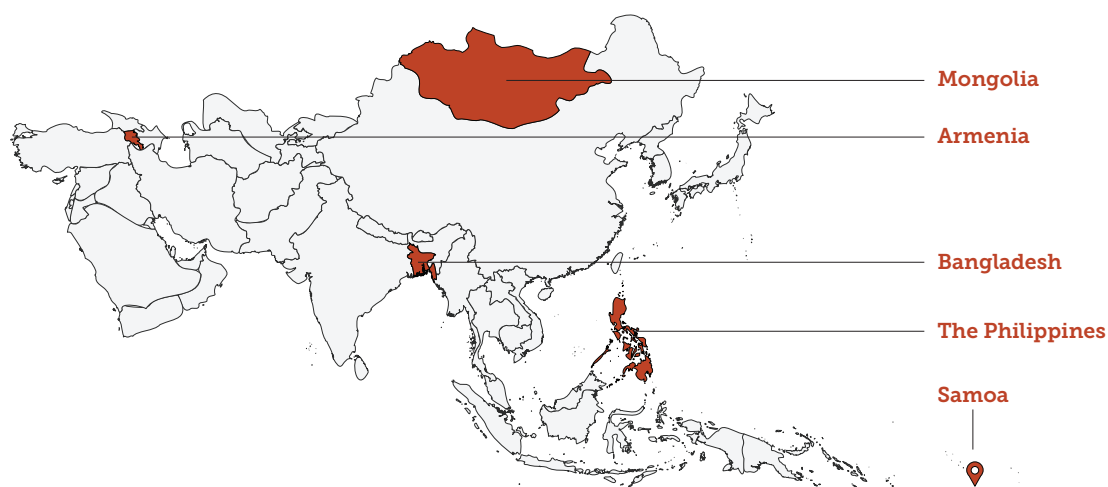
1. The Inter-Agency and Expert Group on SDG indicators has continually reviewed SDG indicators that are relevant for women or girls, along with assessing available methodology for these indicators. Between the previous regional analyses and this one, the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on SDG indicators updated some gender indicators from Tier III (indicators that lack an established methodology) to Tier II (indicators that have an internationally established methodology but are not regularly produced by countries) or Tier I (indicators that have an established methodology and are regularly produced by at least half of countries). Only Tier I and II indicators were included in the analysis. UN Women identified additional indicators, both from the SDGs and supplemental ones that, if sex-disaggregated, would provide additional insight. Indicators analyzed here are drawn from both sources.
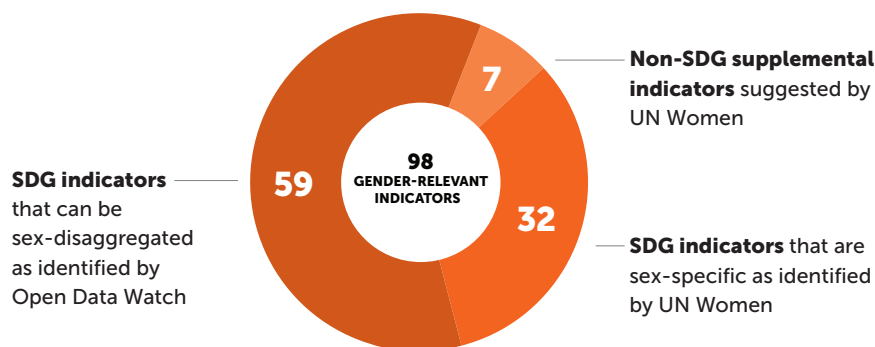
Approach

To answer these questions, we selected 98 gender-relevant indicators covering six domains: economic opportunities, education, environment, health, human security, and public participation.

Fig. 2: Gender-relevant indicators by domain

- **Economic Opportunities** 21
- **Human Security** 19
- **Education** 12
- **Environment** 11
- **Political Participation** 7
- **Health** 28

98 GENDER-RELEVANT INDICATORS

These indicators include 91 gender-relevant SDG indicators and seven non-SDG indicators suggested by UN Women. Producing this set of indicators regularly and to a high standard would support monitoring of and delivering on current commitments for women and girls, but these indicators alone are not enough. Countries need to use this data to adopt policies and implement programs — guided by indicators — to address the conditions of women and children

Fig. 3: Sources of gender-relevant indicators examined in this study

- **Non-SDG supplemental indicators** suggested by UN Women — 7
- **SDG indicators** that can be sex-disaggregated as identified by Open Data Watch — 59
- **SDG indicators** that are sex-specific as identified by UN Women — 32

98 GENDER-RELEVANT INDICATORS

We assessed data from both international and national databases in four ways.

AVAILABILITY
Availability examined if the indicators were recorded at all in any form between 2010 and 2020.

ADHERENCE TO STANDARDS
Adherence to standards noted whether indicators were produced following internationally agreed upon definitions and methodologies.

DISAGGREGATION
Disaggregation assessed if reported indicators first were disaggregated by sex, and then by additional characteristics, such as geographic location, age, income level, or disability status.

TIMELINESS & FREQUENCY
Timeliness and frequency checked how regularly and how recently each indicator was reported.

We examined the metadata and the microdata sources (specific surveys, censuses, and administrative data used to calculate the indicators). With this, we established trends in data production to learn from areas where countries are doing well, assess if that success is replicable, and pinpoint strategic opportunities to improve gender data collection for these indicators.

Key Findings: Gender indicators in international and national databases

AVAILABILITY **ADHERENCE TO STANDARDS**

Forty-six percent of gender-relevant indicators in national databases and 53 percent in international databases lack sex-disaggregated data or are missing entirely.

Fig. 4: Gender-relevant indicators available at the national and international level

Gender-relevant indicators with no data

Gender-relevant indicators with data, but not sex-disaggregated

Gender-relevant indicators with sex-disaggregated data

NATIONAL DATABASES
21%
25%
54%

INTERNATIONAL DATABASES
27%
26%
47%
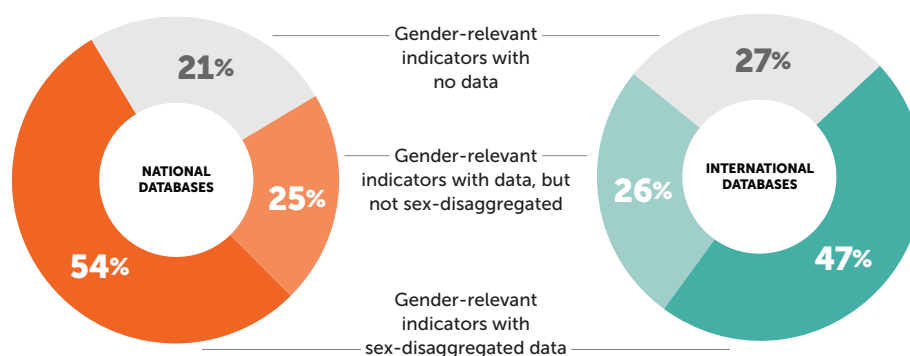
International databases have a higher proportion of gender indicators with no data than national databases, but the data in national databases are less likely to conform to international standards. There is variation both in how many indicators are recorded and how many conform to international standards between countries' national databases. This pattern was also found in the previous regional analyses, suggesting there may be a trade-off between publishing more non-conforming indicators or publishing fewer indicators following international standards.

In both national and international databases, about one-fourth of indicators have data that are not sex-disaggregated, suggesting that work is needed at both levels to improve both the collection and disaggregation of gender data, as well as data overall.

DISAGGREGATION

Only 37 percent of indicators in international databases and 35 percent of indicators in national databases have complete disaggregation.

Sex-disaggregation provides the first, most basic level of information about the lives of women and men and girls and boys. But people of the same gender are not all alike; additional disaggregation can lead to a more nuanced picture of their experiences. For example, there may be critical differences in outcomes by geographical setting (urban or rural), age, income level, disability, status, race, and ethnicity. Producing data that can be disaggregated along multiple dimensions is necessary to fully represent the lives of women and girls.

DISAGGREGATION

The health domain has the highest number of sex-disaggregated indicators at both the national and international levels. The environment domain has the least, with two indicators sex-disaggregated at the international level and only one country, the Philippines, reporting any sex-disaggregated indicators in its national database.

The health domain has the highest number of sex-disaggregated indicators at the national and international levels, 17 and 18 respectively. But this represents less than 65 percent of all indicators in that domain — leaving a sizable gap in what we know about health. The education domain, for which the highest percentage of indicators have data, is missing sex-disaggregated data for one in four indicators. As is true in all regions, the environment domain has the least data in both national and international databases. While there is variability between them, all domains have gaps at both the national and international levels.

Fig. 5: Percent (and number) of sex-disaggregated indicators available in national and international databases (averaged across countries)

TIMELINESS & FREQUENCY
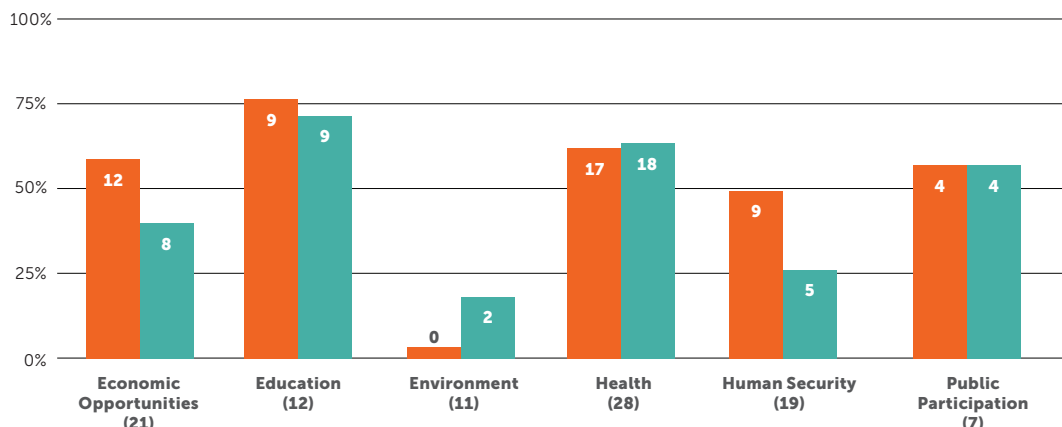
Two-thirds of gender indicators in national databases have available observations within the last four years, with the largest share occurring in 2018.

Fig. 6: Number of indicators by most recent year of collection in national databases (averaged across countries)
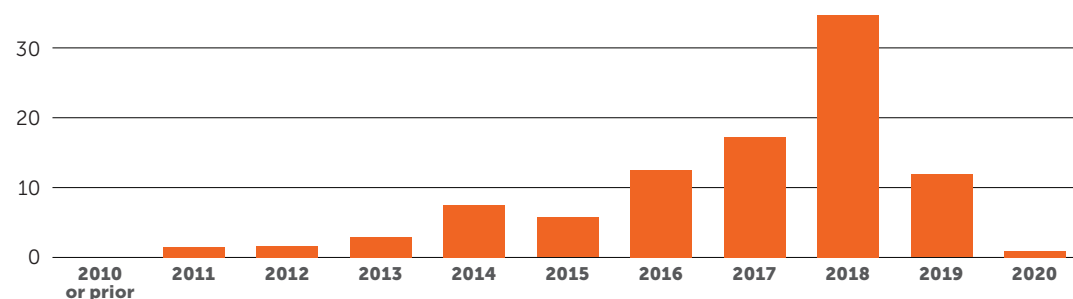
Most gender indicators should be reported every year to better identify trends and assess the impact of policy changes and other relevant initiatives. Increasing the frequency of data collection and streamlining the process of publishing data will increase the timeliness and frequency of data. Data is published more often and more regularly in international databases than in national databases.

The assessments in the Asia and Pacific region were carried out before the full impact of the COVID-19 pandemic was felt. The pandemic is expected to slow data collection in many countries worldwide. Postponed data collection or other delays due to public health restrictions on activities will have an impact on future data availability and timeliness.
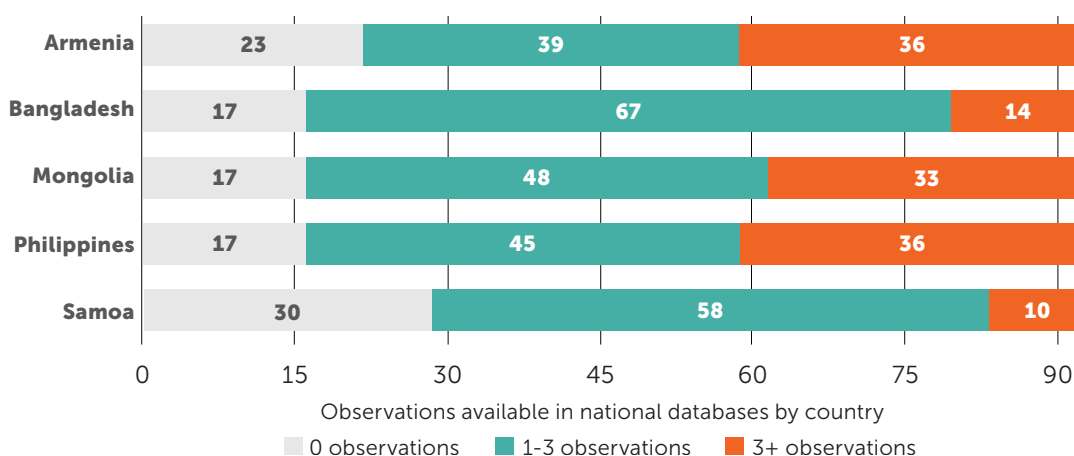
TIMELINESS & FREQUENCY **Fewer than half of indicators were reported more than three times over ten years in national databases, limiting the ability to identify trends by sex.**

There is wide variation between countries in the regularity of data reporting. In the studied eleven-year timespan, Armenia collected data on almost half the indicators more than three times; however, Samoa collected and reported on only ten percent of indicators more than three times.

Fig. 7: Frequency of data collection varies significantly from country to country in national databases

Country	0 observations	1-3 observations	3+ observations
Armenia	23	39	36
Bangladesh	17	67	14
Mongolia	17	48	33
Philippines	17	45	36
Samoa	30	58	10

Observations available in national databases by country

☐ 0 observations   ■ 1-3 observations   ■ 3+ observations

Key Findings: Microdata Sources

Nearly 60 percent of indicators are drawn from survey data, and of those, half are constructed from health surveys.

Household and other specialized health surveys, such as the Demographic Health Surveys and Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys, are used for 31 percent of indicators across all five countries. Other types of surveys, including censuses, account for an additional 27 percent of indicators, for a total of 58 percent. Administrative surveys support only about one in four indicators. This contributes to the uneven gaps in data in different domains. For example, health and labor force surveys provide much of the data for the health and economy domains, and thus have fewer gaps. A balanced mix of microdata sources would help ensure more frequent, higher quality gender data.

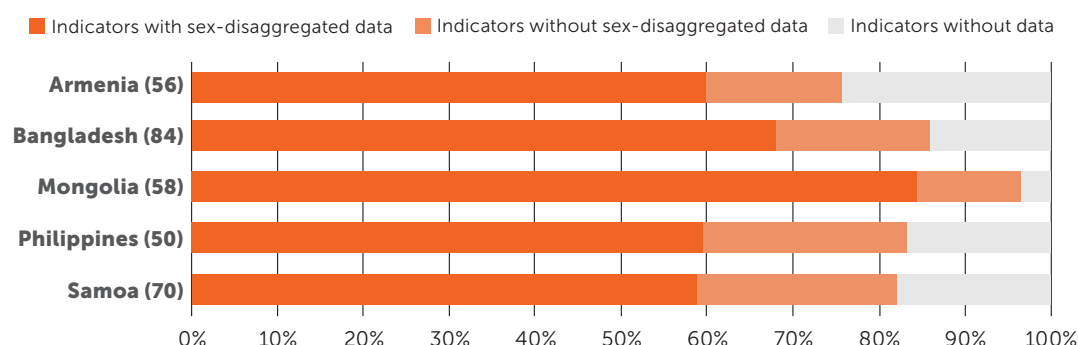**Metadata are unavailable for almost one of every six indicators**

For 15 percent of indicators, data are from unknown sources. Without metadata, the source, methodology, and quality of this data cannot be assessed, limiting its usability. To know what the data measures are and if they are comparable over time or across countries, we need to know how they were collected and whether they have been collected using comparable methods. This gap in information about the indicators themselves points to the need not just to collect and report gender data, but to have comprehensive, open, and well-maintained data systems.

Key Findings: Gender and Data Policies

Incorporating targets tied to indicators in national gender policies could increase transparency, improve decision-making, and provide important evidence of progress.

All five countries in this study have committed to increasing gender equality. All but Mongolia have specific gender policies or strategies in place. Mongolia does have a specific plan to produce gender data. The 98 gender indicators included in this study were mapped against each country's national plans to assess which indicators could be used to help monitor progress. Not all the objectives in these plans can be fully monitored with these 98 indicators, highlighting the limitation of the SDGs to comprehensively assess gender equality at a national level.

Fig. 8: Indicators in national databases that can be used to monitor national plans and strategies

Legend: ■ Indicators with sex-disaggregated data ■ Indicators without sex-disaggregated data □ Indicators without data

At the regional level, ESCAP has supported collecting and using gender data to improve policy for over a decade. In 2018, ESCAP launched the Gender Policy-Data Integration Initiative to connect policy and data stakeholders with each other. Among other activities, this initiative produced the Every Policy is Connected (EPIC) tool that stakeholders can use to monitor progress toward policy objectives with data. Initiatives and tools such as these can play an important role in strengthening the connection between data and policy, ensuring that gender data is integrated throughout the policymaking process.

Recommendations

1. **Prioritize closing gender data gaps.** Our top recommendation is consistent across all regions. National statistical offices, international custodian agencies, and technical experts who support statistical development should collaborate to strengthen the quality of existing gender data and prioritize new production and reporting to close gaps.

2. **Collect and report data disaggregated by multiple dimensions.** Disaggregating data by sex, as well as other relevant factors, creates a more nuanced assessment of the breadth of experiences and outcomes of women and girls. Beyond gender, this knowledge would increase our understanding of social welfare and economic development. As recommended for other regions, countries should prioritize, collect, and report disaggregations most appropriate for their national context.

3. **Produce data at frequent, regular intervals.** While data collection can be resource intensive, databases at the national level could be improved by including data published in international databases. International databases could be expanded by including proxy measures — as many national databases do — to provide a more complete picture in the short-term. With this, trends over time and the impact of policy changes could be better assessed.

4. **Strengthen core gender data systems.** Strong core gender data systems would enable all of the recommendations above. When data of multiple types and from multiple sources are regularly collected, disaggregated, and integrated, they create a full, actionable picture of the lives of women and girls,

5. **Connect data and policy.** The value of data is only realized when data are used. By incorporating targets for key indicators into national gender plans, countries can improve their decision-making processes and engage citizens. This requires robust gender data.

Next Steps

The accompanying technical and methodology reports are a summary of the knowledge generated by the *Bridging the Gap* study. Individual country profiles and country policy reviews were also produced and will be shared with the relevant national statistical offices and other stakeholders. These profiles outline ways to support data production and encourage its use. Additional products for the data and policy communities will be produced, including:

- Summary pages for each of the 91 gender-relevant SDG indicators offering targeted and specific insights into what should be done to improve data collection and production for each gender-relevant SDG indicator, and

- A comparative analysis based on the three regional assessments, Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, and Asia and the Pacific.

About Data2X

Data2X is a technical and advocacy platform dedicated to improving the quality, availability, and use of gender data in order to make a practical difference in the lives of women and girls worldwide. Working in partnership with multilateral agencies, governments, civil society, academics, and the private sector, Data2X mobilizes action for and strengthens production and use of gender data.

About Open Data Watch

Open Data Watch is an international, non-profit organization of data experts working to bring change to organizations that produce and manage official statistical data. We support the efforts of national statistical offices (NSOs), particularly those in low- and middle-income countries, to improve their data systems and harness the advancements of the data revolution. Through our policy advice, data support, and monitoring work, we influence and help both NSOs and other organizations meet the goals of their national statistical plans and the SDGs.

About UN ESCAP

The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) is the largest of five regional commissions of the United Nations with 53 member States and 9 associate members. ESCAP's overall mission is to promote inclusive and sustainable economic and social development in the Asia-Pacific region, with priority accorded to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. Learn more about UN ESCAP at **unescap.org**.

#BridgetheGap

Find out more at: **bit.ly/BridgingtheGapAsia**.