



REVIEW OF GLOBAL WOMEN'S RIGHTS

2024



AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL



WHO WE ARE.

Amnesty Feminists are a network of activists who share news, run campaigns, and take action on Human Rights abuses globally, with a specific focus on rights restricted because of gender discrimination.

The network is run by a committee of volunteers, and it is the network committee that compiled this report from a wide range of sources, including, of course, global research from Amnesty International - but also other NGOs, governmental organisations, and academics.

We hope the report will be a useful resource for people to learn more, get involved and take action for Human Rights around the world. As well as quantifiable fact and hard research, the report also contains opinion pieces from extraordinary women around the world who are standing up for their rights and the rights of others in some of the most dangerous and terrifying circumstances. They are, all of them, remarkable humans who inspire us all.

We would love to hear from you about how you have found this report, and hopefully, how you have used it. We'd love to hear from you if you'd like to get involved with campaigning for Gender Equality in your area, in your group, or as part of the network. Our email and our social handles are at the back of this report.

In Solidarity, and in defiance -

Amnesty Feminists.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.

We express our gratitude to Esther Pinhiero, Mina Roces, Lina Abirafeh, Rosebell Kagumire and Sara Rahnama for their contributions to our report and the continued work they all do to advance women's rights across the world.

Thank you to Isabel Rickets (@IzzieRickArt) for the most beautiful illustrations. You captured both the fun and fight of women from around the world and we are in awe!

Finally, Amnesty Feminist Network's committee have worked exceptionally hard on developing this resource - especially our research team, Safiya Warsame, Ana Mauriac and the driving force behind the project, Louisa Ioannou.

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DEFINITIONS & ABBREVIATIONS.

COMMON ABBREVIATIONS USED.

Countries & Regions:

DRC – Democratic Republic of Congo

LAC – Latin America & the Caribbean

MENA – Middle East & North Africa

UAE – United Arab Emirates

USA – United States of America

UK – United Kingdom

Organisations:

Amnesty – Amnesty International

HRW – Humans Rights Watch

ILO – International Labour Organization

UN – United Nations

WEF – World Economic Forum

WHO – World Health Organisation

Other:

GBV – Gender-based violence

DV - Domestic violence

TfGBV – Technology-facilitated gender-based violence

FGC/M – Female Genital Cutting/Mutilation

Definitions:

Woman – Amnesty Feminists defines ‘woman’ as any person that identifies as a woman. However, we cannot ensure that all the statistics we reference in this report use the same definition.

Global Gender Parity Index - A measure defined by the World Economic Forum in their annual Global Gender Report. The metric benchmarks progress towards gender parity across four dimensions: economic opportunities, education, health and political leadership.

PREFACE.

In recent years, the world has been marked by major events. The Covid-19 pandemic caused disruption to the education and work prospects of women and girls and caused economic and political turmoil that many parts of the world are still recovering from. New crises have since emerged. Several conflicts have broken out across the world, record inflation has led to a cost-of-living crisis and climate disasters are occurring more and more frequently. The unequal status of women and girls means that they are disproportionately affected during upheaval, and the many crises of recent years have caused major setbacks in the progression of women's rights and gender equality.

While we acknowledge the challenges of recent times, we have also seen people continue to mobilise at a grassroots level, demand change and recognise injustice. The Amnesty Feminists Review of Global Women's Rights has been born out of a desire to keep this momentum going. There is a need to highlight the challenges women and other marginalised people continue to face, while also acknowledging the developments that have occurred in recent years, which have largely been brought about through the determination and drive of women's activist organisations.

The report will highlight recent challenges women around the world face as we continue to strive towards gender equity. We will analyse eleven regions: USA & Canada; Latin America & the Caribbean; Central, West & Southern Europe; Eastern Europe & Central Asia; the Middle East & North Africa; Western & Central Africa, Southern Africa; East Africa; East Asia; South Asia; Southeast Asia & Oceania. A twelfth region will focus on the online realm, where traditional geographical boundaries do not exist, and the largely unregulated nature of the internet has created a new era of discrimination and inequality to tackle.

This report will not provide an exhaustive account of women's rights in every country, in every region. Instead, we will look at wider themes and focus on the important insight available and developments or setbacks that have occurred in 2023 to 2024. Through each region a deep analysis of challenges and developments will be undertaken with a focus on three key areas: Economic Empowerment, Politics & Justice, and Health & Education.

Research into Economic Empowerment will examine how far a region has come in closing the gender pay gap, as well as labour force participation and the role of domestic care work, a role largely

undertaken by women but with little formal or monetary regulation.

Politics & Justice will examine representation of women in parliamentary or judicial bodies, as well as looking at issues of freedom of movement and sexual violence and the largely insufficient state support that exists to tackle these issues.

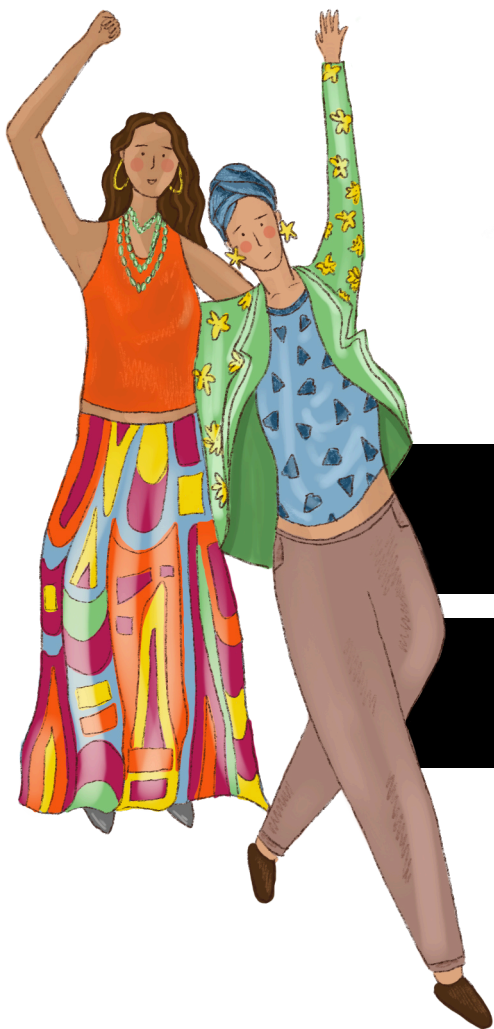
Lastly, we will examine the challenges women face in access to adequate Health & Education. Following several years of attacks on women's autonomy over their own bodies, abortion rights will be a key area of focus, while gender parity in different levels of education will also be understood. In this inaugural edition of the report, we will also look further back to provide context to particular issues, while subsequent issues of the report will instead look at year-on-year developments.

Amnesty Feminists are a volunteer committee working on behalf of Amnesty International. As well as referring to the work of Amnesty International, this report will utilise data and research from other human rights organisations that are working to advance women's rights across the world. As an activist organisation, we believe that it is important that we understand the grassroots activism taking place in each region.

We have been fortunate to connect with activists and scholars specialising in particular areas of the world who have provided their view of the state of women's rights and the work they are involved in to tackle the issues facing women. We have also sought to highlight the work of activists around the world who have driven progress through innovative methods and grassroots mobilisation.

It is important to clarify that gender justice is the fight for equality and equity for all: women, men, trans and gender diverse persons. Conservative commentators have weaponized the discourse on gender and have fuelled an increasingly hostile environment for women, especially transgender women and queer people. Women experience overlapping oppression and women's rights are connected to the fights for racial, climate and queer justice, and so much more. Amnesty Feminists recognises that the fight for gender justice must be intersectional.

Our aim is for the data and analysis in this report to contribute to the advancements in gender rights across the globe, whilst also highlighting where more focus is needed. The turbulence of the last few years cannot stop our fight for a more equitable and intersectional world for all women.



THE

AMERICAS.



USA & CANADA

The United States of America and Canada are among the wealthiest countries in the world, but this wealth does not translate to gender equality.

The 2023 Global Gender Gap Report by the World Economic Forum (WEF) predicted that Northern America will require 95 years to close its gender gap. In 2024, the USA ranked only 43rd in the global parity index among 146 countries examined, and Canada ranked 36th.¹

The overturning of *Roe v. Wade* and the lack of maternity leave, leave a mark on the US gender equality résumé. In contrast, Canada has implemented numerous initiatives to support women's rights, such as a National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence and a parental sharing programme. However, legal developments in the Canadian

province of Quebec, such as the introduction of Bill 21 in 2019, have restricted women's rights and freedoms.

This legislation stipulates that public servants - including teachers, doctors, police officers, and lawyers - are prohibited from wearing religious garments or symbols such as the hijab, turban and kippah at work. This restriction infringes on personal religious freedoms of expression for any individual who ascribes to a religion. As a result, individuals are forced to choose between removing their religious garments or pursuing a career in another province to continue wearing them.

While the United States and Canada have made significant progress toward gender equality, persistent gaps and recent setbacks highlight the need for continued and enhanced efforts to achieve true gender parity.

LEGAL PROGRESS: STATES PROTECTING WOMEN'S RIGHTS

After an onslaught of legislative attacks on women's rights in 2023, some American states are pushing back. Maryland made Medicaid coverage available for gender-affirming care, and Vermont prohibited insurers from cost sharing on gender-affirming care, shielded providers, and protected patients' data.

Washington insurance plans now prohibit participation in cost-sharing for abortion services and California and Illinois expanded access to abortion care and protection for patients and providers. California has also shielded abortion providers from litigation for servicing to out-of-state patients.

ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT.

In 2023, Canadian women were paid 8.5% less than men, while American women earned 16% less than their male counterparts.² The gender pay gap in America has remained flat for the last 20 years, with women earning 82 cents for every dollar earned by their male counterparts.³ The pay gap is starker for women of colour living in rural areas who earn 56% less. There are no states or employment in the USA where women earn more than men, even in professions that employ more women⁴.

A report by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA) found that the public sector gender pay gap is 5%, half that of the private sector, which is 10%.⁵ The public sector is better at reducing the pay gap by lifting pay for workers at the bottom of the income spectrum (who tend to be women and immigrants) and it constrains pay for those at the top of the income spectrum (who tend to be men and executives).⁶ The public/private gender pay gap underscores the need for reform to account for the position of women in the workplace. In Canada, women's economic empowerment is also impacted by the 'motherhood penalty'. The CCPA found that women with

children make less than those without because they are treated as less competent or as having less loyalty.⁷

"The male breadwinner model remains ingrained"

Societal attitudes towards care work further, impact the gender pay gap. In 2019, Canadian women were doing 15 hours per week of unpaid work compared to 10 hours for men.⁸ In the USA, women spend 31.5 hours per week while men spend 19.5 hours.⁹ The male breadwinner model remains ingrained, and women are still expected to take on household chores and to care for children on top of their careers.

The USA is one of only a handful of countries not to offer paid maternity leave. Instead, the responsibility to provide maternity leave falls on individual states and the lack of income during maternity leave can create significant financial strain. The U.S.

56%

Gender pay gap for Women of Colour in the rural USA

1.5x

More unpaid work by Canadian women than Canadian men

2x

The gender pay gap in the Private sector vs the Public sector

Figure 1: Gender Parity Index and year-on-year change for USA and Canada. (Source: The Global Gender Gap Report 2024, World Economic Forum)



Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993, the only national law supporting families, protects up to 12 weeks of unpaid maternity leave or parental leave for eligible employees.

However, as women are more likely to work part-time, they may be ineligible for this leave. Moreover, the high costs of childcare combined with the lack of paid leave creates a double burden for mothers. Childcare in the USA is more expensive; the USA spends around 0.4% of its GDP on childcare, compared to 0.8% for the average OECD country.¹⁰ President Biden has proposed a 12-week paid parental leave in his 2024 budget, but its passage is uncertain, and the source of funding has not been stated.¹¹

Every five years, the Canadian government launches its Federal Budget programme, which includes funding and investment priorities. The 2024 Budget included \$1.5 billion to be invested into a pharmacare plan to make contraception free, allowing nine million women more affordable access to reproductive healthcare. It will also invest in childcare to alleviate the unequal burden of family care that women bear. The budget's emphasis on housing is also closely tied to gender equality, as affordable housing is crucial for women who feel trapped in abusive relationships due to the lack of housing options. These challenges disproportionately affect women from marginalised and underrepresented backgrounds, underscoring the need for targeted investments.

POLITICS & JUSTICE.

In the USA, the Biden administration made history by appointing Kamala Harris, the first woman and woman of colour as vice president and selecting more women cabinet leaders than any of his predecessors.

More recently, Harris was elected the 2024 Democratic presidential nominee for the 2024 elections.¹² However, numeric representation provides a narrow picture of women's political power.

The USA and Canada have decreased the share of women in ministerial positions, particularly in the USA, where the share declined from 46.2% to 33.3% in 2022.

"[Women's] political empowerment has declined by 7.7% since 2022"

stricter definitions in the UN Women database and a decline in women's life expectancy.¹³ As a result, political empowerment has declined by 7.7% in the North American region since 2022. As of 2023, women in the USA constituted less than 30% of the House

of Representatives, the Senate, Fortune 500 CEOs, and governors nationwide.¹⁴

Also in the USA, the 2023 Women, Peace and Security Strategy and National Action Plan is one example of efforts to address women's political disempowerment.¹⁵ To date, the Plan has promoted women's participation and protection in the military by expanding support for military survivors of GBV, women in law enforcement and homeland security through a mentoring programme, and advanced girls' civic and political leadership through the Summits for Democracy. The 2023 Action Plan aims are to tackle technology-facilitated GBV (TfGBV) and women's meaningful participation in Ukraine. Yet, some argue that a focus on foreign policy might be to the detriment of women's empowerment at the national level.





ACTION NEEDED

CRIMINALISATION OF THE WET’SUWET’EN

The Wet’suwet’en people have experienced extensive human rights violations while fighting a gas pipeline being built through their land without prior or informed consent.

Wet’suwet’en are a matriarchal society, and most land defenders are women. They are under surveillance, face discrimination, aggressive and misogynistic language, and threats of rape by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and pipeline development employees. This crisis has been attributed to limited consultation with communities, an influx of transient male workers and misogynistic and racist attitudes.

In July 2022, 20 land defenders were arrested. Since then, three have filed abuse of process applications and these will be heard in B.C. Supreme Court from June 2024. Five defenders arrested in March 2023 are awaiting trial dates.

The plight of the Wet’suwet’en people displays intersecting gender, racial and environmental issues. Amnesty is calling for an end to the criminalisation and violent crackdown on indigenous land defenders.

Image: Alli McCracken / Amnesty International

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& TAKE ACTION!**



GENDER BASED VIOLENCE.

Gender-based violence is considered an epidemic by the Canadian government, a sentiment shared by civil society and feminist organisations.¹⁶



#METOO

More than four in 10 women have experienced some form of intimate partner violence in their lifetimes and one woman or girl is killed every 48 hours.¹⁷

Feminist organisations such as the Canadian Women's Foundation, have criticised the response instead of the preventative approach used by the government when tackling GBV.¹⁸

Indeed, funding for the National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence has been distributed to responsive services such as policing services, government services, and legal or justice services.

In the 2024 Federal Budget plan, no additional funding has been attributed to ending GBV. Despite efforts, the persistent rates of GBV in Canada highlight the urgent need for a more proactive approach to truly address this national crisis.

GBV and DV assistance in the UK

If you need help with domestic violence or gender based violence in the UK, you are not alone.

There are a number of generalist and specialist services available to support you. You can find a list of some of them by following the QR code below.



"One woman or girl is killed every 48 hours in Canada."

HEALTH & EDUCATION.

Education in North America scores 100% in the Global Parity Index for educational attainment. 2022 data shows that Canadian women graduates represent 60% of all graduates and 55% of total enrolment. However, men continue to dominate high-paying, STEM fields such as computer science and engineering.

Moreover, while 34% of Canadians with a STEM degree are women, they only constitute 23% of Canadians working in science and technology roles.¹⁹ Various colleges across Canada have implemented mentoring programmes aimed at breaking down gender barriers to empower women in their careers, but also scholarships and training.

Achieving true gender parity in STEM fields requires continued and concerted action to support and encourage women to pursue and thrive in traditionally male-dominated careers.

"Gender blind policies perpetrate stigma around menstruation"

Menstrual products are expensive and one in four American teens and one in three adults struggle to afford period products, especially teens of colour and low-income households.²⁰ Gender blind policies (like the 'pink tax' on feminine products) perpetrate stigma around menstruation. In many American states, erectile dysfunction medication is classified as a tax-exempt health product, while sanitary products are classified as luxury goods and taxed at the highest rate. Education of menstruation remains limited.

23%

of Canadians working in a science and Technology role are Women

1 in 3

American adults who menstruate struggle to afford period products.

81%

of menstruating students believe there needs to be more education about menstrual health.

UNICEF conducted a review of primary and secondary education standards in the USA in 2018 and found that menstrual health is not required as part of the health education standards in most states. Only three states (California, Michigan and New Jersey) include period hygiene products, and only three (Michigan, Oregon and Utah) specifically include menstruation management in school health standards.

"Almost half of American teens felt confused and unprepared when they got their first period."

Lack of education and support in school furthers stigmatisation of periods. A 2023 survey found that 42% of American teens felt confused and unprepared when they got their first period, and 81% of menstruating students believed there needed to be more education about menstrual health.²¹



PIONEERING ACTIVISTS: THE KWEK SOCIETY

Eva Carney, a human rights lawyer and dual citizen of the USA and Potawatomi Nation, founded The Kwek Society in early 2018.

Kwe'k means 'women' in the Potawatomi language. They provide supplies, including pads, tampons, underwear, 'moon time' bags filled with supplies, and educational materials to indigenous students and communities across the USA, mostly through partnerships with schools.

REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS.

On the 22nd of June 2022, The United States of America's Supreme Court overturned the 1973 Roe v. Wade ruling which legalised abortion, giving 50 states individual powers to decide abortion laws.

This decision did not come as a surprise to women's right activists. Bans on pre-viability had been struck down in various states since 2016 like the six-week ban in North Dakota and a 12-week ban in Arkansas.

The overturning of this ruling has had a significant impact, and now one in three women of reproductive age live in states where abortion access is either totally or near-totally inaccessible.²² In addition, anti-abortion groups are actively working to further criminalise abortion, bounty systems to report abortion seekers, preventing access to medication, and restricting information about abortion.

Some anti-abortion organisations have twisted the concept of anti-racism through advertising campaigns that use the term 'black genocide' to target the reproductive autonomy of Black women.²³

Supreme Justice Clarence Thomas has suggested that Roe v Wade gives a precedent to overturn other constitutional rights such as gay rights and contraception rights. The overturning of this important ruling has not only reshaped the legal landscape of abortion in the USA but also heightened concerns about the potential rollback of other constitutional rights.





LATIN AMERICA & THE CARIBBEAN.

Significant progress in women's rights have been made in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) in recent years. LAC now ranks third for gender parity with a score of 74.2%. In 2024 LA reached its highest economic parity score to date, of 65.7%.²⁴

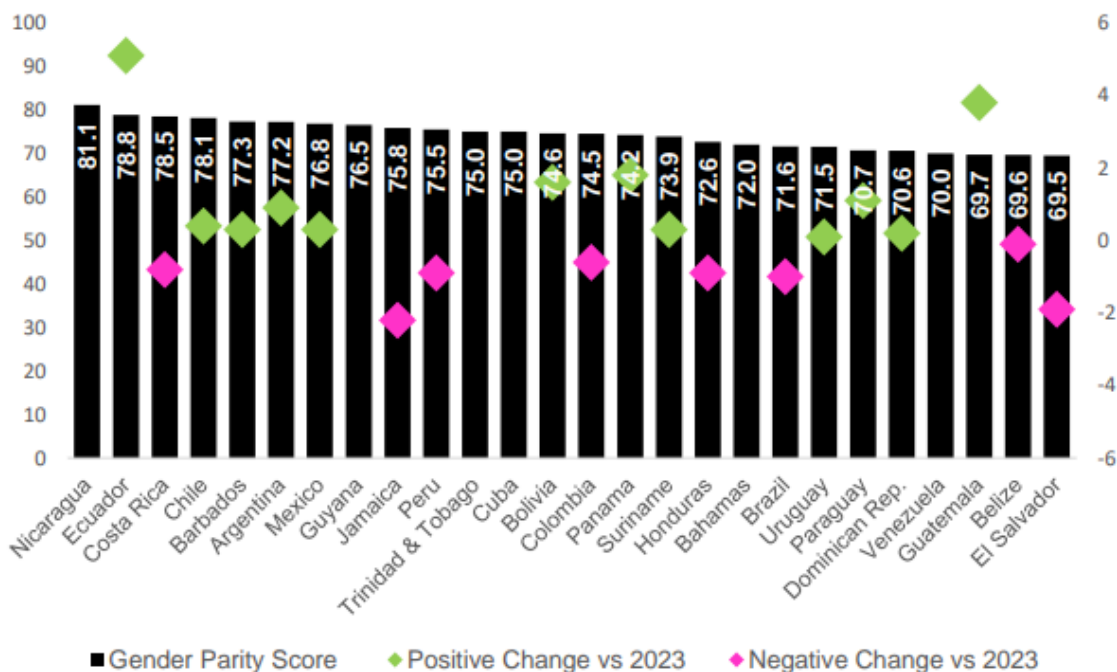
However, inequality and social exclusions remain for women, particularly indigenous and black women. Despite decriminalisation efforts, access to abortion is difficult due to social stigma

and misinformation, and gender-based violence continues to be an issue.

ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT.

Disparity exists in the distribution of unpaid work and women bear a disproportionately high burden. In Uruguay women dedicate an average of 34.4 hours to unpaid work, compared to 20.6 spent by men. The gap is further emphasised by the fact that 61.4% of women's total workload consists of unpaid work. Women's ability to engage in paid employment outside the domestic

Figure 2: Gender Parity Index and year-on-year change for Latin American and the Caribbean countries. (Source: The Global Gender Gap Report 2024, World Economic Forum)



sphere is hindered by the poor implantation of the National Integrated Care System (SNI). Uruguay must address shortcomings of SNI to alleviate the disproportionate burden of unpaid work borne by women.

"In Argentina, 3 million women engage in care work, but 90% are not paid for it."

A similar disparity exists in Argentina where 3 million women engage in care work but 90% are not paid for it. The Registradas (Registered) program began to tackle this inequality. The Registradas applies to those working more than six hours a week in the same household and aims to encourage domestic workers and employers to formalise working agreements and benefits such as pension contributions, paid healthcare, and maternity leave. The policy also dictates that the state pays 50% of the salary for the first six months.²⁵

Economic engagement of women lags in Mexico and in the second quarter of 2023, only 46% of women were active participants in the labour force compared to over 76% of men.²⁶

Further pay inequality exists where for every 100 pesos a man receives, a Mexican woman gets paid 65 pesos.

NI
UNA
MENOS

Women undertake

60%

more unpaid work
In Uruguay than men

In Mexico, only

46%

of women are active
participants in the
Labour force.



POLITICS & JUSTICE.

Gender parity in government is far from being achieved and in 2022 only 25% of cabinet posts in LAC countries were held by women. Only Costa Rica (50%) and Chile (58%) have achieved parity in government. In Aguilla, Barbados, Guyana and Trinidad and Tobago there is not a single woman minister.²⁷

"Brazil has made significant progress."

In recent years, Brazil has made significant progress by appointing women to nearly 38% of ministerial positions, the highest representation in its history. The number of women parliamentarians has also reached 17.7%, elevating Brazil's level of parity to 26.3%.²⁸

Argentina became the first country worldwide to enact a gender quota law. Their commitment to gender parity has been bolstered by the enactment of the Law on Gender Parity in Areas of Political Representation, mandating gender balance among legislative candidates. This has reverberated across the region, and similar laws were subsequently enacted in Bolivia, Ecuador, and Peru,

reflecting growing recognition of the need for gender balanced representation.

GENDER BASED VIOLENCE.

Sexual violence is a pressing issue and justice for victims is not sufficient.

There has been an alarming escalation of rape cases in Brazil, with a record high 75,00 cases registered in 2022, and this is understood to be underrepresented due to underreporting. Statistics indicate that in 60% of cases the victims were minors, with many assaults perpetrated by relatives.²⁹ GBV has similarly increased in Uruguay, in contradiction to the overall decrease in crime identified in 2022. Cases of sexual exploitation against children reached their highest figure in years. The failure to effectively implement legislation addressing GBV and the inadequate allocation of resources for specialised courts exacerbate this issue.³⁰

Trans women are at particular risk of violence. According to the Inter American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) more than 150 trans and gender-diverse people were murdered between January 2023 and January 2024³¹, most of them trans women. Shockingly, trans women in LAC have an average life expectancy of around 35 years.

In Argentina the intersectionality of the women's movement needs to be improved. Afro-Argentines, indigenous and other marginalised ethnic groups face some of the most brutal and colonialist sexual violence. Frequent rape and abuse of indigenous women by non-indigenous men is common. In 2019 the Movement of Indigenous Women and Diversities for Living Well created the #NoAlChineo (No to Chineo, an offensive slur) campaign, which garnered significant media coverage. Indigenous activists want Argentina to recognise its plurinational nature and acknowledge indigenous nations existed on the land long before colonisation.

The refugee crisis in the region deepens as Venezuelans continue to leave into neighbouring countries, who have failed to fulfil their obligations in safeguarding the rights of refugees, exacerbating the vulnerability of this population. There are over seven million Venezuelan refugees globally, with the majority in Chile, Peru and Ecuador. Amnesty research found that in Ecuador, where over half of the refugees are women and children, the state has been inadequate in protecting the rights of Venezuelan women, leaving them susceptible to sexual violence and discrimination.

Between 2018 and 2022, only 555 women were formally recognised as refugees and women reported that authorities had discouraged them from seeking international protection. Women

are left at a greater risk of violence and discrimination because of their irregular migration status.

PIONEERING ACTIVISTS: NI UNA MENOS

Not One More is a grassroots Argentinian movement, born in 2015 after a series of teenage femicides.

Every year on June 3rd they protest to highlight the continued struggle to eradicate GBV.

The movement's importance was highlighted in March 2023 when Maria Aquino was murdered by her former partner. Aquino spent years seeking support from the local judiciary, filing lawsuits against him and alerting authorities to threats she received. Aquino was one of 99 femicide cases reported in the first four months of 2023, 60% of which occurred in the victim's home.

Despite advancements, the safety of women in Argentina remains a concern and so the work of Ni Una Menos is essential.





AMNESTY CAMPAIGN



TARGETING OF WOMEN IN THE JUDICIARY

Guatemalan officials are abusing the justice system to suppress the fight against corruption.

Amnesty has identified a significant gender bias in this harassment. Erika Aifán, Paola Escobar, Aliss Morán and Claudia González are all former judges, prosecutors and lawyers who have been subjected to unfair trials and misogynistic attacks, including the sharing of degrading manipulated images on social media. These attacks often occur during trials and authorities have failed to punish the behaviour.

In July 2024 Virginia Laparra Rivas, former prosecutor of the Special Prosecutor's Office against Impunity, was found guilty of sharing confidential information, sentenced to prison and disqualified from public office. This follows another unfounded criminal conviction in 2022.

Laparra remains on house arrest and Amnesty have declared her a prisoner of conscience. They have condemned Guatemala's lack of due process and targeting of women in the Judiciary.

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HEALTH AND EDUCATION.

LAC is second in the world for gender parity in higher education.³² More than six in 10 women go to college, compared to less than half of men.

Comparing this to the same statistics in 1970, where only 5% of women progressed beyond second-level schooling, significant improvement in educational attainment is evident. Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala have been identified as having low enrolment rates for both sexes compared to neighbouring countries. Beyond educational attainment, labour markets

need to progress and welcome the skills women bring, while offering flexibility for their needs.

Countries must ensure a gender perspective is taught. Paraguay has actively tried to prevent this through a new bill introduced to the in July 2023 which prohibits the teaching of gender ideology in all educational institutions. Amnesty has challenged the bill, calling it a “total affront to human rights” and insisting that they adopt a gender perspective in education³³.

REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS.

The ‘Green Wave’ is a feminist movement fighting to legalise abortion in LAC and although it has driven progress, setbacks remain a risk.

“In Brazil, black women are 2x more likely to die from unsafe abortions”

In Brazil one in 28 women die from unsafe conditions, with black women two times more likely, highlighting the racial inequalities.³⁴ Current legislation from the 1940s criminalises abortion except for cases of sexual violence, foetal health, or risk to mothers’ health.

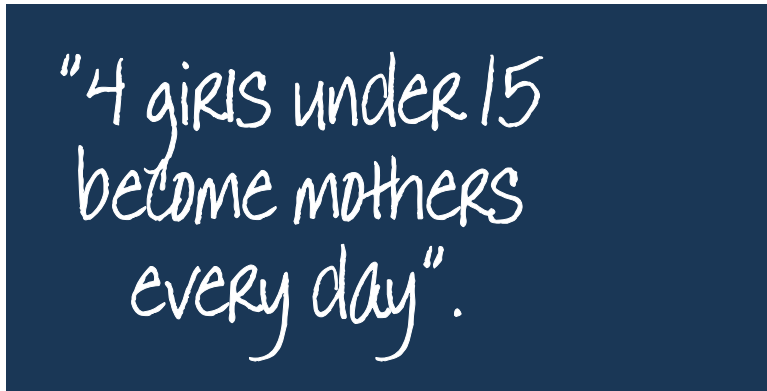
Just before retirement in 2023, Supreme Court president Rosa Weber voted to decriminalise abortion within the first 12 weeks of pregnancy, emphasising that motherhood is a choice, not a coercive obligation and recognising that current law conflicts with the constitution, as it violates women’s rights to equality, non discrimination, privacy and health.

Green Wave activists awaited a victory and expected Brazil to join Argentina, Colombia and Mexico in decriminalising abortion. However, Weber's replacement Justice Luís Barroso, froze the debate. Brazil's U-turn is undoubtedly a setback for the region.

In September 2023, Mexico's Supreme Court decriminalized abortion, but it remains criminalized in 20 states. Efforts must continue to eliminate all penalties nationwide. In Honduras, an executive decree in March 2023 lifted a ban on emergency contraception, an important step forward for reproductive rights as abortion remains prohibited in all cases.³⁵ In February 2022 Colombia decriminalised abortion on all grounds up to week 24 of pregnancy.³⁶ In practice, several factors mean access is limited including the spread of misinformation by anti-abortion groups, issues of medical malpractice, including the misuse of conscientious objection, and a lack of centres offering the procedure. A Colombian court ruled recently that there is no obligation to perform an abortion before week 24 due to the "lack of legal regulation", which appears to leave it to the discretion of healthcare workers to allow or deny access.³⁷

Abortion is illegal in Chile and is a contentious issue in the deeply religious country. A 2017 law made exceptions for cases of rape, foetal non-viability and danger to life. Until January 2022, only 2,313 abortions were registered,

indicating access is still limited.³⁸ There was an opportunity to legalise abortion in a referendum for a new constitution in 2022, which would have enacted more than 100 constitutional rights, a global record. However, over 60% of voters rejected the change.³⁹ The majority Republican party has made several attempts to challenge existing law, proposing to eliminate abortion protections.



"4 girls under 15 become mothers every day".

Peru allows abortion in specific incidences of risk to the health or life of the mother and is particularly tough on girls trying to access abortions, resulting in four girls under 15 forced to become mothers every day.

When Camila (pseudonym), a 13-year-old indigenous girl, became pregnant after being raped by her father, medical professionals didn't inform her of her right to an abortion. Instead, police were used to enforce regular check ups. Disregard for her condition by authorities and stigmatisation forced her to leave her school and village. She ultimately miscarried and was then prosecuted and convicted.

Camila was later acquitted on appeal after taking her case to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child which found that Peru had been responsible for violating her rights to life, health, and to be free from discrimination and inhumane or degrading treatment. The committee noted that medical and judicial services continuously re-

victimised Camila and asked Peru to decriminalise abortion in all cases of child pregnancies, ensure safe access to abortion services and amend the regulations to provide for specific application to girls. To date, Peru have not acted on this recommendation.

LEGAL PROGRESS: RECOGNISING OBSTETRIC VIOLENCE

In January 2023 the Inter-American Court of Human Rights recognised 'obstetric violence'. The concept was used for the first time in the *Brítez Arce v. Argentina* case. The term was defined as "a form of gender-based violence, exercised by those in charge of health care for pregnant persons accessing services during pregnancy, childbirth and post-partum."

Cristina Brítez Arce found out that her foetus was dead and suffered a cardiac arrest after she was hospitalised to induce labour. The court found that Brítez had not received adequate medical treatment, and she did not receive necessary information on treatment alternatives. They ruled that she had been "subjected to obstetric violence" leading to her death. While obstetric violence has been discussed by human rights experts previously, this is the first time a judicial ruling has recognized the state's obligation to prevent obstetric violence.





WOMEN ON THE FRONT LINES.

ESTER PINHIERO

Ester is a Brazilian independent journalist and producer with a master's degree in Gender Studies from the Complutense University of Madrid.

Ester founded *Feminismos del Sur*, a multilingual podcast, and she covers gender, climate change, social justice, health, and migration for national and international media outlets. Ester has worked for the UN and NGOs on communication and is currently a journalist producer at *AZMina*, a digital feminist magazine in Brazil.

She has been acknowledged for her work as a former Pulitzer Centre grantee, and Young Peacebuilder (UNAOC), besides as a fellow in *Creadoras Camp*, *Global Youth Mobilization*, *Climate Tracker*, *The Global Feminist Pitch* with *Heinrich Boll Stiftung* and *Google News Initiative*. We asked her to share her thoughts on women's rights in the region.

“As a Brazilian journalist with a decolonial and feminist perspective, I faced several challenges when using communication as a tool for social transformation and gender advocacy. Those challenges, to name a few, are related to the worsening of ongoing issues. The polarization and politicization of subjects has made us go backwards on various debates such as the right to get an abortion, gender violence, care work crisis, invasion of Indigenous territories and threats to Amazon.

The Venezuelan migration crisis is still a concern, and women and girls have turned to prostitution to survive. I joined

the Youth Migration Forum from IOM to find solutions for this issue. There has been a strengthening of extreme rights movements and anti-right governments in the LAC region, together with a tendency for extreme masculinities. New research shows how young women have become more progressive and young men the opposite.⁽¹⁾ However, for each challenge, there's work ongoing to change it.

Where there is oppression, there is resistance. Brazil continues to kill the most transgender people in the world. 2024 marks the 15th year in a row. The situation is worse for trans women, who see themselves forgotten by the State

and in some cases from feminist movements. 79% are black, and the vast majority are sexual workers. That's why I decided to work with social media campaigns and with podcasts at Feminismos del Sur to bring trans realities to light. (2) There's no census in the country about transgender population, we don't know how many they are and what their conditions of living are. Data from the LAC region on trans people isn't very positive either, 235 were killed last year. (3)

Violence against women has worsened in 2022 and at least 4,050 women were victims of femicide in 26 countries and territories in the region. In Brazil, the reality is very bad, one-third of Brazilian women already suffered violence (physical or sexual) in their lives. For me, journalism is a tool for education, as Comprehensive Sexual Education can impact the patriarchal roots of society and help boys, girls and youth to unlearn a gendered culture imposed and conditioned on them. That's why I produced a podcast season called *AbiertaMente* in Spanish (4) (Open Your Mind) with UNESCO Santiago collaboration to open up the talk about gender as a nuclear factor in education practices. How do parents and educators have a gender perspective in their daily lives? How in practice can they include trans kids? Educate Boys to have empathy, demystify gender norms, and prevent gender-based violence in

educational realms but also at home. How to talk about pornography and face the fact that youth is learning everything about sex with scenes of violence or unhealthy sexual relations where a no can be a yes? (5) We talked about consent and so much more. I also could

question the rape culture at the Falling Walls Summit in Berlin last year, where I interviewed the feminist researcher from South Africa, Pumla Gqola (6). She criticizes patriarchal violence as she envisions a future of freedom through female resistance.

See the interview on her theory, the Female Fear Factory. Care work is also still an issue, globally, women spend 2.8 more hours than men on unpaid care and domestic work, often working triple shifts. They work in their paid jobs, care for children and also take care of the family home; this triple burden impacts their physical and mental health, as well as their retention in the labour market. In the LAC region, we still face a strong disparity between men's and women's time dedicated to unremunerated care work at home. Read more in this series of blogs for Equal Measures 2030. The care crisis is a feminist issue, here's why. (7)

In terms of sexual and reproductive rights, at *Revista AzMina* (8) we launched an abortion data website, abortonobrasil.info (9), which compiles all the data and useful information for journalists to cover the topic: healthy data, who abort in the

country, legal data on people who have been prosecuted, abortion methods, research; journalistic guides, allied organizations, sources and so on. Now, because abortion is a crime in Brazil except for three reasons (foetal anencephaly, the health of the mother, rape), we do not have official data on how many people have abortions in the country, but we do have non-governmental organizations that make these reports. So, it's all there in abortonobrasil.info (9); the first platform in its form.

Climate change and Indigenous peoples were also a challenge last year. Yanomami indigenous peoples suffered through the 4 years of an oblivious State in Brazil. 308 people died last year from diseases and undernutrition. The deforested area in the Amazon was 9,001 km² between August 2022 and July 2023 (the equivalent to the size of the Republic of Cyprus, in the Mediterranean), according to the National Institute of Space Research (Inpe). At the World Conference for Science Journalists (10), I was able to question these challenges for overcoming climate change and crimes against biodiversity. With Brigitte Baptiste in this podcast on how to decolonize science and find common solutions from the South for climate justice. (11)

Although gender violence, and social and environmental inequalities should be State responsibilities, organizations have

been doing so much to impact society for the good. Through the collective strength of feminist and/or women-led organizations, based on an intersectional & decolonial feminism approach, we have been moving towards a more gender-equal society and equal world.”

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EUROPE &

CENTRAL ASIA.



CENTRAL, WEST & SOUTH EUROPE.

The recent Global Gender Gap Report notes that 11 out of the top 15 best-performing countries for gender parity are in Europe.⁴⁰ Despite this, disparities still exist, and women across Europe are subjected to increased scrutiny, control, societal pressure and stringent laws that affect their lives. A wave of regressive governments coming into power has created challenges to overcome for marginalised groups.

ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT.

"Women in the EU
earn 13% less than
men"

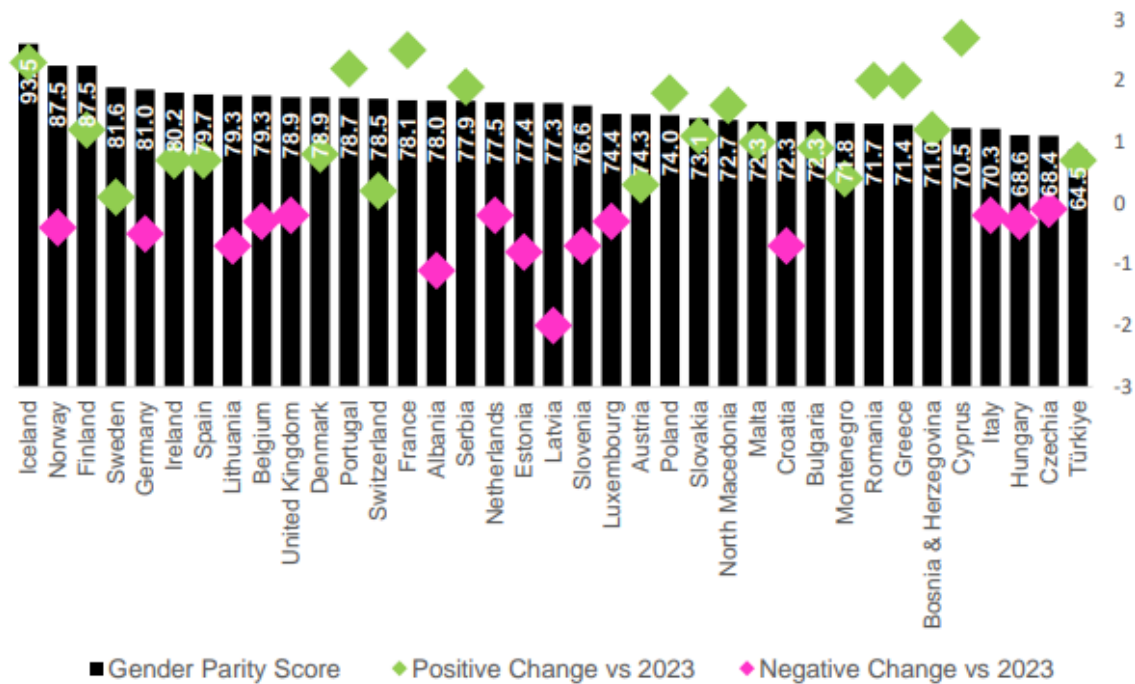
On average, women in the EU earn 13% less than men.⁴¹ The EU recently introduced measures that make pay transparency mandatory for all companies in member states. Under the

new rule, companies must share employee salary data and keep the wage gap at 5% or less. In addition, the policy ensures compensation is paid to those discriminated against and requires states enforce the rules with fines and penalties. This law will enable women to take legal action against companies with pay gap discrepancies over 5%.

Looking more specifically at the issue of parental leave, EU member state Sweden has extended leave to include grandparents. Sweden pioneered shared parental leave when it introduced the policy in 1974. Fathers now take around 30% of the paid parental leave. Since July 2024, it has been possible to transfer up to 45 days of paid parental leave to relatives or friends, providing more flexibility to new parents. The policy also provides greater opportunities to single parents and makes parental leave available to a greater diversity of family types.

Women face significant economic barriers in several countries, for example in Kosovo, where in 2017, only 17% of women were formally employed compared to 50% of men, and in 2021, only 18% of property was owned by

Figure 3: Gender Parity Index and year-on-year change for Central, West & South European countries. (Source: The Global Gender Gap Report 2024, World Economic Forum)



women compared to 79% by men. Furthermore, women are often excluded from family inheritance and the property division between spouses in divorce proceedings also tends to disadvantage women.⁴²

In 2023 protests erupted in Iceland against the existing gender pay gap and

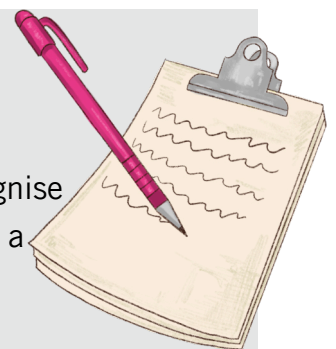
gender-violence. Prime Minister Katrín Jakobsdóttir joined thousands of women in what was the first full-day women's strike since 1975. Icelandic women demanded greater pay transparency and improved institutional frameworks to address violence against women.

LEGAL PROGRESS: CONSENT BASED DEFINITION OF RAPE

Switzerland voted in June 2023 to amend legislation and recognise that sex against the will of another person is rape. This was a historic victory for human rights campaigners in the country.

Since then, the Netherlands has also voted to remove the requirement that rape must involve physical force, threat or coercion from their Sexual Offences Act. Amnesty International, along with activists and a survivor's action group have campaigned for a consent-based law for years.

The act came into force on July the 1st 2024, making the Netherlands the 17th out of 31 European states to recognise that sex without consent is rape.



POLITICS & JUSTICE.

A growing number of European countries have been enacting stricter laws and regulations, which negatively impact the daily lives of women and girls. In France, the situation is particularly concerning following government efforts to restrict women's right to wear religious garments.

Disappointingly, in June 2023 French courts upheld the discriminatory decision of the French Football Federation (FFF) to ban women wearing the hijab in sporting events. France hosted the 2024 Olympics and Paralympics in Paris, but their restrictions on religious expression

are in direct conflict with the Olympics values of inclusion and diversity.

The longstanding process of secularisation that suppresses the rights of Muslim women can further be seen in the announcement of a ban on girls wearing abayas in school in August 2023. Abayas are traditionally seen as a cultural garment rather than a religious symbol and so have been unjustly targeted. The ban on religious wear has fuelled ideas of intolerance and deepens divisions between communities.

GENDER BASED VIOLENCE.

Rates of GBV are a concern and according to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), an estimated 2300 women in Europe were victims of intimate partner or family-related killings in 2022.⁴³ In the UK, 25% of women have experienced domestic violence and a woman is murdered every three days.⁴⁴ These alarming statistics have led UN experts to classify GBV as a "national threat".

"2010 - 2020: 319
women in Austria
were killed"

The situation is similarly dire in other European countries. In Italy there were 97 cases of women killed by domestic violence in 2023, with 64 of these women being killed by their current or former partners. In Austria, 319 women were killed by current or former partners between 2010 to 2020, and in 2023 alone 26 women were murdered. There have been widespread protests in Kosovo following increased rates of domestic violence and femicide.

Authorities have since attempted to improve legislation and passed a new law in March 2023 focused on protecting women from GBV. However, a report from Amnesty has found failings in legislation

including barriers to compensation or support services, as well as prejudice from police.⁴⁵

Ethnic minorities such as Serb, Roma and Ashkali or LGBTQI+ communities face further barriers.

Kosovo needs to enact true intersectional reform to protect all women from violence. The wave of conservatism sweeping the region has resulted in increased attacks on the rights of the LGBTQI+ community. Far-right parties in Slovakia have proposed a bill that would make it impossible to change ‘birth numbers’, effectively blocking gender recognition for trans people. All citizens have a birth number which indicates date of birth and gender assigned at birth and is found on official documentation such as passports.

This bill, which conflicts with the country’s obligations under the European convention on human rights, will have a detrimental impact on transgender people in Slovakia who have been able to access gender recognition for over 40 years.

In Turkey, President Erdoğan blamed the LGBTQI+ community for the erosion of “the institution of the family.” In 2023 he proposed legally codifying the definition of family as a unit centred on a man and a woman.⁴⁶

“The government of Italy has launched attacks on lesbian parents”

Similarly, the government in Italy has launched attacks on lesbian parents by removing non gestational mothers from their children’s birth certificates. State agencies have re issued 33 certificates listing only one of the child’s mothers. Lesbian couples in Italy also cannot access fertility treatments and the law does not explicitly state whether same-sex parents can both be registered.⁴⁷ This order has endangered access to medical care and education. Italy must reinstate the mothers removed from birth certificates and recognise the rights of non-gestational parents.

There have been some positive developments. In January 2024 Estonia became the second Eastern European country (after Slovenia) to legalize same-sex marriage, followed later that year by Latvia who legalised same-sex civil unions. Liechtenstein also passed a law guaranteeing the right of same-sex couples to adopt children and the government has also made progress towards legalising same-sex marriage.⁴⁸



ACTION NEEDED

OVERTURN JUSTYNA'S CONVICTION

Justyna Wydrzyńska is an activist and a founder of Abortion Dream Team, a collective campaigning against abortion stigma in Poland. She helped found Abortion Without Borders, a feminist network from Poland, and other parts of Europe, that provides information, funding and practical support to people in Poland in need of an abortion abroad, or support obtaining medicines for safe abortions at home, as doing your own abortion is not a crime in Poland.

Abortion Dream Team activists work in an increasingly hostile environment and face misogynistic smear campaigns.

In November 2021, Wydrzyńska was arrested after sending abortion pills to a pregnant woman through the mail. She was charged with "intent to aid an abortion and unauthorised distribution of a pharmaceutical". She was convicted and sentenced to eight months community service.

Amnesty International was amongst several human rights organisations that condemned the conviction and the dangerous precedent that it set for women in Poland.

**READ MORE
& TAKE ACTION!**




HEALTH & EDUCATION.

Many countries in this region are wealthy and economically powerful, and yet access to adequate and affordable healthcare is still an issue, in particular, period poverty is a challenge. In the UK, survey data from 2020 shows that three in 10 girls struggled to afford or access menstrual products and more than half used toilet paper instead.⁴⁹ Also, nearly two million girls aged 14-21 in the UK have missed a day of school per term due to their period.

Since 2022, the EU allows member states to sell menstrual products without VAT, but at the time of writing, only Ireland is taking advantage of this.

Despite this, there are other schemes available that improve access to period products. Scotland became the first

country to offer free sanitary products in 2020, and in 2024 the Catalan



"Scotland became the first country to offer free sanitary products."

government announced it was providing free reusable menstrual products like cups, period underwear and cloth pads, in one of the first initiatives of its kind in the world. Further incentives are needed by the EU to encourage member states to reduce or eliminate the so-called 'tampon tax'.

REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS.

Access to abortions in Poland have become increasingly restricted. Since a near-ban on legal abortion in 2020, Polish officials have increasingly targeted women seeking medical care for miscarriages or legal abortion medication. Having an abortion is not illegal, the law instead criminalises anyone who provides or assists someone in having an abortion outside of specific expectations.⁵⁰ Since January 2021, at least six women are known to have died

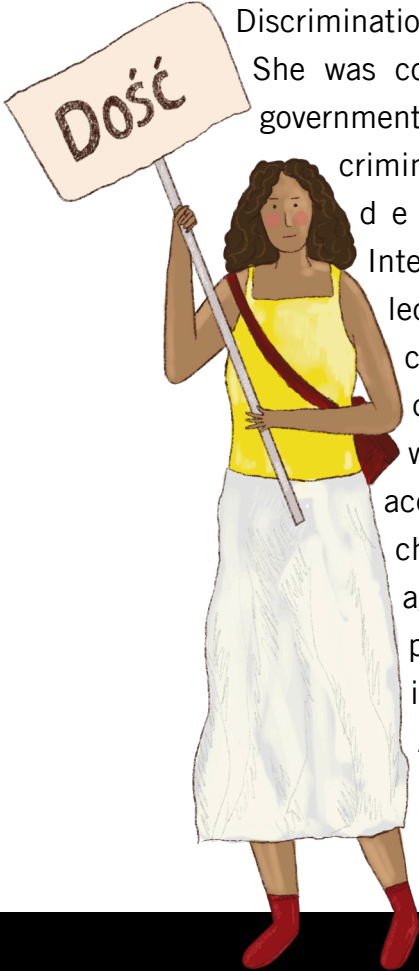
after doctors would not terminate their pregnancies despite a danger to their health, which remain legal grounds for an abortion.⁵¹

Restrictive legislation has left many Polish women seeking alternative, and potentially dangerous, methods of terminating their pregnancies. In 2021, Abortions Without Borders reported that more than 1,000 Polish women had travelled from Poland to access abortions in foreign clinics.⁵²

Women in Malta have similarly seen access to abortion limited. In 2023 the government backtracked from a 2022 proposal to decriminalise abortion on health grounds. Under the new bill pregnant women whose health is in jeopardy require approval of three doctors to be granted an abortion. The bill excludes cases of risk to health that are ‘not life-threatening’.⁵³ Although there is some recognition that access to abortion services is necessary to save lives, this reform creates more barriers for women and is a missed opportunity to provide safe and legal access to abortion.

Andorran activist Vanessa Mendoza Cortes, President of women’s rights group Stop Violence (Stop Violències), was charged after speaking out on Andorra’s abortion ban at a meeting of the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of

Discrimination against Women. She was condemned by the government and faced three criminal charges of **d e f a m a t i o n**. International outcry led to two of the charges being dropped, and she was ultimately acquitted of the final charge of a “crime against the prestige of the institutions”⁵⁴. Although she



should never have been charged in the first place, Cortes’ acquittal is an important victory that upholds her right to freedom of expression. This case is an example of states using laws that safeguard against attacks on reputation to instead protect state institutions.

PIONEERING ACTIVISTS: CYPRUS WOMEN’S BICOMMUNAL COALITION

Cyprus has been divided since 1974, when Turkey invaded and occupied the north of the island. Since then, there has been several rounds of UN-led peace talks which have failed to yield results.

The CWBC works to resolve the Cyprus issue by incorporating gender perspectives, ensuring equal and meaningful participation of women in the negotiation process and strengthening the role of women in peacebuilding by promoting a culture of peace and reconciliation.





EASTERN EUROPE & CENTRAL ASIA.

The pervasive focus on 'traditional values' in Eastern European and Central Asian countries has contributed to a deterioration of human rights, increased levels of gender-based violence and unequal opportunities in the workplace. Amnesty International produced a report on the region in December 2022 exposing the institutional, social and cultural challenges faced by survivors of GBV and how ill-equipped state institutions are to safeguard against violence.⁵⁵

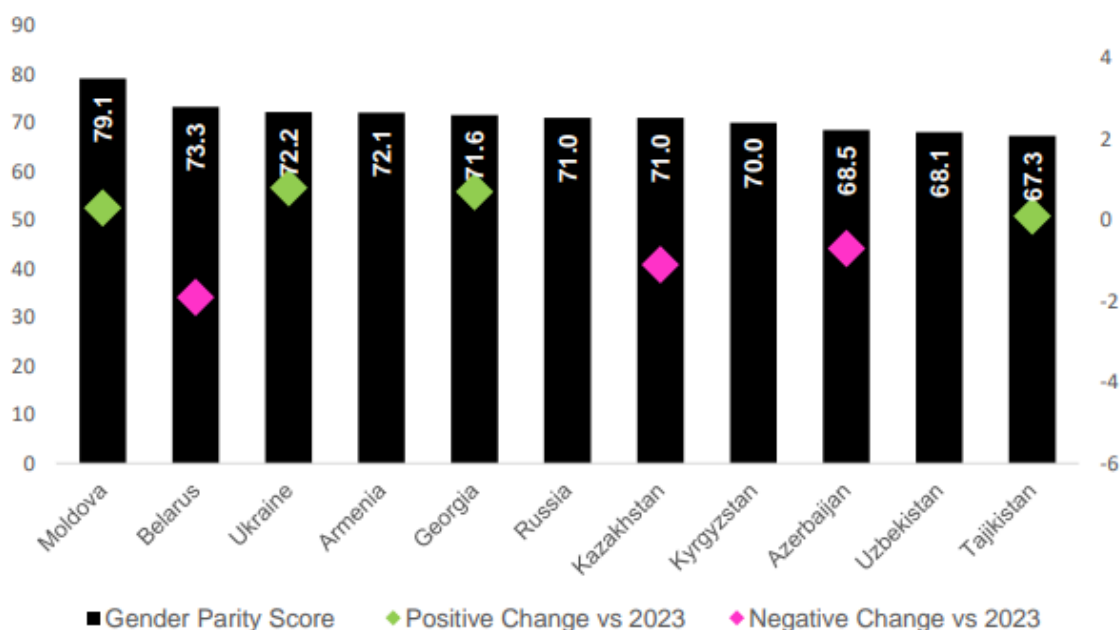
Since then, there have been some positive developments, but patriarchal

and misogynistic ideology continues to hamper progress.

ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT.

Ensuring women have more equal opportunities is crucial to the economic development of the region. The World Bank estimated that if women participated in the economy on par with men Uzbekistan's national income would increase by 29%, by 27% in Kazakhstan and 63% in Tajikistan. Uzbekistan has made some progress on gender equality by including equal pay and removing job

Figure 4: Gender Parity Index and year-on-year change for Eastern European and Central Asian countries. (Source: The Global Gender Gap Report 2024, World Economic Forum)



restrictions for women in the Labor Code in 2022.

"Giving women equal pay could lift 700,000 people out of poverty"

Giving women equal pay could improve livelihoods and lift 700,000 Uzbeki people out of poverty⁵⁶. However, it is important that Uzbekistan acknowledges that entrenched gender norms and traditional roles of women as caregivers will impede their economic progress if not addressed in the implementation of this new law. Kazakhstan has tried to address this by lifting restrictions that prevented

women from undertaking certain work. Other countries in the region also need to follow suit and ensure all restrictions to women's professions are removed.

There is also a link between women's involvement in economic growth, and addressing the climate crisis. For example, Gender stereotypes often prevent women in the region from entering the energy sector. The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) has identified the potential to harness renewable energy in Central Asia and recognises that women, who are primary managers and users of energy, can play a leading role in this transition. The OSCE is running a project to build confidence and educate women on career opportunities in the sector. It also supports Central Asian governments and companies to integrate gender equality targets into policies.⁵⁷

POLITICS & JUSTICE.

It has been over two years since Russia launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

The war has had a disproportionate effect on women living in the war zone who face increased burden of caring responsibilities, challenges in accessing housing, food, sexual health, employment, and other essential services. For menstruating people, limited supplies and increased prices for

period products are forcing them to make choices between food and period products.

The lack of security and breakdown in the rule of law has seen an increase in GBV in areas affected by conflict.

Although women represent most refugees and internally displaced, they play a huge role in providing humanitarian

assistance, supporting their communities, participating in armed resistance and keeping the economy afloat.

"...police in Moscow reportedly arrested 30 journalists..."

Following the invasion, Russia has clamped down on freedom of expression. In February 2023, police in Moscow reportedly arrested around 30 journalists covering the '500 days of mobilisation' protest rally. The protest was organised by The Way Home, a group of resolute wives of soldiers who are advocating for their husbands return from war. The acts of Russian police reflect the ongoing suppression of media and right to peaceful assembly. Suppression of freedom of expression impacts women across the region.

In Kyrgyzstan, Rita Karasartova, alongside 26 other people, was arrested and charged for speaking up against a new border agreement that gave control of a freshwater reservoir to neighbouring Uzbekistan. Karasartova is one of the first women human rights defenders to publicly cover issues in law enforcement and judiciary systems in Kyrgyz language.

After Karasartova and her group called for peaceful demonstrations against the agreement they were detained for organizing mass disorder, and she was charged with attempting to overthrow the government, a charge that could have resulted in up to 15 years' imprisonment, had she not been acquitted.⁵⁸

Kazakhstan has similarly targeted women's right activists. In March 2024 they denied the right to peaceful protest on International Women's Day.

Furthermore, authorities charged an activist in February 2024, and she now faces up to 10 years in prison. Dinara Smailova is founder of NeMolchiKz, a nonprofit group supporting survivors of sexual and domestic violence and is known for criticising the authorities' failure to protect women. Police have gone to significant lengths to investigate her and claim she has misappropriated donations, but questions remain over the credibility of their evidence.⁵⁹

Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan are just a few examples of how countries manipulate and weaponize the criminal justice system to silence activists and critics.

PROTECT THE PROTEST
PROTECT THE PROTEST
PROTECT THE PROTEST
PROTECT THE PROTEST

NATALYA FILONOVA

PROTECT THE PROTEST
PROTECT THE PROTEST



ACTION NEEDED

SOLIDARITY FOR RUSSIAN ACTIVIST NATALYA FILONOVA

Natalya Filonova has been an activist since the 1990s. She worked as a correspondent for a regional newspaper and later started publishing her own newspaper Vsemu naperekor (“Despite everything”).

Natalya was detained in Ulan-Ude on 26 September 2022, at a protest against mobilization for Russia’s war in Ukraine. According to the investigators, she attacked police officers while she was being taken to court. Natalya allegedly hit one police officer in the face and poked another in the face with a pen while in police transport. Natalya denies these allegations.

On 31 August 2023, she was sentenced to 2 years and 10 months in prison under article 318 (1 and 2) of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation – “using violence against representatives of the authorities”. This law is regularly used by the Russian to prosecute activists participating in assemblies.

People across Russia like Natalya are facing persecution for peaceful anti-war dissent. Russia must immediately release all those imprisoned for peacefully protesting.

**READ MORE
& TAKE ACTION!**



GENDER BASED VIOLENCE.

In many instances the scarcity of comprehensive and adequately collected data in Eastern Europe and Central Asia creates a challenge in fully understanding how extensive the issue of Gender Based Violence really is in this region.

"Domestic violence
claims the life of 80
Kazakhstani women
a year"

Domestic violence claims the life of 80 women a year in Kazakhstan and a further 150 are injured. In May 2024 a court sentenced the country's former economy minister, Kuandyk Bishimbayev to 24 years in prison for the murder of his partner Saltanat Nukenova. The high-profile trial found Bishimbayev had tormented his partner before she died of a traumatic brain injury.

Following this event, 'Saltanat's Law' was passed, criminalising battery and 'light bodily harm'. The law ensures police investigate all cases of domestic violence and shifts the duty to collect evidence from the survivor to the police.

However, the law also includes reference to 'traditional family values' and 'strengthening the institute of marriage' which downplays the violence, particularly in unmarried relationships. While this law is ultimately a step in the right direction, its effective enforcement in the coming months will be key to ensuring other women do not suffer a fate like Nukenova's.⁶⁰

Armenia has similarly strengthened domestic violence law in the last year. Acknowledging the influence that concepts of 'traditional family values' have, they have removed reference to "restoring family harmony" from the title of the law.

Additional acts of physical, sexual, psychological, and economic violence will now also be considered as domestic violence, stalking is acknowledged as a standalone crime. This is again good progress, but more is needed to fully enact this law at all levels state institutions - for example, there have been cases of courts invalidating police urgent intervention orders.

Armenia has also, thus far, not ratified the Council of Europe's convention on preventing domestic violence.

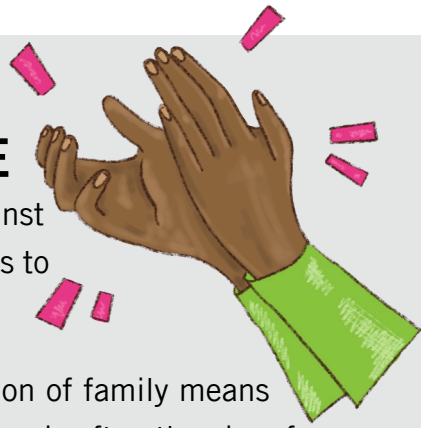
LEGAL PROGRESS: CRIMINALISING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

In Uzbekistan, cases of domestic violence against women reached almost 36,000 in the nine months to November 2021.

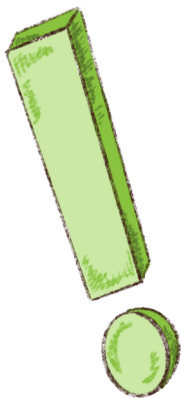
Societal norms and heavy emphasis on preservation of family means that reconciliation, rather than protection of women, is often the aim of officials.

Following years of campaigning by women's rights defenders, Uzbekistan's parliament unanimously approved a bill criminalising domestic violence in April 2023. The reform will establish liability for the harassment and stalking of women, make early release for sexual offenders impossible, and exclude ignorance of the age of sex crime victims to avoid harsher criminal punishments.

Preservation of family remains important, and an official statement from parliament states that the new law will prevent domestic violence against women and children, but also will be integral in "strengthening the institution of the family".



HEALTH & EDUCATION.



There will be a long-term impact on Ukrainian children missing out on school. Ukrainian students have experienced four years of disrupted education since the Covid-19 pandemic, followed by Russia's invasion.

There has also been a disruption to access of maternal care. Ukrainian women living in rural areas have been unable to access care due to deteriorated logistical routes. When war broke out, nearly 265,000 women were due to give birth, with many forced to do so under poor conditions and with limited care.⁶¹

REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS.

Women in the region experience significant difficulties in accessing sexual and reproductive healthcare services and three in five women have reported difficulty accessing such services⁶². The focus on preserving the family in many countries has meant that access has in many instances become increasingly hard to access.

The Russian Orthodox church, which has close ties to the Kremlin, has been leading an anti-abortion campaign in recent years. The Russian government is particularly receptive to the stance of the church following years of stagnant population growth – the current population size is virtually the same as it was 20 years ago. While abortion is currently legal and widely available, the country is enforcing informal restrictions, for example, making it an offence to persuade a woman to have an abortion and pressuring private clinics to stop performing procedures. They are also offering financial incentives to those who give birth, which can be used to purchase property or pay for education⁶³.

In November 2023 a senior Russian politician even proposed that the state purchase babies from women planning to have abortions, and that the state to care for them.

Activists continue to mobilise against restrictions, for example the Urals

Feminist Movement group has organised small-scale protests in favour of abortion rights.

In May, an activist from the group was arrested (and later released without charge) while holding a sign that said 'child-free is not a crime'. The term 'child-free' has become a charged term used by senior government officials who have identified the term as a threat to the country and their 'traditional values'.

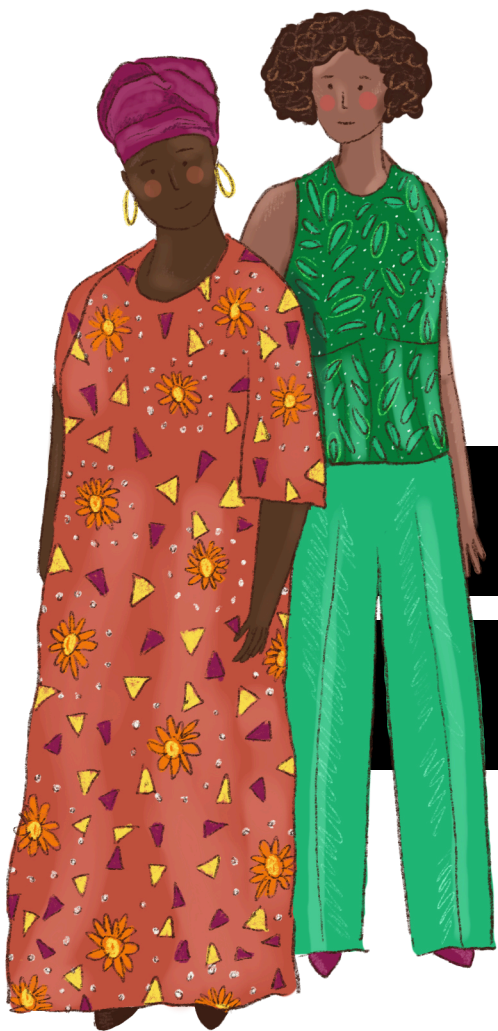
PIONEERING ACTIVISTS:

HI ADHD



Teenagers Gaukhar Abualieva and Dayana Zhumabaeva from Kazakhstan launched "Hi, ADHD" in 2024. Their mission is to raise awareness and provide support for people with ADHD and mental illnesses in Central Asia.

The non-profit works to translate resources related to ADHD and mental health from English into Kazakh and Russian, including through social media posts and lectures. They have already delivered lectures to 255 people, addressing audiences ranging from school pupils to adults. Their presentations cover ADHD symptoms, myths, life hacks, stigma, masking, and barriers in diagnosing the condition.



AFRICA &

THE MIDDLE EAST.



MIDDLE EAST & NORTH AFRICA.

The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region ranks last among all regions, for gender parity, with a score of 61.7%⁶⁴. The region continues to grapple with a myriad of challenges which affect the lives of women and girls.

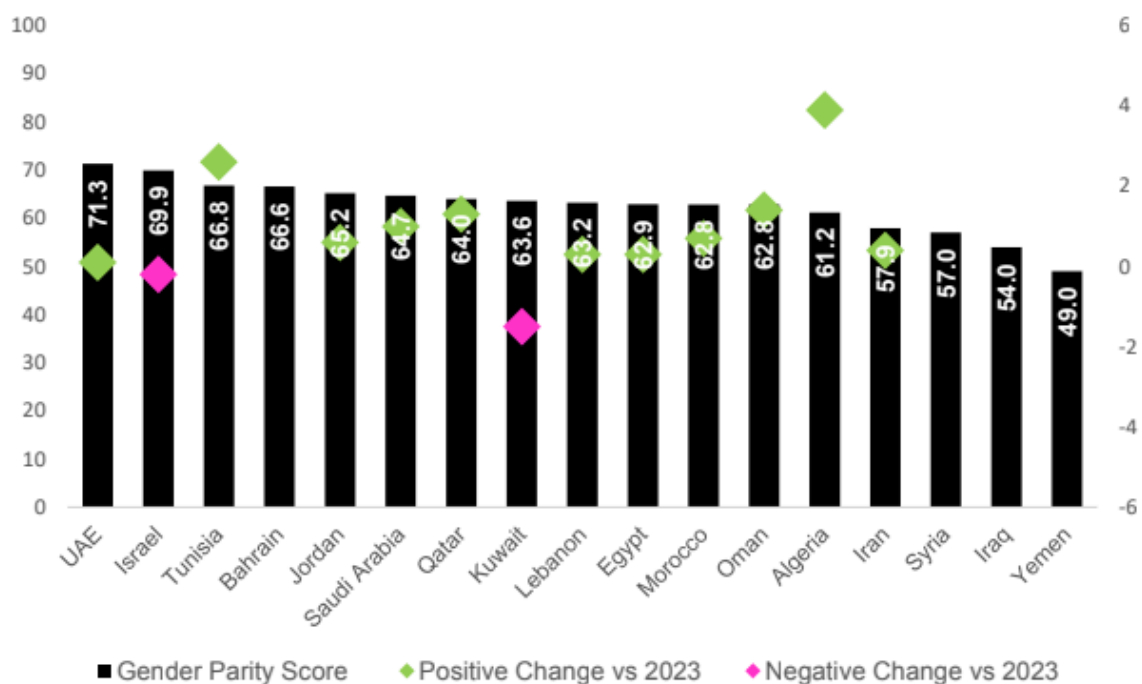
Particular challenges stem from entrenched customs, compounded by ramifications of conflicts like displacement-induced housing and health issues.

ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT.

Some countries have implemented initiatives to improve the lives and rights of women. The Central Bank of Iraq passed recent reform ensuring

discriminatory practices do not hinder the financial pursuits of women. They have effectively banned gender-based discrimination in the financial services

Figure 5: Gender Parity Index and year-on-year change for Middle Eastern and North African countries. (Source: The Global Gender Gap Report 2024, World Economic Forum)



industry, including banking, lending, and investment operations. Bahrain also saw positive change in 2022 when it established both men and women retire at the same age and receive full pension benefit.⁶⁵

Women’s labour force participation in the MENA is 18%, significantly lower than men’s participation of 70%. Societal attitudes uphold the belief that men should be breadwinners while women are caregivers in the family unit.

Inadequate care services mean that many women leave the paid labour market for unpaid caregiving roles. The ILO found that women committed nearly five times more time to house and care work than men. Furthermore, women are often denied their fundamental right to guaranteed paid and job-protected maternity leave.

Only Bahrain, Saudi Arabia and Tunisia guarantee employment protection during maternity leave while Iran, Iraq and Morocco offer the right to return to the same position following maternity leave. 12 countries in the region do not meet the ILO’s minimum 14 weeks of maternity leave. The ILO estimates that at the current pace of legal reforms, it will take at least 70 years for MENA countries, where nearly 80 million potential mothers live, to fill the current gaps and align to ILO standards on maternity leave⁶⁶. MENA governments need to implement care policies that

redistribute and balance care work and ensure women are protected on maternity leave. This is integral to empowering the most vulnerable women to join, and stay, in a work.

LEGAL PROGRESS: LAND & EMPLOYABILITY COMPACT

A large share of Morocco’s agricultural land is collective, owned by the state but designated to ethnic communities and managed according to customary practices. Existing 60-year-old policy called for a single heir to be the designated rights holder, but women were often deprived of inheritance and were unlikely to be designated as sole heir over male relatives. The government sought the help of the Millenium Challenge Corporation (MCC) to improve inclusivity of existing procedures. They developed a pilot program covering 56,000 hectares to produce a model for land privatization and titling that could be scaled up to other collective lands and empower women as landowners.

This led to removal of the single-heir rule. Under Islamic Inheritance Law, all legal heirs, including women, now have protected rights to inherit land, although not equally with men.



"Women hold only
18% of
Parliamentary
positions"

Women's political participation is low and only 18% of parliamentary positions are held by women⁶⁷. Tunisia was the first in the region to have a woman leader when Prime Minister Najla Bouden was appointed. However, she was dismissed from her position in August 2023 and women have since struggled to gain significant representation in politics.

Other countries have attempted to close the gender bias gap, for example UAE President Sheikh Khalifa declared in 2018 that women should make up 50% of the Federal National Council.⁶⁸

Suppression of freedom of expression is a concern for many MENA women. In Lebanon there has been a concerning trend over the last five years of harassment and intimidation of activists who critique the government. Government officials classify criticism of the government as violating defamation laws. A recent example of this was when comedian Shaden Fakih faced legal charges for "insulting" and "harming the

reputation" of the internal security forces".⁶⁹

Similarly, the government in Egypt has been targeting social media personalities for content deemed immoral or incompatible with the country's 'values'. Influencers like Salma Elshimy, Hanin Hossam and Mawada el-Adham have been subjected to the crackdown by authorities. Women are unable to portray themselves online without fear of being convicted for what the government deems 'indecent'.

The restriction of a women's ability to wear what they want in Iran is hindering women's freedom of expression. A hijab law, implemented in 2022, is enforced by the "morality" police who maintain behaviour and clothing regulations. In September 2022, Mahsa Zhina Amini was brutally beaten by morality police, resulting in her death. The subsequent outrage and uprising against Iranian authorities resulted in hundreds of deaths and arrests of civilians due to the authorities unlawful use of force.⁷⁰

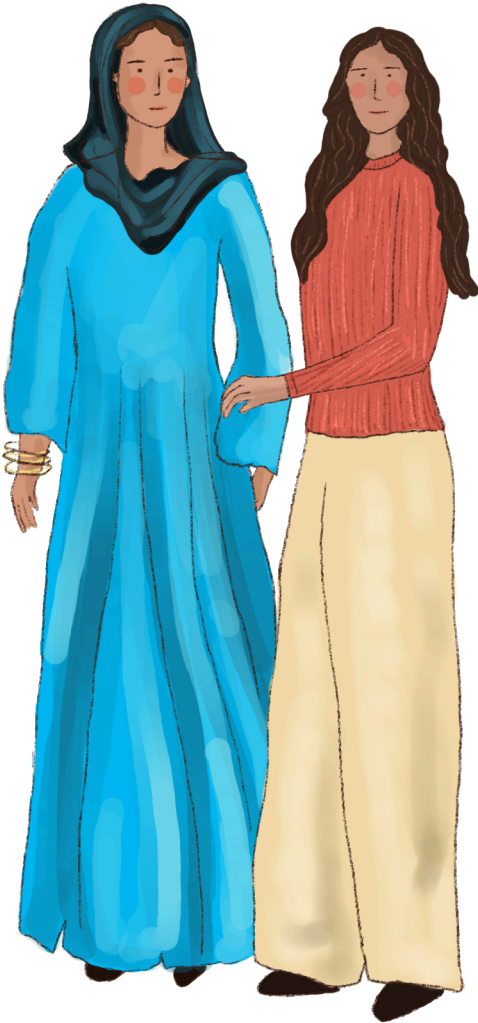
Protesters chanted the words "women, life, freedom", a phrase which rapidly became a universal symbol of resistance and the fight for women's rights. Several individuals connected to the uprising had been victims of sexual violence, used as a tool of coercion and punishment by Iranian special forces. Amnesty has

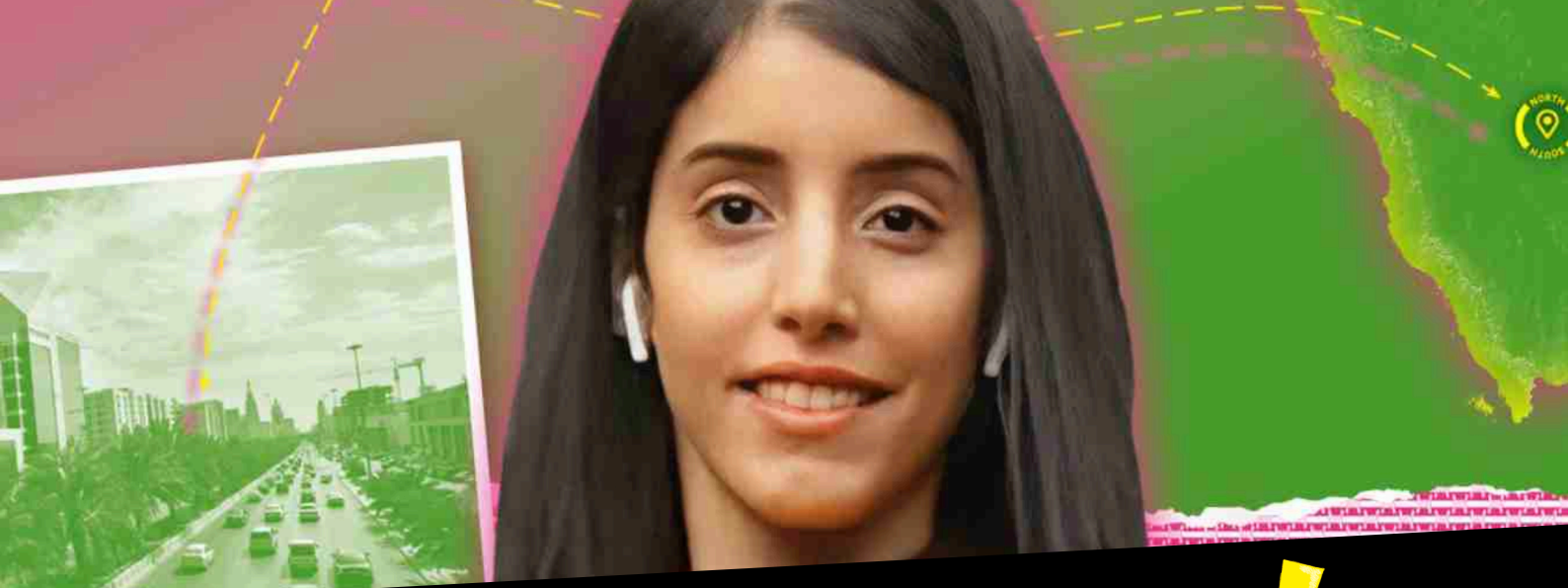
documented testimonies from men, women and children who were victims of this violence between September and December 2022.

Furthermore, UN and Amnesty officials have reported that schoolgirls are being intentionally poisoned in attacks believed to be linked to the Women Life Freedom protests⁷¹. Approximately 300 attacks have taken place in elementary, middle and high schools since November 2022. Thousands of schoolgirls nationwide were admitted to hospitals in attempts to censor their rights to wear what they want. In December 2022 recognition of Iran’s treatment of women led to their removal from UN Commission on the Status of Women following a measure supported by 25 other countries. The measure noted that the government’s campaign to suppress the rights of women and girls through force was in direct contrast to the mission of the UN body.⁷²

Restrictions on movement continue to exist due to deeply ingrained practices, and existing laws disregard a women's autonomy to dictate their own lives. In states including Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Qatar and Kuwait, a woman can be reported to the police for leaving their home or the country without a male guardian's approval. In April 2023, Libya implemented restrictions on women and girls’ ability to travel freely overseas without a male guardian. The Saudi government started enforcing the

Personal Status Law in June 2022. It requires women to obtain permission from male guardians before getting married. In addition, women are denied equal rights in parental guardianship in the event of separation.





ACTION NEEDED

FREE MANAHEL AL-OTAIBI

Saudi Arabia sentenced al-Otaibi to 11 years in prison for “terrorist offences” in a secret trial.

The 29-year-old fitness instructor and women’s rights activist was charged with violating the Anti-Cyber Crime Law due to her tweets in support of women’s rights as well as posting photos of herself at the mall without an abaya on Snapchat.

Saudi authorities forcibly disappeared al-Otaibi between November 2023 and April 2024. She was able to contact her family in April 2024 where she told them she was being held in solitary confinement and had been brutally beaten, resulting in a broken leg and no access to medical care.

Amnesty is urging the Saudi authorities to release Manahel al-Otaibi.

**READ MORE
& TAKE ACTION!**



GENDER BASED VIOLENCE.

Violence against women and girls is a concern across MENA countries. In Iran, honour killings are a deeply ingrained societal custom. A woman may be killed by a relative when she is perceived to have brought dishonour upon her family. Each year roughly 500 women fall victim to honour killings.⁷³

In Egypt, cases of violence against women in 2020 reached 415, and in the following year cases increased to 813⁷⁴. Activists argue that femicide is becoming part of a growing pandemic of violence against women in the country. In the space of four months there were four femicide cases where in all instances the victims had been killed by men after rejecting their advances.

In Jordan, there have been reports of women being killed for rejecting men. In Libya, justice for rape and sexual violence is hard to achieve. Authorities have prosecuted women who report crimes for engaging in sexual relations outside of marriage, despite it not being consensual. This shows how state organisations do not support or protect women from violence and in some cases, can even be the perpetrators of violence. The treatment of Palestinian women by the Israeli army is one example of this. The UN has reported that Palestinian women have been targeted, detained, inhumanly treated, and killed by the Israeli army and government agents despite them being civilians who are seeking refuge.⁷⁵

HEALTH & EDUCATION.

For many women in MENA, opportunities to complete higher education can be limited due to cultural norms that prioritise women undertaking household labour. In countries like Yemen, Syria and Palestine, conflict severely impacts students' experiences. An estimated 47% of girls in Yemen are displaced, impeding access to education.⁷⁶

The effect of conflict disproportionately impacts women and girls. In Syria, ongoing conflict has resulted in a significant portion of women being

internally displaced. 6.8 million people do not have access to basic food and nutrition, 4.2 million of which are women and girls. The 13-year crisis has deteriorated the health system and left millions in a vulnerable state.⁷⁷

"...540,000 women & girls in Gaza lack access to... health, hygiene..."

Israel's war on Palestine persists and the toll on civilians remains severe. Beyond the immediate threat of death and destruction, women and girls grapple with sanitation challenges. A recent report from UN Women, found that more than 540,000 women and girls in Gaza lack access to items to support their hygiene, health, and dignity. There is a lack of access of adequate menstrual products and women are resorting to

using cloths or sponges. It is estimated that 10 million disposable menstrual pads are needed each month to cover the needs of women in Gaza⁷⁸. Many pregnant women are forced to undergo deliveries without anaesthesia, proper sanitation, and in unsafe environments. The widespread destruction of the area, including hospital facilities, exacerbates these difficulties, leaving women and their families in dire circumstances.

REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS.

Morocco has strict restrictions on abortion and the service is only permitted if the mothers health is in danger. The country punishes making statements in public or distribution of written materials about abortion with a prison sentence or fine.⁷⁹

Tunisia had historically been a leading country for reproductive health, allowing abortion on request and free of charge in

the first trimester of pregnancy. However, increasingly restricted access has been observed due to budget cuts, denial of service based on age and health condition and diminished commitment by authorities.

Activists believe this is due to the rise of conservatism, as well as a recent spread of disinformation.⁸⁰



WOMEN ON THE FRONT LINES. SARA RAHNAMA

Sara Rahnama is an Assistant Professor of History and Director of the Program for the Study of the Middle East & North Africa at Morgan State University.

She is the author of *The Future is Feminist: Women and Social Change in Interwar Algeria* (2023), which examines how commentators saw women's advancement as key to a prosperous and modern future for Algeria. We asked her to share her view of women's rights in the region:

"Since the era of French colonialism in North Africa, claims that North African women are particularly subjugated by their religion and their culture have remained in circulation, particularly by European and American observers. Yet new feminist histories of the region and North African women's feminist organizing should remind us that the reality is much more complicated.

There have been multiple feminist developments in Algeria in recent years.

Within the Hirak movement (2019-2021), women were active participants. A feminist group, Femmes algériennes pour un changement vers l'égalité (Algerian women for a change towards equality, FACE), was created in the first month of the Hirak protests. The group created a feminist bloc that marched together in the protests.

In protests, FACE members regularly carried portraits of women who participated in Algeria's War of Independence to remind Algerians of the long history of women's participation in national political upheaval.

These women sought to utilize Algeria's feminist history as a tool within their activism for feminist change in the present.

"...there has been a renewed interest in unearthing... material from Algerian Feminist groups."

Online as well, there has been a renewed interest in unearthing and disseminating material from Algerian feminist groups throughout recent history.

In 2019, a group of Algerian women collaborated to create a digital archive, Archives des luttes des femmes en Algérie (Archive of Women’s Struggle in Algeria), comprised “of documents

produced by feminist or women’s groups, collectives, and associations that have fought for the rights of Algerian women.” They have digitized Algerian women’s and feminist publications from the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s. In December 2022, the group published a book form of their archive, sold within Algeria and abroad. Their Facebook group currently has almost 7,000 followers.”



WOMEN ON THE FRONT LINES. LINA ABIRAFEH

An activist, academic, and aid worker, Lina AbiRafeh is one of the world’s leading women’s rights experts.

She has a master’s degree in international economics and development from Johns Hopkins University and a PhD from the London School of Economics and Political Science. We asked her to share her thoughts on women’s rights in the region:

“The Arab region faces unprecedented challenges – protracted crises and economic insecurity have further fuelled the backlash against women’s rights and fundamental freedoms.

The genocide underway in Palestine along with conflicts in Syria, Iraq, Yemen, and elsewhere show no signs of abating. Still, there are signs of hope. Women –

especially young women – are refusing to be sidelined. They are on the forefront of movements for peace and social justice across the region. My latest book – Yalla Feminists – shares some of their stories. Our hope for the region rests on them.”



SAY THEIR
NAMES

WEST & CENTRAL AFRICA.

2023 marked two decades since the Maputo Protocol, which provides for extensive and progressive women's rights, and it has been ratified by 44 African countries since. In this region, only Central African Republic, Niger and Equatorial Guinea

have not ratified the protocol. Most countries in this region have created gender policy, but in practice these are not implemented effectively and the traditional place of women in society limits effective enforcement of legal developments.

ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT.

Gender parity in the workforce is far from being achieved and the slow progress is made more frustrating by the fact that more women in work is beneficial to all.

In Nigeria alone, World Bank research estimates that closing gender gaps in economic sectors could unlock an additional \$9.3 billion for the country.⁸¹ More legal reform is needed to ensure equal pay for equal work, and further work is needed to fully embed and enforce new laws. For example, in Gabon there is a Labour Code that prohibits discrimination based on sex, but it is not effectively enforced and therefore it remains common for women's wages to be less than that of male counterparts.

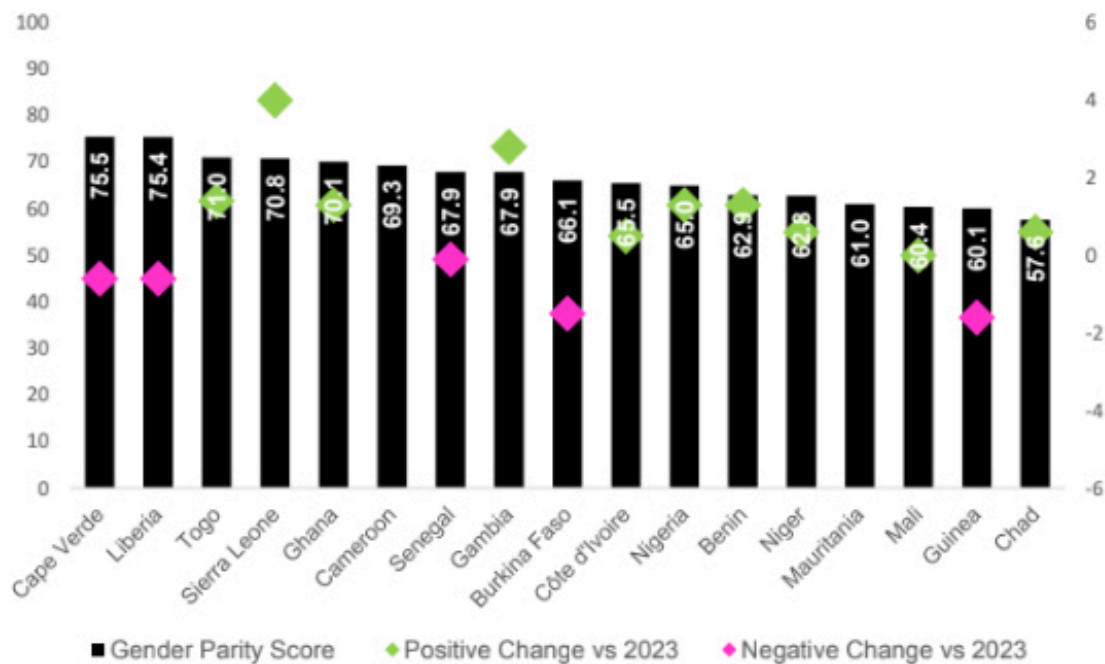
Sierra Leone has tried to address the issues of implementation with their new

Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Act (GEWE).

This landmark ruling, passed in January 2023, states that 30% of public and private jobs must be reserved for women, senior positions ring-fenced and at least 14 weeks of maternity leave must be provided.

To ensure the ruling is enforced, there are tough repercussions for employers who do not adhere, including fines and potential prison time for institutions like banks that do not give women fair access to financial support. The aim is that this reform will enable more women to start their own businesses.

Figure 6: Gender Parity Index and year-on-year change for Western and Central African countries. (Source: The Global Gender Gap Report 2024, World Economic Forum)



POLITICS & JUSTICE.

Women continue to be left out in political and leadership roles.

Since Nigeria's independence in 1960, they have not had a woman in the role of President or Vice President and women have had significantly low representation at all levels of government.

Despite comprising almost half of the electorate, women made up only 4% of the National Parliament in 2023. In the Senate there were 4 women out of 109 members and in the House of Representatives only 16 women out of 360 members.⁸²

In contrast, the government in Senegal enacted a law on parity in elected

institutions in 2010 and since then has gone on to achieve one of the best scores globally for women's parliamentary representation.

"559 local authorities exist in Senegal, but only 15 are headed by women."

However, it is important to recognise the imbalance that still exists in the representation of women in national and

local decision-making bodies, as 559 local authorities exist in Senegal but only 15 are headed by women.

Societal norms can create an expectation that women should play a subordinate role in the household, and this limits the freedom of expression or movement of women.

In Gabon the Civil Code states that a wife must obey her husband as head of the

household. Married women need their husband's permission to obtain a passport or travel abroad. The de facto discrimination that exists also means that rape and domestic abuse are rarely reported or prosecuted, and spousal rape is not specifically recognised.

There was some progress in 2021 when the Civil Code was updated to recognise GBV as legitimate grounds for divorce.

GENDER BASED VIOLENCE.

Female genital mutilation and cutting (FGM/C) is a deeply entrenched and troubling practice that many girls in the region face.

The patriarchal society perpetuates the need for this practice by encouraging false narratives that women are 'unclean' or 'promiscuous'.

Globally, an estimated 200 million girls have undergone FGM/C. Sierra Leone has one of the highest rates with an estimated 83% of girls having undergone FGM/C and 71% before the age of 15⁸³.

In 2023 two legal cases were filed against the government of Sierra Leone to end FGM/C in the country. The Forum Against Harmful Practices (FAHP) with the Institute for Human Rights and Development Africa (IHRDA) have filed cases in the ECOWAS court and another in the High Court of Sierra Leone to hold

accountable individual perpetrators and the State.

These cases assert the criminal acts and violations of human rights related to FGM/C and highlight the failure of successive governments to protect citizens.⁸⁴

Legal reform is urgently needed to fulfil the mandates of the treaties Sierra Leone has signed, including the Maputo Protocol, which names FGM/C as a human rights violation, and action is needed to enact a law that explicitly bans FGM/C.

Although concerns remain that the practice will persist even after legal reform – as is the case in Gambia – activists nonetheless acknowledge this is an important step toward ending the violence towards women.

The armed conflict between Boko Haram and Nigerian forces has affected millions in north-east Nigeria for over a decade. The resulting humanitarian crisis has seen millions displaced, with specific impact on women, children, and the elderly.

In April 2014, Boko Haram abducted 276 schoolgirls from a government school and since then some girls have escaped or been released, but 82 remain in captivity to this day. The abduction of young girls is a common tactic used by Boko Haram. Abducted girls are forcibly married and used in a multitude of ways as “wives”, including being made to serve their “husbands” in sexual slavery and domestic servitude. They live under strict rules with extremely limited freedom of movement and harsh punishments for breaching rules.

When girls have managed to escape or been ‘rescued’, they may continue to be mistreated due to their association with Boko Haram, and the Nigerian military has detained some girls for years in horrible conditions. To this day, the stigma of being a ‘Boko Haram wife’ prevents many young girls from reintegrating into their communities. Survivors and activists have highlighted the lack of support from the Nigerian government and Amnesty recently called on the government and UN agencies to urgently make tailored reintegration services available to these girls and young women.⁸⁵

PIONEERING ACTIVISTS: NOUS SOMMES LA SOLUTION (WOMEN ARE THE SOLUTION)

Women in Senegal are not entitled to land ownership, as are expected to leave their community when they marry.

When Mariama Sonko moved to her new husband’s town, she and a group of women convinced a landowner to rent them a small plot of land in return for part of their harvest. Five years later, once their crop was plentiful, they were kicked off the land.

Sonko identified that when women earn money, they often reinvest it in their community, health and education. So, she chose to invest in women, training woman farmers who often had no access to education, explaining their rights and funding women-led agricultural projects. Sonko is now president of a 115,000-strong rural women’s rights movement called We Are the Solution.

Her training centre employs more than 20 people, and she has expanded into Guinea-Bissau and Gambia. With the increasing impact of climate change on agriculture, Sonko is more demand than ever and is now working on seven new training centres. This highlights the value, and community-focus women can bring to industries they have traditionally been excluded from.



HEALTH & EDUCATION.

In Togo authorities have taken steps to make maternal healthcare more affordable. However, Amnesty recently called for new measures to ensure pregnant women can give birth with dignity and be properly cared for.

"Infant mortality is 43 deaths per 1000 in Togo."

UNICEF data indicates that the current rate of infant mortality is 43 deaths per 1000 in Togo, while maternal mortality

rate is 399 deaths for every 100,000 live births⁸⁶. There are only two midwives for every 10,000 people and midwives can be on-call duty for over 15 hours.

Work is needed to ensure that pregnant women and their newborns can access adequate healthcare and support.

Sierra Leone has made great strides in ensuring young girls are not excluded from education. Until 2020, pregnant girls were banned from school. In April 2023 parliament enacted the Basic Senior and Secondary Education Act, a groundbreaking policy which acknowledged that pregnant girls and young mothers are systematically excluded from school.

REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS.

"GFW... identified the abortion rights movement... as... promising."

Global Fund for Women has identified the abortion rights movement in West and Central Africa as collectively emerging

and promising. Countries including Cameroon, Guinea and Cote d'Ivoire have very limited access to abortions, so activists have focused on advocacy and addressing the issue of unsafe abortions, while in Benin, which expanded access to abortions in 2021, activists work on ensuring the law is effectively implemented.⁸⁷

Benin passed one of the most liberal abortion laws in Africa when it permitted termination of a pregnancy if it is likely to cause a situation of material,

educational, professional or moral distress incompatible with the interests of the woman and/or the foetus. In this region, only Sao Tome and Principe and Cape Verde have similarly liberal abortion laws.

However, implementation remains difficult, and activists have highlighted that unsafe abortions are still happening. There is a need to translate laws from French into national languages to ensure the law is known to all communities, as

well as disseminating information to rural communities.⁸⁸

In Nigeria abortion clinics have faced attacks by authorities. In 2019 an MSI Reproductive Choices clinic in Lagos was raided by police because of a demonisation campaign led by the Spanish anti-abortion advocacy group Citizengo. The police harassed the workers and took confidential client information, following false claims that the clinic was performing illegal abortions.⁸⁹





HORN & EAST AFRICA.

Women and girls in Horn and East Africa face unique barriers to education and economic empowerment, and gender-based violence remains prevalent in the region. Ongoing conflict

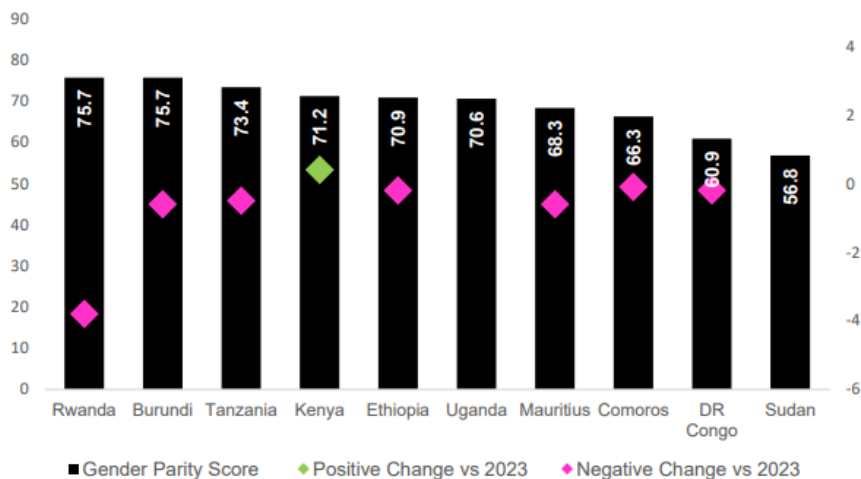
in several countries in this region has had a particular impact to the lives of women and girls who have been subjected to sexual violence, displacement and other human rights abuses.

ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT.

Working women in some countries in the region are closer to parity than in others. In Ethiopia, young men and women are equally likely to hold a waged job, while in Kenya and Somalia, women's share is 41% and 43% respectively. However, cultural barriers may prevent women from being as active in the labour market where entrenched social norms prescribe heavier domestic and care responsibilities to them. For example, Tanzania has a relatively low work force

gender gap at 7.6%, but women are more likely to work in retail and food sectors, while their male counterparts are likely to work in manufacturing, construction, and transportation sectors.⁹⁰ The country has specific policies in place to improve this and further support women's economic empowerment, for example the Tanzania Development Vision 2025 aims to eliminate gender-based classification of economic activity by 2025.

Figure 7: Gender Parity Index and year-on-year change for Horn and East African countries. (Source: The Global Gender Gap Report 2024, World Economic Forum)



POLITICS & JUSTICE.

Rwanda leads global political representation of women, with women in 61% of seats. However, this is not the case at a local government level, where women constitute only 29% of mayors, highlighting the impact that socio-cultural norms continue to have.

In Somaliland's 2021 elections not a single woman was elected to its 82-person parliament. Only three women were elected among 220 elected councillors. Prior to this, there was just one woman MP and nine woman local councillors.

Somalia's parliament is doing somewhat better. For many years, campaigners have petitioned for political parties to have a 30% gender quota, and although this has not yet been enacted, the three major parties have agreed to a voluntary quota of six woman candidates each.

These levels remain disappointing, however, given the high levels of political participation by women in Somalia; women serve in polling stations on election days and vote in large numbers. Furthermore, women have historically been integral in establishing stability through roles as mediators between clans and by leading grassroots campaigns for peace, central to ending the clan-based conflicts of the 1990s.⁹¹

The constitution of the DRC prohibits discrimination against women, but in practice, women will still face discrimination in many aspects of their lives, and the WEF has ranked the DRC at 140 out of 146 for gender parity⁹². In January 2024 Felix Tshisekedi was voted in for a second five-year term as President, and he appointed Judith Suminwa Tuluka as the country's first ever woman prime minister. However, despite the high-profile post, the DRC still has the lowest representation of women in parliament in the region.

Achieving intersectional gender justice in the region remains challenging due to the discrimination of the LGBTQI+ community.

There has been some progress, for example, Mauritius and the Seychelles legalised homosexuality in recent years. In Kenya, although homosexuality is outlawed, there was progress in 2022 when the new Children Act acknowledged intersex as a third gender; they are the first country on the continent to do this⁹³.

Kenya is also the only country in region to offer asylum based on sexual orientation or gender identity. However, LGBTQI+ refugees in Kakuma camp have reported poor conditions where they are attacked by hosts or other refugees⁹⁴.

In 2023 Uganda passed one of the most extreme anti-LGBTQI+ laws in the world. Since then, Human Rights Awareness and Promotion Forum (HRAPF), a Ugandan NGO, has documented 55 arrests, three death penalty cases, eight

forced anal examination cases and 254 evictions of persons accused to be or associate with LGBTQI+ people⁹⁵. This is evidence of the devastating impact the law will have on queer women in the country.

GENDER BASED VIOLENCE.

The DRC continues to grapple with issues of gender violence that need to be addressed. According to a 2023 report by Freedom House, the DRC have granted reparations to victims of sexual violence and other serious crimes, but these are rarely actually paid.⁹⁶ This stunted progress can be attributed to the societal expectation for women to play a subordinate role in the household. The Family Code obliges women to obey their husbands, who are designated as the head of the household and dictates that married women are under the legal guardianship of their husbands.

"...estimates suggest over one million women have been raped [during conflicts in the DRC]"

In addition, armed conflicts in the region have had significant impact on progress. Decades of conflict in the DRC have led

to the deaths of over two million civilians and estimates suggest over one million women have been raped.

Over 100 armed groups are active in the eastern Ituri, North Kivu, South Kivu and Tanganyika provinces with many commanders being implicated in war crimes, including sexual violence. Between January and October 2023, at least 1,211 civilians in the Ituri province had been murdered, this included women and children⁹⁷.

Armed conflict has similarly impacted women in Sudan where girls as young as 12 have been subjected to sexual violence and other human rights violations. Since April 2023, Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) have been fighting for control of Sudan. Rape, sexual slavery, and other forms of sexual violence and other war crimes have been committed. Amnesty has spoken to survivors who have identified the perpetrators as RSF members or members of allied Arab militias. In one case a group of 24 women and girls were abducted by RSF members and taken to

a hotel where they were held for several days in conditions amounting to sexual slavery⁹⁸. The international community needs to exert pressure on the warring sides to stop violating the human rights of civilians caught up in the conflict.

"The recognition of marital rape has had slow progress in the region."

Widely held cultural and religious perspectives see women as the property of their husbands, and as a result the recognition of marital rape has had slow progress in the region despite most countries criminalising rape. Only Burundi and Rwanda explicitly criminalise spousal rape, while Eritrea, Ethiopia and South Sudan explicitly exclude spousal rape from the penal code.⁹⁹

Traditional beliefs also influence the high rates of FGM/C, which remains a deeply entrenched social norm. In Somalia alone, FGM/C prevalence stands at 98%. Sudan has tried to change the existing narrative with its Saleema initiative. Launched by Sudan's National Council of Child Welfare and UNICEF, Saleema means 'whole' and 'untouched' in Arabic,

and the initiative intends to spread new positive terminology to describe the bodies of girls. Saleema Girls' Clubs, launched in 2019, sees young girls trained to sensitize communities on genital cutting, child marriage, gender-based violence and other child protection-related issues, with the aim to build consensus within communities to abandon the practice of FGM/C. In 2023, Sudan launched the Saleema Girls' Clubs Training Manual, further institutionalising the initiative.¹⁰⁰



PIONEERING ACTIVISTS: WOW MUM

Women are the majority of informal vendors in Kenya's more than 50 market centres. Social-enterprise Wow Mom was founded by Penina Ndegwa and aims to establish childcare facilities at market centres across Kenya. It launched in Mwariro and Gikomba markets, serving over 70 children of market traders and significantly improving trade for mothers. In August 2024 the Governor of Nairobi announced plans to expand the program further.

HEALTH & EDUCATION.

In Ethiopia, there is disparity in the severity of period poverty by location. Period poverty and lack of education on menstruation affects young girls in East Africa. In Ethiopia, a survey found that only 37% of girls said that they don't feel ashamed of menstruation and had discussed menstruation with others.

The proportion of menstruating people that can afford pads is varied: 87% in urban areas, 60% in rural non-pastoralist areas, and just 13% in rural pastoralist areas¹⁰¹. Conflict also limits access to healthcare. In Sudan, 1.6 million women of reproductive age are without adequate services, including an estimated 160,000 pregnant women and 54,000 expected childbirths within between October and December 2024.

Furthermore, over 74% of schoolgirls are currently out of school which increases their likelihood of being subjected to harmful practices such as child marriage and female genital mutilation/cutting¹⁰². The Ugandan government proposed allowing girls as young as 15 access to contraception, in a bid to tackle high levels of teenage pregnancy in the country. Nearly a quarter of 15 to 19-year-olds in Uganda are pregnant or already mothers, with rates growing significantly during the Covid lockdowns.

Teenage pregnancy contributes to 20% of infant deaths and 28% of maternal

deaths, while also contributing to 22% of school dropouts among young girls¹⁰³.

Expanding access to contraceptives could have a significant impact on the lives of young Ugandan women. Disappointingly the proposal was rejected in October 2023 with lawmakers calling the idea “devilish” and saying it would “formalise the defilement” of girls. Influential religious leaders had opposed the proposal, instead advocating abstinence from sex¹⁰⁴. The response from and language used by the government and religious leaders serves only to encourage the stigma young girls face. Uganda must reconsider this decision and acknowledge the protection that their young population needs.

Teenage pregnancy similarly impacts girls in the DRC. Only 16.8% of women completed secondary education, half the completion rate of male students¹⁰⁵. Women without an education have a fertility rate twice that of women who complete secondary school, suggesting that women are leaving education due to pregnancy.



REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS.

Abortion clinics in Kenya are subject to regular raids, equipment confiscated, and practitioners and patients are arrested. In September 2023 a healthcare provider and a mother and daughter were cleared of charges of

procuring an abortion. They had been arrested in 2018 when police raided the clinic where the girl was being treated for pregnancy related complications following a sexual assault.¹⁰⁶

LEGAL PROGRESS: RESPECTFUL MATERNAL HEALTHCARE

Josephine Majani was denied sufficient maternal care in 2013 when she was physically and verbally abused by hospital staff and left to deliver her baby on the hospital floor.

In February 2024, the Kenyan Court of Appeal upheld the landmark 2018 High Court judgment which defended Majani's human rights.

The original ruling found the hospital, county government and Secretary of Health had violated Majani's right to health, dignity and freedom from cruel, degrading and inhuman treatment when they failed to implement national standards on quality maternal care.

Despite video and eyewitness accounts, the county government appealed, arguing that there was no evidence and challenging the harm that Majani had suffered. The court's recent decision to dismiss the meritless appeal and uphold the original ruling further enforces the need for Kenya to adopt specific policies for respectful maternal health care with meaningful implementation.





WOMEN ON THE FRONT LINES.

ROSEBELL KAGUMIRE

Rosebell is a writer and human rights defender. She is the curator and editor of African Feminism, a platform that documents the narratives and experiences of African women on the continent and in the diaspora.

With over 10 years of experience in media and communications, Rosebell has worked at Women's Link Worldwide and the UN Migration Agency. She holds a master's degree in Media, Peace and Conflict Studies from United Nations-mandated University for Peace in Costa Rica.

In 2018 she was honoured with the Anna Guèye award for her advocacy for digital democracy, justice and equality by Africтивistes, a network of African activists. She is a member of the World Economic Forum Global Young Leaders. We asked her for her thoughts on women's rights in the region:

"It has been a challenging year on many fronts, from forced displacement by wars to climate crisis amidst the struggle to recover from the economic crisis. Many young Africans are accessing online spaces at such a challenging time. Africa currently has about 650m internet users, and while good things come out of this, the internet is also a place where oppression and inequality are replicated and expanded. Disinformation is a real danger to many social groups and has a destabilising potential for African society. We have seen sustained gendered disinformation this year with gendered impacts affecting marginalized people. Like many key tactics of oppression, we see the constant manufacturing of

narratives against the oppressed to define them by the oppressor's lens, dehumanize, alienate, and excuse the resultant violence as something they deserve.

Sexism, misogyny, homophobia, and racism are dominant factors in gendered disinformation as the anti-rights transnational movements are rising and gaining financial power to roll back the rights of women and Queer Africans. We saw online campaigns in Uganda, Kenya, Ethiopia, and Ghana aimed at driving policy and legislation to cause harm and regress rights in the name of 'culture' and 'family'.

There's growing monetization of this gendered disinformation upheld by most digital platforms' inadequate response and standards and this is a real threat to women and queer Africans. Many African feminists are already responding to these

challenges with little resources, with dire implications for their mental health. We need greater efforts in the new year to combat this kind of threat as it has real-life impacts on the safety and freedoms of women and Queer Africans."



SOUTHERN AFRICA.

In recent years Southern African governments have made efforts to redress the imbalance to promote gender equality, mainly through the adoption of international, regional and national legal instruments.

While South Africa has one of the highest rates in the world of women represented in parliament, elsewhere in the region

work is still needed to address imbalance, and the safety of women political actors.

The rights of queer people remain uncertain in this region, and the continued attacks on the LGBTQI+ community hinders the intersectional progress of women's rights.

ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT.

Women in Southern Africa bear the brunt of domestic and care work, even when they are also in formal employment. This is primarily due to poverty and poor public services which have been exacerbated by the HIV and AIDS pandemic and the recurrent droughts

experienced in the region, thus, leading to social, economic and health problems. Botswana has acknowledged the importance of engaging women in the economy to drive prosperity in the country. Vision 2036 Achieving Prosperity for All defines their aspirations

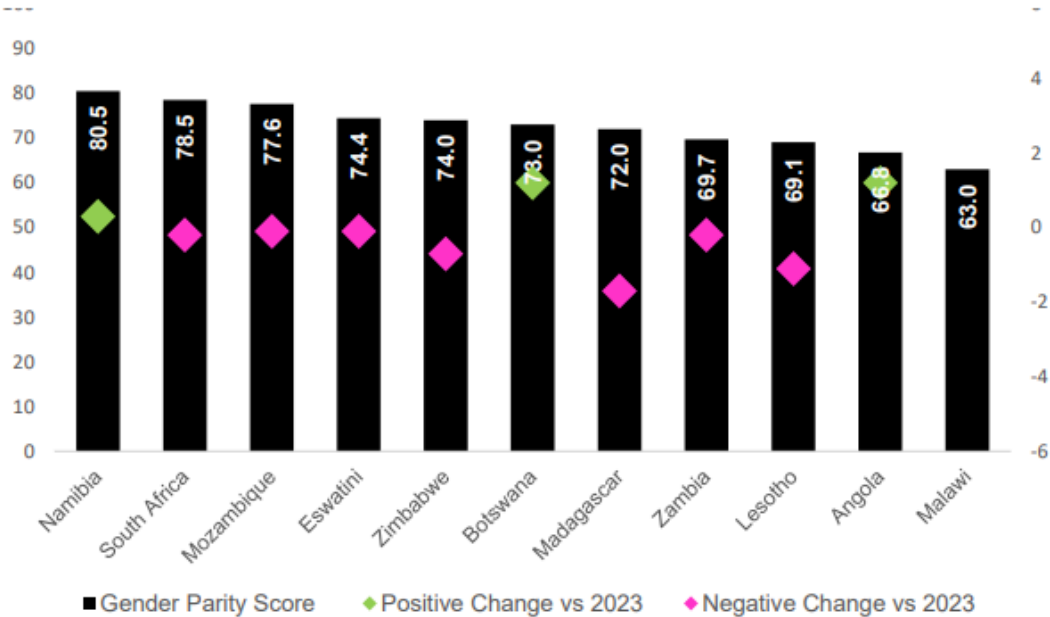
to transform from a middle-income to a high-income economy. Promoting gender equality and granting men and women equal opportunities to participate in the economy are key components of the government reset agenda for inclusive development.

Across the region, millions of people engage in informal cross-border trade (ICBT), trade that generates a significant portion of intra-regional commerce and is estimated to be worth \$17.6 billion.

"Women make up 60%-90% of those engaged in informal cross-border trade"

Women make up 60% to 90% of those engaged in ICBT and often face exploitation and violence. The ILO's Convention 190 (the Violence and Harassment Convention) is designed to eradicate violence and harassment at work and has a particular impact on women. Disappointingly, only South Africa, Namibia, and Mauritius have ratified the convention in this region, and gender based discrimination at border posts continue to be commonplace. Informal workers do not have adequate support as social security systems, particularly in Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe, favour formal workers. Furthermore, despite women comprising most of the ICBT workforce, leadership of cross-border trader associations is still largely male, leaving women trader without adequate representation in policy discussions and decision-making processes.¹⁰⁷

Figure 8: Gender Parity Index and year-on-year change for Southern African countries. (Source: The Global Gender Gap Report 2024, World Economic Forum)





ACTION NEEDED

HELP RELEASE NETH NAHARA

August 2024 marked one year since Angolan Tiktoker Neth Nahara was imprisoned for the crime of “outrage against the state”.

After she criticized Angola’s president, Nahara was initially sentenced to six months, but an appeals court deemed this too lenient, and her sentence was unjustly extended to two years.

Neth has also been ordered to pay the President João Lourenço £1,000 for "damage" to his reputation.

Nahara imprisonment is posing a serious risk to her life. She is HIV positive and she has not been receiving her daily medication. In December 2023 this led to emergency hospitalisation.

**READ MORE
& TAKE ACTION!**



POLITICS & JUSTICE.

Women political leaders and activists will often face harsh retribution for advocating on issues.

In May 2024 Marie Jeanne d’Arc Masy Goulamaly, a Madagascan member of parliament, was arbitrarily arrested and accused of orchestrating protests following an official complaint she made about the credibility of recent elections in her district of Tshiombe¹⁰⁸. At the time of writing, Goulamaly remains in detention.

Another example of this can be seen in Zimbabwe, where Fadzayi Mahare, an activist and opposition spokesperson, was convicted for “publishing falsehoods” for a video she posted on Twitter alleging that a police officer had killed a baby. Mahare was convicted based on a law that no longer exists in Zimbabwe. Mahare was eventually acquitted of the charge of “promoting and inciting public violence” and convicted of the alternative charge of communicating false statements.¹⁰⁹

The harassment of Tanele Maseko by Eswatini authorities provides a further example of how Southern African governments suppress freedom of expression. Maseko was arrested in March 2023 and an investigation into the killing of her husband was cited as the reason why. Her husband, the human rights lawyer Thulani Maseko, was

murdered in January 2023 amid an escalation in attacks on state critics, and since then Maseko has been vocal in campaigning for justice.

“Women political leaders and activists... face discriminatory portrayal in the media”

Aside from the potential legal ramifications of their work, women political leaders and activists also face discriminatory portrayal in the media. The label ‘woman’ is overemphasised, and they are often classified as widows, wives and mothers. Reporting can sideline their perspectives and downplay expertise.

LBGTQI+ community in Southern Africa has faced sustained attacks in recent years. In June 2024, Malawian human rights suffered a huge set back when the Constitutional Court rejected a legal challenge to the penal code that makes same sex conduct a criminal offense. Trans woman Jana Gonani had led the

challenge with the assistance of Nyasa Rainbow Alliance, a Malawian LGBTQI+ organisation. Prior to the verdict, faith and religious leader led an anti-LGBTQI+ backlash and the Nyasa Rainbow Alliance received abuse and physical threats, as well as having their office raided by unknown individuals in June 2023¹¹⁰.

The influence of religious leaders is also evident in Tanzania where in March 2023 they organised public workshops to strategize against homosexuality. This has fuelled anti LGBTQI+ sentiment and

in the same month calls were made by the head of the women’s wing of Tanzania’s ruling party to castrate male homosexuals. There is a failure to understand the intersectional struggle that women and queer people face. This is highlighted in Zambia where members of a feminist organisation were arrested for carrying a rainbow flag at a women’s rights march in March 2023. Police declared that the “promotion of homosexuality” was not permitted at a protest for sexual and gender rights.¹¹¹

PIONEERING ACTIVISTS: NCAZELO NCUBE-MLILO



Zimbabwean psychologist Ncazelo Ncube-Mlilo has dedicated her career to developing local, culturally appropriate psychosocial healing practices. Her charity Phola – which means to “heal” or “cool down” in southern Africa’s Nguni languages – breaks from conventional western therapeutic techniques.

Using a travelling caravan or permanent shipping containers fitted as therapy rooms, the charity aims to make therapy more accessible. They host drive throughs and popup events for women, men’s groups that tackle the root causes of violence and abuse, and school programmes that work to break the cycle of trauma for the next generation. Ncube-Mlilo’s work is rooted in the belief that people affected by adversity, abuse and trauma possess the knowledge and skills to overcome their problems.

The charity reaches more than 10,000 people in townships in Johannesburg every year. These methods are now being employed across the globe, for example by Afro-Caribbean men in inner-city London and in Australia, Aboriginal practitioners have incorporated them into their attempt to gain official recognition.

GENDER BASED VIOLENCE.

The release of Paralympian Oscar Pistorius on parole in January 2024, after serving less than half of his sentence for the murder of his fiancé Reeva Steenkamp, has highlighted the attitudes towards femicide and violence against women in South Africa.

In 2019 the UN ranked South Africa among the five countries with the highest rates of femicide. An average of one woman every eight hours died at the hands of her intimate partner. South Africa also has extremely high levels of rape. Between July and September 2023 more than 10,500 incidents were reported to the police.

Zimbabwe similarly has issues with high rates of GBV. Their recently published Zimbabwe Gender-Based Violence Assessment paints a disturbing picture, showing many women are still facing danger in their own homes.

"39% of women in Zimbabwe have experienced physical violence"

High rates of physical violence are pervasive with approximately 39% of women have experienced physical violence, and an estimated 12% have experienced sexual violence. Furthermore, the fear of retaliation and financial insecurity means that women will often not report abusive partners.

HEALTH & EDUCATION.

Mozambique has the fifth highest rate of child marriage in the world¹¹². Just over half of young women are first married before age 18, compared with a regional average of 36%. The conflict in Cabo Delgado contributes to the high rates of child marriage and teenage pregnancies. Girls are being abducted by armed groups and forced into marriage and early

pregnancy. These marriages are dangerous for young girls as access to healthcare services is challenging due to stigmatisation and difficulties reaching suitable facilities.¹¹³

Furthermore, teenage pregnancy limits the educational attainment of girls. A study from 2019 found that 70% of pregnant girls dropped out of school. In

2022, only 41% of girls completed lower secondary. In 2020, only 4% of girls completed upper secondary.¹¹⁴

Zambia similarly has high rates of child marriage, with 29% of girls married before age 18. In 2023, the government

sought to address this and passed a new law setting the minimum marriage age at 18 and the government increased social services funding, including in education and health, to empower girls and women.¹¹⁵

REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS.

In South Africa elective abortion is available on request up to 12 weeks and is free of charge through public health care facilities. Despite this, a high number of abortions take place outside the formal healthcare sector. Social stigma, and lack of access to information, particularly in marginalised areas, are key reasons for this. In addition, healthcare providers are refusing to perform abortions due to their own beliefs and the fear of being judged and stigmatised.¹¹⁶

limits availability of facilities that can legally provide abortion services. There has not been a sufficient attempt to tackle the stigma that exists, and awareness of the law is poor, so many women and girls incorrectly believe abortion is illegal.

"In Zambia.. unsafe abortion accounts for 30% of maternal mortality."

In Zambia, which is considered to have some of the most liberal abortion laws on the continent, unsafe abortion remains prevalent and accounts for 30% of the country's maternal mortality¹¹⁷. The law





ASIA &

PACIFIC.



EAST ASIA.

In recent years China and other East Asia countries have emerged as economic and political powerhouses. However, in terms of social reform, progress may be considered slower. Some progress has been made towards closing gender gaps in areas such as health, education, employment and political participation.

However, deeply rooted inequalities remain and keep girls and boys from having equal opportunities. There is often a higher value placed on boys which can lead to sex selection before a child is even born. Women and girls are expected to carry burden of domestic and care work and their voice and participation in public life carries much less weight.

ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT.

It is estimated that women in China earn 22% less than men, a disparity exacerbated by a reported gender bias in hiring processes. Recruiters will often hire for male workers only, limiting the opportunities available for women¹¹⁸. Furthermore, women perform approximately three times more unpaid work than men¹¹⁹.

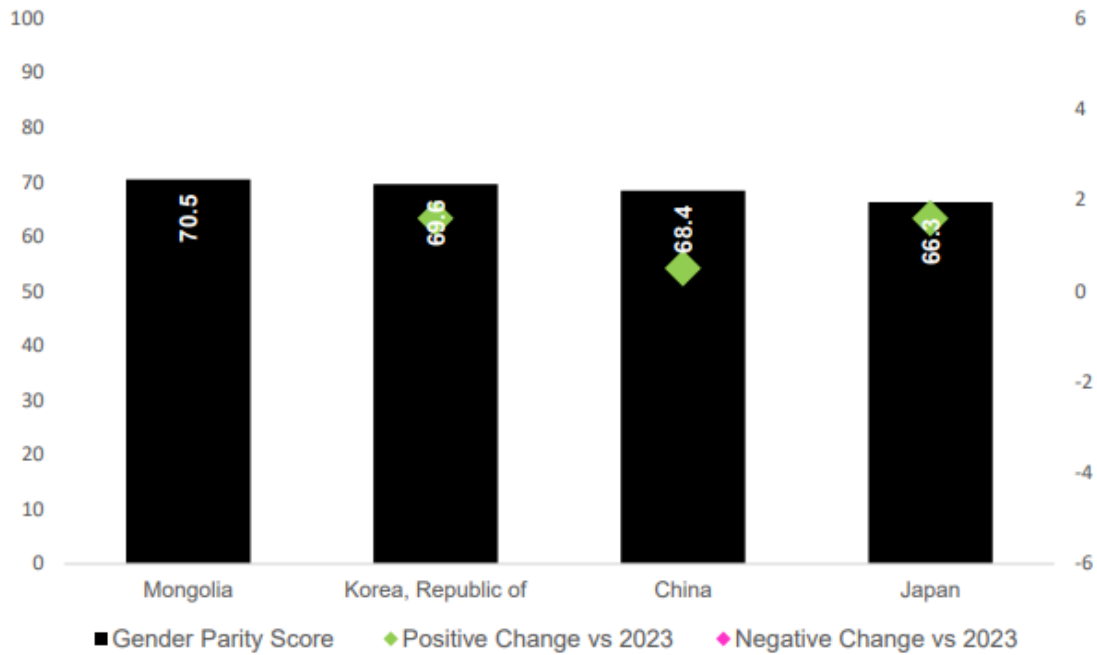
The government has attempted to improve women's economic empowerment and in January 2023 revised the Law on the Protection of Women's Rights and Interests. Amendments to the law include requirements on employers to eliminate gender discrimination in hiring processes

and to prevent sexual harassment in the workplace. Such protections will be needed to support China's growing population of entrepreneurs.

"China is now home to the world's largest number of women entrepreneurs."

China is now home the world's largest number of woman entrepreneurs and their over 13 million women

Figure 9: Gender Parity Index and year-on-year change for East Asian countries. (Source: The Global Gender Gap Report 2024, World Economic Forum)



entrepreneurs account for 43% of all entrepreneurs in China. Growth has been driven by government support for women's entrepreneurship, increased availability of venture capital funding for women-led businesses, and recognition of the importance of women in leadership in the business world.

Women have legal equality in North Korea, but face discrimination in practice. Most North Korean workers cannot freely choose employment, with the government assigning men and unmarried women to their positions and often denying monetary compensation. Workers, especially women, seek informal employment to earn an income and pay official employers bribes to cover absences.

South Korea has one of the largest gender wage gaps in the region, currently at 31.5%. Along with a very competitive workforce and strict maternity leave policies, women must often choose between motherhood or a career. This has resulted in South Korea's low fertility rate, which at 0.72 is the lowest in the world and is estimated to drop further to 0.68 in 2024.

As part of the government's attempt to tackle what they have described as a "national emergency" and grow their population, they recently announced plans to expand childbirth incentives, paternity leave benefits and housing welfare programs for families with newborns¹²⁰.

"Unemployment among women in Mongolia is primarily attributed to childbirth & childcare."

Mongolia also has a lack of economic support for mothers' impacted women's participation in the workforce. Statistics

show that unemployment among women is primarily attributed to childbirth and childcare, with the limited availability of childcare services contributing to long gaps in their professional careers¹²¹.

A study by the Equal Opportunities Commission found that women in Hong Kong are also affected by the so-called 'motherhood penalty'. Over half of recruiters surveyed admitted that they would not hire a woman responsible for caring for a child¹²². This bias not only affects how women are treated in the workplace but contributes to gendered poverty rates.

POLITICS & JUSTICE.

The role of women in political and legislative bodies remains limited.

In Mongolia women make up 51% of the electorate and actively participate in elections. However, participation in political decision-making remains insufficient as women have neither held any of top three political offices at the national level nor at the subnational level.

In Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea) women occupy just 17.6% of seats in the Supreme People's Assembly, and even that participation is largely symbolic as they cannot independently advocate for women's interests.

In South Korea, women hold only 19% of seats in the National Assembly (as of December 2022), despite making up half of the population¹²³. The inauguration of Yoo Suk-Yeol marked a shift in South Korean politics and has stalled progress on women's rights. Suk-Yeol has pledged to remove the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family, which was established in 2001, and is refusing to acknowledge the existence of gender discrimination and inequality in the country. In 2024, we have witnessed these setbacks through the reduction in funding in departments dealing with violence against women. This is extremely harmful and threatens to



undo the progress to reduce gender disparities and inequalities.

There have been positive developments in the region, and in 2020 Taiwan elected their first women president. Since then, a record 42% of national legislators were women, an increase on the 2016 rate of 38%. After the 2022 local elections, political participation of women in Taiwan hit a record-breaking high of 56.3%.

Freedom of expression is limited in China with women's activists facing severe repercussions when challenging the Chinese government. In 2020, activist He Fangmei was prosecuted for campaigning against faulty vaccinees provided by the government to children. Despite being five months pregnant He and her children were detained, her family were denied custody of the children, and they were subsequently placed in psychiatric hospital or foster care¹²⁴. This unlawful treatment and forced separation demonstrate the practice of collective punishment where individuals are punished for the actions of their relatives.

A similar case involves Wang Liqin, the wife of a detained lawyer Wang Zhang. She has faced harassment and threats from Chinese authorities and has reported that

authorities have threatened to either detain her or to separate her from her children if she were to post publicly about her husbands' situation. Both cases demonstrate how Chinese authorities silence women activists and use their children as leverage. Unlawfully targeting and prosecuting family members is a form of collective punishment and highlights a broader

"Women in the camps have reportedly been subject to mass rape"

issue of injustice in China.

In the Xinjiang region of China, Uyghur Muslims are subjected to religious discrimination and mistreatment by the government. Approximately one million Uyghur Muslims are detained in concentration camps where they are subjected to torture. Women in the camps have reportedly been subject to mass rape and sexual abuse.¹²⁵

One of the most troubling practices has been the forced sterilisation of women to prevent them from having more than 2 children¹²⁶. Uyghur women are denied the right to freely name their children, as Muslim names cannot be registered in the household registration system.



Japan's family registration system, known as koseki, limits the autonomy of women and perpetuates the patriarchal society. Under this system, women must adopt their spouses surname, leaving women with no option to keep their own. Furthermore, the koseki is an essential

document that serves as proof of citizenship¹²⁷. It creates legal issues for women who have children outside of marriage or who are divorced as the child would not be registered under their mother surname, leading to identity, legal, and custody issues.

GENDER BASED VIOLENCE.

The patriarchal societies of the region means that violence against women is prevalent.

"...there are no designated legal penalties for domestic violence."

In North Korea, there are no designated legal penalties for domestic violence thus sexual and physical violence against women are not uncommon and are normalised.

There has been reports that government officials aid in the human trafficking of North Korean women to China, facilitating their exploitation through sex slavery and forced marriages.¹³³

Violence against women is also a concern in Mongolia. A report by the United Nations Population Fund found that 57.9% of women who have been in a relationship have experienced some type of abuse whether it being physical, sexual, emotional or financial¹³⁴. Childhood sexual abuse is also prevalent with one in 10 girls experiencing sexual abuse in their childhood before the age of 15.

In South Korea, sexual harassment and digital sex crimes have become widespread with cases raising sharply in recent years. Nearly 80% of stalking victims are women. In October 2022, a former Seoul Metro employee was indicted for murdering a female colleague whom he had stalked. The murder led to calls for stronger punishments for stalking and greater protections for women. Additionally, women have been targets of "semen terrorism", where men put semen on women and their property, and this is yet to be criminalised by the state.¹³⁵

HEALTH & EDUCATION.

In 2021, almost half (44%) of adolescent girls in Japan reported that the main inconvenience in their daily life caused by menstruation is the lack of sufficient sanitary products at school or in public places.¹²⁸

REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS.

Access to abortion remains an issue. Women in Japan face barriers to abortion, with current law mandating that married women seek consent from the father of the child for an abortion¹²⁹. In South Korea, despite the decriminalisation of abortion in 2021, women continue to face barriers accessing treatment. Laws surrounding this matter remain unclear, the state has failed to provide guidance and abortion pills have not been legalised leaving women uncertain about their rights.¹³⁰

Abortion was decriminalised for doctors in South Korea in 2021. In 2023 the country passed the Protected Birth Bill which promotes anonymous births and adoption or orphanage care as solutions to unregistered births and unwanted pregnancies. However, women's rights groups in South Korea have raised concerns that the bill does not address underlying reasons for unregistered births, including lack of access to safe abortions, poor sexuality education,

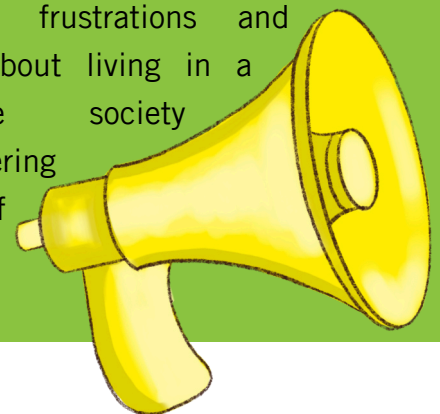
inadequate support services for pregnant women, and stigma that single mothers face.¹³¹

Furthermore, South Korea continues to block access to abortion services. In May 2024 courts rejected an appeal to unblock the website of Women on Web (WoW), a nongovernmental organization that provides information on sexual and reproductive health and rights. The website had been blocked in 2019 due to claims that it connected women in need of abortion pills, not legal in the country, to overseas pharmacists.¹³²

PIONEERING ACTIVISTS:

4B MOVEMENT

4B is a digital movement that originated in South Korea in 2019 and aims to serve as opposition to the country's patriarchal society and pro-natalist policies. 4B refers to *bihon* (marriage), *bichulsan* (childbirth), *biyeonae* (romance) and *bisekseu* (sexual relationships), which members refuse to engage in. It serves as a platform for women to vent their frustrations and concerns about living in a conservative society while fostering a sense of solidarity.





AMNESTY CAMPAIGN

TRANS ACTIVIST MUST NOT BE DEPORTED

Lai Ke was convicted of using “forged” documents to travel from China to Canada via Hong Kong in June 2023.

She is due to be released from serving a prison sentence in Hong Kong and is at risk of being deported to mainland China.

Lai Ke was a vocal advocate for transgender rights in China alongside her partner, who, according to friends, was imprisoned in 2023 for her own activism and transgender identity.

Lai was convicted in Hong Kong on 16 June last year and sentenced to 15 months in prison, which she served at Siu Lam Psychiatric Centre, a psychiatric detention institution where the Hong Kong authorities usually hold transgender detainees. Her first meeting with a lawyer hired on her behalf was not until 20 July, more than a month after her trial and conviction.

**READ AMNESTY'S
FULL PRESS RELEASE**





SOUTH ASIA.

Deep-rooted social norms and gender biases allow discrimination to persist in South Asia. The region has achieved 63.7% gender parity, ranking as one of the lowest globally.¹³⁶ The patriarchal societies encourage men to be primary

decision makers, while women are expected to take on a subordinate role. The Taliban's rule of Afghanistan is an acute and extreme example of this. Their state of gender apartheid has completely erased women from public life.

ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT.

Afghan women have lost agency in every aspect of their lives in three years of Taliban rule, resulting a ranking of 177 out of 177 countries for women's rights globally¹³⁷.

Use of arbitrary detention, torture and other ill-treatment of women accounts to gender persecution. Women are banned from the workforce. Prior to Taliban rule the salon industry employed over 60,000 women and was hugely important for providing women with safe, women-only spaces.¹³⁸

In late 2022 Taliban authorities banned women from working in international and national non-governmental organisations. Afghan women that took to the streets in protest were met with water cannons, beatings, and arrests.¹³⁹

Removing women's right to work has had significant economic impact, plunging many women into abject poverty.

"...food vouchers offered to pregnant women could not be redeemed due to lack of funds."

Economic crisis in Sri Lanka has prevented pregnant and breastfeeding women from accessing nutrition. Falling incomes, and rising inflation have reduced women's purchasing power, and government-funded programs have also been affected. In 2023, Amnesty found

that government food vouchers offered to pregnant women could not be redeemed due to lack of state funds¹⁴⁰.

A 2022 survey found that only 42% of women in Bangladesh participate in the labour force and only 13% own land.

Women in the Maldives have an even lower labour force participation rate of 34%¹⁴¹. Women dominate stereotypical and socially acceptable sectors such as education and health, while men dominate industries such as mining construction and fisheries.

This ingrained patriarchy is also visible in Nepal, where the primary responsibility of women is care or household work. According to the ILO, women carried out 85% of daily unpaid care work, a total of 29 million hours a day compared to five million hours spent by men. Moreover, inequitable inheritance rights hinder women's ability to access and control resources, while limitations on mobility and their low decision-making power also impact their productivity potential.

Women's unpaid labour contributes to around 7.5% of India's economy. Indian women spend an estimated 150 million workdays a year fetching water, and this is holding them back from paid employment. The government is trying to combat this by improving water infrastructure. By January 2024, it said it had provided piped water to nearly 74% of rural households¹⁴².

"...Asia accounts for approximately 75% of the garment industry workforce"

The continent of Asia accounts for approximately 75% of the garment industry global workforce and is a key point of entry for women in the workplace. In this region, Afghanistan has the highest share of women in the industry at 80%, followed by Sri Lanka at 70%. Wage inequality in the sector is the highest in Pakistan at 65%, followed by India 35%¹⁴³. Sexual harassment and violence are prevalent in the garment industry and the COVID-19 pandemic worsened the issue due to heightened tension, women's loss of bargaining power at home and workers being confined to dormitories and unable to escape abusers.¹⁴⁴



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GLOBAL CAMPAIGN



RECOGNISE GENDER APARTHEID

Gender apartheid must be recognised as a crime under international law in order to strengthen efforts to combat institutionalised regimes of systematic oppression and domination imposed on the grounds of gender.

The concept of Gender Apartheid was first articulated by Afghan women human rights and feminist defenders in response to the subjugation of women and girls under the Taliban in the 1990s. It has since become widely used and discussed, especially since 2021 when the Taliban regained control of the country.

"Today we are joining the calls of courageous trailblazers, including women of Afghanistan, Iran and beyond, who have led the way in demanding recognition of gender apartheid in international law"

Agnès Callamard,
Amnesty International Secretary General

**READ AMNESTY'S
FULL PRESS RELEASE**



POLITICS & JUSTICE.

Bangladesh is one of few countries in the world to have had continuous female leadership for over 30 years. Sheikh Hasina (Prime Minister since 2009) and Khaleda Zia (former Prime Minister) highlight the presence of women at the highest political levels.

Despite this, 69% of Bangladeshis still believe that men make better political leaders. Bangladesh has reserved 50 seats for women in the national parliament, out of 350 seats, approximately 14.3%.

"...only 8% of parliamentary seats in Sri Lanka were held by women in 2021, and only 5% in 2023"

Sri Lanka had 8% of parliamentary seats held by women 2021, and only 5% in 2023, reflecting a worsening gender imbalance in leadership.

Voting is a constitutional right for all adults in Pakistan, but women are regularly discouraged to take part in elections. In some of the most

conservative constituencies, political party officials and local elders have broadcast messages urging women not to vote and even physically prevented them from entering polling stations.

"10 Million more men than women registered to vote in Pakistan's 2024 election."

The impact of this can be seen in the February 2024 election where ten million more men than women had registered to vote. This is a significant gap in voter power, especially as women make up nearly 50% of the population¹⁵².

Pakistan passed the Transgender Persons Act in 2018 and it was considered a positive step for queer rights. The law protected the definition of a transgender person and access to legal self-determination. Disappointingly, in May 2023, the government ruled that sections of the Act do not conform with their interpretation of Islamic principles¹⁵³.

They said that it could result in women's sexual assault as it 'makes it easy for men

to gain access' to spaces intended for women. The ruling fuels a dangerous narrative that vilifies trans people, putting their lives at risk. This is part of a continued attack on the trans community - Pakistan has the highest rate of trans people murdered in Asia. Between October 2021 and September 2022

there were reportedly 18 individuals killed.

In November 2022 the government banned Joyland, an award-winning Pakistani film with a trans leading role, due to its "highly objectionable material".¹⁵⁴

GENDER BASED VIOLENCE.

The Taliban are responsible for severe GBV against women in Afghanistan.

"...women detained... have been subject to beatings, whippings and electrocutions."

Women detained for 'moral crimes' or for participation in protests have been subjected to violence such as beatings, whipping and electrocutions¹⁴⁵.

The Taliban disputes these allegations of gender persecution, claiming they are complying with Shariah law and 'Afghan culture'. They are unwilling to hold members to account for crimes.

In February 2023 two Taliban members allegedly raped a woman and her two daughters, and the incident was caught on camera¹⁴⁶. The Taliban has not

acknowledged or punished the perpetrators. They have also removed protections available to women by dissolving the institutional framework of support for GBV survivors previously in place¹⁴⁷.

Taliban rule has further violated women's freedom of movement and expression due to requirements that women stay at home unless necessary, travel with a male chaperone and adhere to a strict dress code.

India opposed petitions to criminalise marital rape saying that it would be "excessively harsh". In October 2024 the Supreme Court acknowledged that a man does not have the right to force sex with their wife, but believed there was already sufficient laws to protect women from sexual violence. This is a disappointing ruling as recent surveys indicate that one in 25 Indian women experience sexual violence at the hands of their husbands¹⁴⁸.

Women in Bangladesh are also at risk of violence and a shocking 54% of women have experienced physical and sexual abuse at least once in their lifetime¹⁴⁹. In late 2022 Bangladesh finally repealed the discriminatory provisions of its Evidence Act which questioned rape survivors on their ‘character evidence,’ including sexual history, during trials.

However, activists have expressed concern that there is still scope for judicial discretion in allowing character-related evidence.

So-called ‘honour killings’ are a concern. In Pakistan an 18-year-old girl was murdered in November 2023 after villager elders called for her death due to a picture was shared on social media, later discovered to have been doctored¹⁵⁰.

Pakistan reported over 384 instances of honour killings in 2022 alone. However, convictions in cases of GBV remain low, at 1-2.5%¹⁵¹.

384 instances of ‘honour based killings’ in Pakistan in 2022.	“Excessively Harsh” How some of those opposing calls to make illegal marital rape in India described the proposed criminalisation..	1 in 25 women in India suffer sexual violence at the hands of their husbands.
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HEALTH & EDUCATION.

Prevalence of natural disasters impacts access to health and education for women and girls.

Nepal was hit by several earthquakes in 2023, causing damage to 47 health facilities and disrupting critical services such as maternal care. Furthermore, 898 school buildings were damaged and education severely impacted.

“Afghanistan restricts access to education past the age of 12.”

Afghanistan is now the only country in the world that restricts girls access to

PIONEERING ACTIVISTS: RUKSHANA MEDIA

Zahra Joya, an Afghan journalist, created Rukshana Media in November 2020 in memory of Rukhshana, a young woman stoned to death in 2015 for having fled with a lover after a forced marriage.

Joya runs the outlet while in exile in the United Kingdom. Rukshana Media focuses on stories by and about Afghan women. It aims to give voice, dignity and support to the women of Afghanistan living under the Taliban who are determined not to be silenced.



education past the age of 12¹⁵⁵. Banning girls from education will have long-term ramifications such as a lack of woman healthcare professionals. This will inevitably further impede women's access to healthcare, which is already limited due to traditional aversions to women seeking medical assistance from male doctors.

Child marriage has a negative impact on the health and education of girls. South Asia accounts for nearly half the global number of child brides and India alone accounts for one third¹⁵⁶. Bangladesh has the highest prevalence of child brides in the region with over half of girls married before 18. In Nepal a third of girls are married before 18 and the government has tried to combat the issue by raising the legal age for marriage to 20 (or 18 with parental consent), but there is evidence this is not implemented or adhered to.

In India, over one million traditional, religious and community leaders participated in a UNICEF program working to end child marriage. With the support of faith leaders, the state of Odisha has prohibited child marriages in temples and religious festivals. Also, 28% of the 51,313 villages in the state have now declared themselves 'child marriage-free'.

There are significant drop-out rates among students after they have married, with very few girls continuing in education.

Education of Nepalese girls is further impacted by parental bias displayed in some rural communities where son's education is favoured over daughters, who are expected to carry out roles in the household. Girls are sent to government schools while boys are sent to boarding schools.

"Menstruating girls face stigma and discrimination."

Harmful social and cultural norms around periods lead to girls facing stigma and discrimination. In some communities menstruating girls are seen as dirty or untouchable, restricting their movement and access to spaces. Traditions prevail that keep menstruating women from enter places of worship, and keep them isolated.

REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS.

The Indian Supreme Court ruled in 2022 that all women, regardless of marital status, can obtain abortions up to 24 weeks into their pregnancies. The ruling came following a petition brought by a 25-year-old single woman who had been in a consensual relationship and was 22 weeks pregnant. This was an important step forward in acknowledging that single or unmarried women also have sex and are entitled to appropriate support.

In Sri Lanka abortion is criminalised unless it is "in good faith for the purpose of saving the life of the woman"¹⁵⁹. Unsafe abortions are responsible for up to 13% of maternal deaths, but despite

The taboo means that education of menstruation is poor. In Central and Southern Asia, only 39% of schools provide menstrual hygiene education. In Bangladesh, just over half of schoolgirls knew about menstruation before their first period¹⁵⁷.

However, in Nepal's 2021/22 Ministry of Education budget, more than \$35 million was allocated for free distribution of menstrual sanitary napkins for female students.¹⁵⁸

this, religious groups have led strong opposition to any amendments to current regulations¹⁶⁰.

In Bangladesh abortion is similarly only permissible to save a woman's life and is criminalised in all other circumstances. However, a preference or favouritism of sons is prevalent, and so some parents choose to undergo sex-selective abortions¹⁶¹.



SOUTH-EAST ASIA & OCEANIA.

The Southeast Asia and Oceania region has extraordinary diversity in religion, culture, and history. The region includes countries that excel and those that fall behind in terms of gender equity.

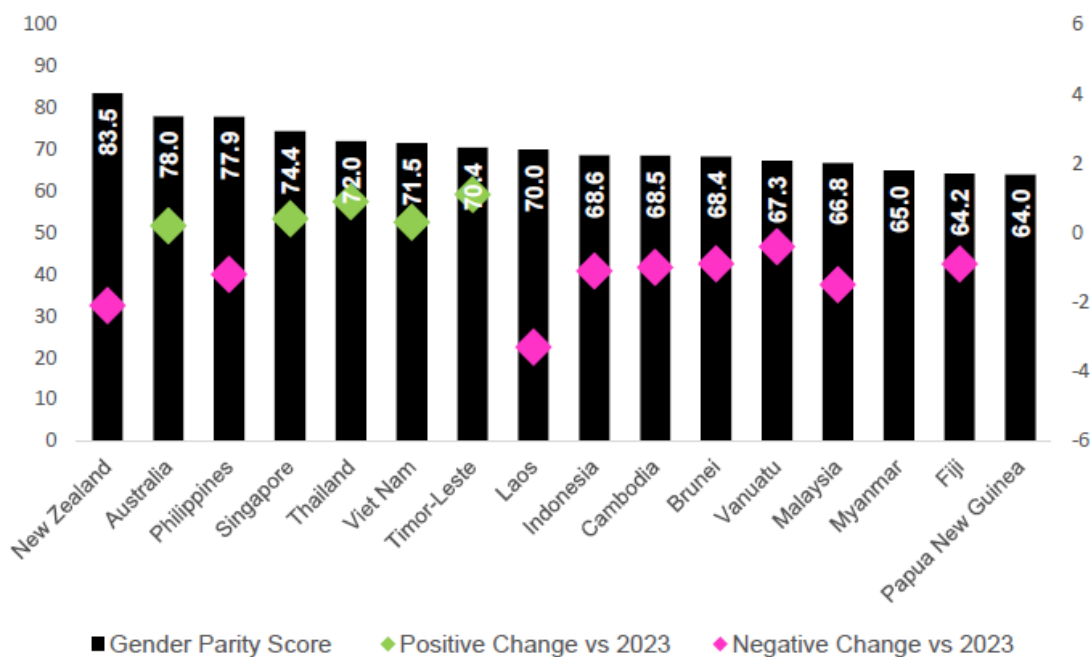
The Philippines surpasses many Western countries, such as Australia, the USA, and Switzerland, in narrowing the gender

gap in education, economic participation, political empowerment, and health outcomes.

In contrast, Myanmar ranks in the bottom 25% of countries regarding gender equity¹⁶². Throughout Southeast Asia and Oceania, political empowerment remains one of the most challenging areas for achieving gender equality.

ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT.

Figure 11: Gender Parity Index and year-on-year change for South Asian and Pacific countries. (Source: The Global Gender Gap Report 2024, World Economic Forum)



The pay gap is influenced by factors such as part-time work or career breaks to care for children, as well as gender discrimination, as seen in differences across countries. The gender wage gap results from various factors, including disparities in seniority between men and women, the lower average pay in sectors where women are more concentrated, differences in working hours, and discrimination¹⁶³.

In 2024, New Zealand reported a gender wage gap of 9.2%, while Australia had a gap of 9.9%.¹⁶⁴ The Global Gender Gap Reports do not provide gender wage gap data for countries outside the OECD. Although precise data for Southeast Asia is unavailable, specific country data is provided for Thailand, Indonesia, and Vietnam in 2017¹⁶⁵. In that year, Thailand had a gender wage gap of 11%, Vietnam 12%, and Indonesia 20%.

POLITICS & JUSTICE.

Women remain underrepresented in political life across the region. Although there are more women in leadership roles now than in previous decades, progress has been slow. The implementation of gender quotas has increased women's participation in national political offices, and initiatives in civil society, such as affirmative action and gender-sensitive policies, have supported women's leadership in grassroots organisations.

financial resources, state repression, and sexism. In addition, cultural norms and economic inequalities continue to be enduring obstacles that are slow to change.

Violence against women in politics is also prevalent, with 88% of 45 women leaders interviewed reporting experiences of violence and harassment due to their political roles. This creates an environment where women leaders struggle to access power and have their voices heard.¹⁶⁶

"69% of women political leaders still face barriers."

However, 69% of women political leaders still face barriers to leadership, with the top three challenges being a lack of

Climate change has had a particularly detrimental impact on the Pacific Islands, who have called for wealthier nations to take responsibility and protect those most affected. Grassroots feminist organisations have relentlessly campaigned on the issue, but the unique perspective that women have on natural

resources remains overlooked and undervalued.

In December 2022 a group of 18 countries, led by Vanuatu, took climate injustice to the world's highest court. In March 2023 UN member states unanimously approved the Resolution for an International Court of Justice Advisory Opinion on Climate Change and Human Rights, paving the way for transformative climate action globally.

A cohort of feminist groups is working to transform the landscape for disability rights in the Solomon Islands and globally. Thanks partly to their activism, in June 2023, the Solomon Islands became the 187th country to ratify the Convention on the Rights of Disabled Person. Now, local disability rights groups are continuing their advocacy to ensure the treaty translates into meaningful change for Solomon Islanders with disabilities.

PIONEERING ACTIVISTS:

PIFA4CJ

Pacific Islands Feminist Alliance for Climate Justice is made up of seven organisations and draws on youth, disability and queer movements, and disaster response work.



Their purpose is to shift the power between “donor” and “recipient” for Pacific Island women to determine resourcing priorities. The alliances grants protect watersheds, document women’s traditional and ancestral knowledge, establish community planning mechanisms for climate emergencies, and build the capacity of feminist organisations to respond to the urgency of community needs in the face of increasing climate impacts.

Several cyclones were experienced in 2023, and the alliance supported intersectional women-led responses including the building of seawalls, supporting disabled women to lead their communities’ need assessments and young women brought each other reproductive health resources.

GENDER BASED VIOLENCE.

WHO research has found that the Southeast Asia region ranks second highest in rates of sexual violence, with approximately 33% of women affected¹⁶⁷. (Note that the region within this research is only a part of the region discussed here).

"76,000 cases of violence against women and children were reported in the Philippines in 2020."

In 2020 the Philippine National Police reported over 76,000 cases of violence against women and children.

In Australia, 27% of women have experienced intimate partner violence, which is lower than the global average¹⁶⁸. However, one in five Australian women over the age of 15 will experience sexual violence, and Indigenous women face

disproportionately high rates of sexual violence compared to non-Indigenous women, with three in five Indigenous women over the age of 15 affected.¹⁶⁹

Since the military coup in February 2021, there has been a continued degradation of women's rights in Myanmar. The recent mandatory enlistment of women in the army, including pregnant women and young mothers, poses serious health risks and increases the potential for GBV.

Feminist organisations have denounced this policy, stating, "women who will be forcibly recruited will be exposed to rape, gang rape, sexual slavery, and other brutal forms of sexual violence, as well as conflict-related sexual violence, that the military has long perpetrated"¹⁷⁰.

The forced conscription of women into the military highlights the urgent need for international attention and action to protect women's rights and safety in Myanmar.

Digital repression has also escalated in Myanmar, particularly affecting women activists. The government employs various methods, including internet shutdowns,



online censorship, surveillance, and social media manipulation and disinformation. Specific gendered tactics, such as 'doxing', abusive messages with sexist language, leaking intimate videos and images without consent, sexualised disinformation, and threats of sexual violence, rape, and death, further exacerbate the situation.

These tactics are used to instil fear and subject women to societal shame.

HEALTH & EDUCATION.

Education and support services for menstruating girls is not adequate. In Papua New Guinea a survey of six provinces found that 53% of schools taught menstrual hygiene management as part of the school curriculum, but only 5% taught this to both girls and boys. Fiji has looked to address this and announced a budget allocation for a menstrual product provision scheme in schools in 2022.¹⁷¹

"Technology is transforming education... enabling distance learning and better access."

Similarly, in Thailand, state-backed digital violence is used to silence women and LGBTQI+ activists. Since the 2014 military coup, activists have faced technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TfGVB), including gendered harassment, the spread of disinformation, and hateful speech.

Technology is transforming education and with 400 million internet users in the region, technology enables distance learning in remote areas and provides better access to the Internet for people with disabilities. According to a UNESCO report, while gender does not significantly influence basic digital skills, it plays a major role in advanced skills like programming. For instance, in Singapore, only four women for every 10 men can code a computer program.

Additionally, there is a notable rural-urban divide, so initiatives such as 'Connect to Learn' empower women and girls in rural schools by enhancing their English language skills and improve secondary school retention rates, essential for narrowing these gaps¹⁷².

In Indonesia, regulation was passed in 2022 providing for personal choice in school uniforms, but many local

regulations require girls to wear a hijab in school and refuse to abide by the new national regulation. Local regulations have been enforced through bullying and intimidation. In August 2023, a teacher in an East Javan school shaved the heads of 14 schoolgirls for not wearing the ciput (a knitted head covering) under the hijab.

Another example of this is in West Java where a family of Sunda Wiwitan believers had to withdraw their daughter from school in 2023, and ultimately move away from the area, because of bullying from teachers over her refusal to wear the hijab.¹⁷³

REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS.

Women rights activists in the Philippines have fought to decriminalise abortion for many years, utilising evidence of unsafe abortions that women must resort to. The influence of Christian groups and conservative lawmakers has prevented any progress on the issue.

In November 2023 the Philippine Congress threatened to defund the national human rights commission due to its support of abortions. It was argued by

senators that the commission be defunded unless it demonstrated a “strong stance” against abortion.

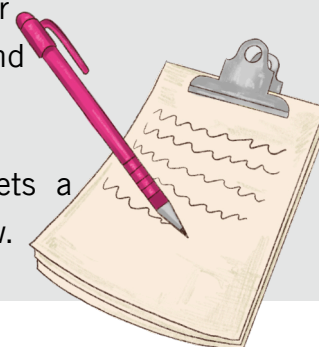
In response, the commission backtracked on its original position and has declared that it is “against abortion, save for extreme circumstances”¹⁷⁴. This is a worrying setback in a difficult fight for the right to access safe abortions in the Philippines.

LEGAL PROGRESS: MARRIAGE EQUALITY

On 27 March 2024 Thailand passed the marriage equality bill, granting LGBTQI+ couples equal rights regarding marriage, child adoption, inheritance etc.

Thailand is the first country in Southeast Asia to legalise marriage for LGBTQI+ couples. This landmark moment is a reward for the tireless work of activists, civil society organisations and lawmakers who have fought for this victory’.

This move promotes equality and inclusiveness and sets a powerful example for other countries in the region to follow.





WOMEN ON THE FRONT LINES.

MINA ROCES

A PhD graduate from The University of Michigan, Mina Roces is a Professor of History at University of New South Wales. She is the author of five books, including her most recent publications: *The Filipino Migration Experience: Global Agents of Change* (2021), and *Gender in Southeast Asia* (2022). Mina has also co-edited several anthologies on the topic of women in Asia, book series editor for the Sussex Library of Asian and Asian American Studies Book Series and leader of the UNSW Research Cluster on Imperial, Colonial and Transnational Histories. In 2016 she was elected fellow of the Australian Academy of the Humanities. We asked her to share her thoughts on women's rights in the region:

“Among the most pressing issues for women in the region is that of LGBT rights in countries which experience authoritarian regimes and/or governments that link sexualities with morality and national identity.

States such as Indonesia, Myanmar and Singapore police the sexualities of individuals in the name of preserving national identities. For example, the political leaders of Singapore and Malaysia, have all claimed that non-normative sexualities are a Western import that threaten “Asian values” and therefore must be expunged in order to protect the Asian heteronormative family (Peletz 2006: 322-24).

In Indonesia state politicians, the press, civil society groups and conservative leaders described LGBT Indonesians as

“products of ‘Western intervention’” and therefore as “foreign” and “politically threatening” (Wijaya 2020: 2-3).

The Malaysian government demonizes LGBT persons as “traitors to the nation” and in Cambodia LGBT persons are represented as threats to the ‘traditional’ Khmer culture.

In places like Myanmar, which is under military rule, it is difficult to organize protests even though some LGBT groups have braved arrest including one carrying a sign that declared: “I want a relationship, not a dictatorship” (Hylain and Fisbein (2021).

Hence, LGBT resistance movements suffer from state discourses and the reduction of democratic spaces to advocate for their rights. Conservative

forces including religious leaders also “seek to enhance their public persona as the nation’s moral guardian, demanding the exclusion of queer people from national identity and belonging” (Wijaya 2020: 151).

Southeast Asian feminists have already theorized cultural constructions of the feminine and proposed alternative role models. However, activists still need to launch campaigns to alter the association of virility with masculine ideals. So far, the fight for LGBT rights has been a battle for the inclusion of alternative sexualities, rather than a plea for the reform of hegemonic masculinities. The hegemonic ideal that men are naturally lustful and that women are devoid of desire justifies men’s adultery and society’s tolerance for this behavior and its consequences, including the abandonment of women, while demanding that women be chaste at all costs (even though men attempt seduction to fulfill their own masculine ideals).

One of the cultural constructions of the feminine that activists have not yet been able to seriously contest is the ideal woman as beauty queen.

It is necessary to dismantle the link between physical beauty and female virtue and morality because it motivates women to focus on their physical appearance as a priority rather than developing their leadership or intellectual

talents. This is radical because the woman as scholar/intellectual has never been in the purview of definitions of the feminine in contemporary Southeast Asia (except in pre-colonial Philippines where the babaylan or pre-Hispanic priestess was the religious leader and healer, considered a wise woman past menopause).

Finally, there still needs to be a critique of the ‘marriage imperative’ (Boellstorff 2005) or to be more accurate, the heteronormative ‘marriage imperative’.

The cultural view that adulthood is achieved only with heterosexual marriage marginalizes both men and women who feel pressured to marry simply to avoid family shame or to be socially accepted.

Although same sex-marriage is being debated in some countries, even if it is passed it will still endorse the institution of marriage. In Indonesia such a belief (heterosexual marriage) is seen as intrinsic to one’s civic duty. There needs to be some cultural campaign that will underscore the view that marriage is not the only rite of passage to adulthood.



**DIGITAL &
ONLINE.**

The digital age has brought opportunities for connection and empowerment but also new risks.

As online spaces grow, so do threats to gender equality and safety. Women's rights activists face increasing digital violence, including harassment and doxing, aimed at silencing them.

DIGITAL GENDER GAP.

Cyber-activism allows women to create online communities where messages can be spread across country borders.

Increased access to social media has led to mobilisation of women's rights movements on a global scale. Notable transnational mobilisation seen in recent years include: #SlutWalk, a 2011 protest against victim blaming culture; #MeToo, a sexual harassment and assault awareness campaign started in 2017; and #BringBackOurGirls which demanded the return on schoolgirls kidnapped by Boko Haram in Nigeria.

"In sub-Saharan Africa women are 37% less likely to use mobile internet"

Digital inclusion offers a pathway to women's empowerment, but progress remains slow. While digital literacy and access can unlock economic opportunities, the risks of digital violence persist. This section examines the threats of gendered digital violence and the impact of exclusion from digital spaces, calling for global cooperation to create safer, equitable online spaces.

While online spaces can give feminist campaigns global reach, it is important to recognise that there is a gap in access to these spaces. Often access to online spaces can be limited to a privileged few. Women from rural areas or impoverished women can be under-represented in online campaigns. For example, in Sub-Saharan Africa women are 37% less likely than men to use mobile internet.¹⁷⁵

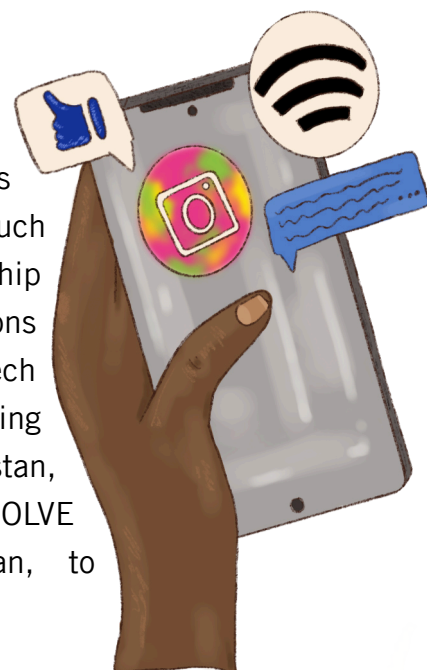
In South Asia, although the region leads in the number of online users, adolescent boys are nearly twice as likely to own a smartphone than girls and girls are 35% less likely to possess basic digital skills.¹⁷⁶

The digital gender gap means that some women can have their voices excluded from online movements. Literacy, affordability, perceived relevance and digital skills are the main barriers to closing the gap. Addressing the digital gap is essential to ensuring women have

enhanced access to information, work opportunities, and the ability to take part in activism.

There are some schemes in place to improve women's digital inclusion. In Uganda the World Bank collaborated with several organisations in 2021 to launch a women's digital literacy and inclusion pilot among refugees. Participants reported a fourfold increase in basic digital skills. Over 90% of the women reported owning digital devices, as well as improved income-generating opportunities.

In South Asia, UNICEF supports several schemes such as mentorship programs, hackathons held by Women in Tech in Maldives, e-learning passport in Pakistan, and the UNISOLVE platform in Bhutan, to name a few.¹⁷⁷



DIGITAL GENDER VIOLENCE.

Women's rights defenders often face digital violence including sexualised and misogynistic harassment. They are vulnerable to 'doxing' (where private information is shared online) which can discourage them from continuing their activism.

Research indicates that women's rights defenders, and activists are at high risk of cyber-attacks and often struggle to recover from or protect themselves against these threats.¹⁷⁸ Gendered disinformation is used to silence critics and exclude women from online discourses.

The increased power of anti-rights transnational movements in Africa has resulted in an increase in gendered disinformation. This poses a danger to

many social groups and has a destabilising potential for society.

In 2024 there were over 15 countries in Africa holding elections, and there are fears that the increase in digital disinformation has threatened women's political participation.

"Martha Karua was targeted... for her 'unwomanly' role in politics."

Kenyan vice-presidential candidate Martha Karua was targeted online for being a single woman and for her

'unwomanly' role in politics. Winnie Odinga, one of the daughters of a Kenyan Presidential candidate has been harassed online and accused of being gay because she is an unmarried woman. Former Nigerian First Lady Patience Jonathan faced a similar disinformation campaign

which accused her of not being the biological mother of her children.¹⁷⁹

These are a few examples of recent campaigns aimed at driving policy in the name of 'culture' and 'family'.

VIRTUAL REALITY RISKS.

Virtual reality (VR) games pose a potential danger to children's safety, particularly due to users anonymity, which increases the likelihood of abuse with minimal risk of prosecution.

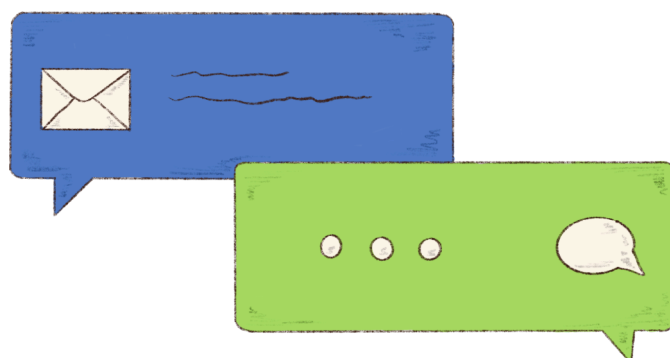
In the UK alone, there were eight reported instances of VR use in child sexual abuse-related crimes in 2022. In 2024, one particularly alarming case involved the avatar of a girl under 16 being sexually assaulted by a group of men in a VR game (The Guardian, 2024).

The Child Protection and Abuse Investigation Lead from the National Police Chiefs Council has warned that "the metaverse creates a gateway for predators to commit horrific crimes against children".

Despite these emerging threats, current legislation does not yet cover VR-based sexual abuse. This investigation marks the first reported case of "virtual rape" in the UK, allegedly occurring in the metaverse.

Some proactive measures are being taken to protect children. The XR Safety Initiative, for example, is developing a child safety framework aimed at safeguarding minors in Extended Reality (XR) environments (ref).

However, regulations are struggling to keep up with the rapid development of new technologies. As technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI) and XR advance and converge, they are increasingly exploited by offenders. Urgent, coordinated global action is essential if we are to prevent the growing wave of abuse.



WHAT CAN YOU DO?



1 - JOIN US

Follow Amnesty Feminists on social media, join our whatsapp group, and sign up to our mailing list to get involved with our ongoing work. This is how we communicate demonstrations and protests, new actions and other ways to join in with the fight for Women's Rights globally.



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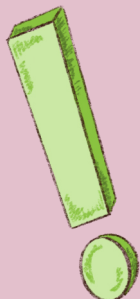
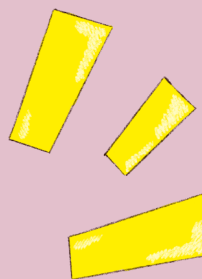
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If you're interested in Country specific work, get in touch with Amnesty International UK's Country Coordinators at www.amnesty.org.uk/cc

2 - LEARN



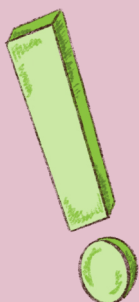
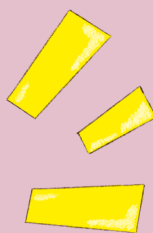
Use these resources to learn more about women's rights globally. This report closes with pages of sources and references we used - pick a few, and read them in full. They are remarkable, thorough, and engaging pieces of work.

Amnesty International UK has a host of free educational resources, including a large library of online courses on a wide range of Human Rights topics.

Complete a course - or several courses - at <https://academy.amnesty.org/learn>



3 - ACT



Keep an eye on our whatsapp group and socials, and join us taking action. Amnesty International is founded on the principle that individual people's small acts of solidarity and defiance can be brought together to make extraordinary, powerful change. Be a part of it.

There are actions throughout this pack, which are focused on the regions where they are found. Taking these actions adds your voice to thousands of others.

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