

# WHERE ARE THE WOMEN? GENDER EQUALITY IN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION IN ASIA-PACIFIC

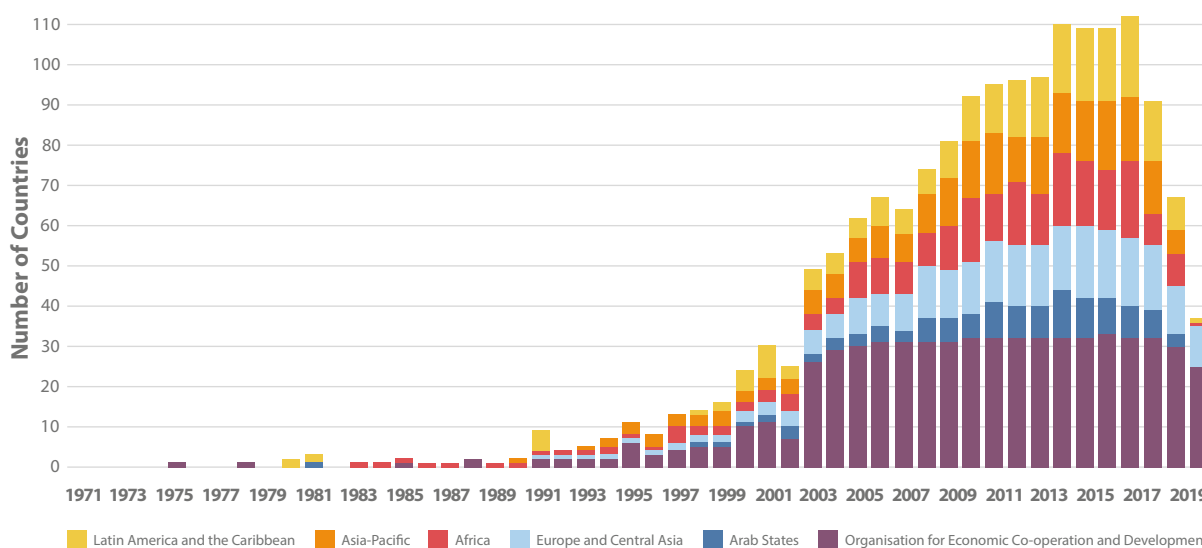


**G**ender equality in public administration has improved in recent years, but there is still a long way to go. Women’s participation in the civil service approaches parity at 46 percent on average across 139 countries and territories.<sup>1</sup> Yet, significant variation across countries and regions means that only one-third (33 percent) of countries have reached this goal. At decision-making levels of the civil service, women make up only 31 percent of top leadership positions on average. Women are also missing from COVID-19 policy decision-making spaces. Even though women make up 58 percent of employees in health ministries worldwide,<sup>2</sup> they average just 24 percent of COVID-19 task force positions and make up only 18 percent of task force leadership.<sup>3</sup>

This brief provides an overview on women’s participation and leadership in public administration and the gendered dimensions of the COVID-19 response in the Asia-Pacific region. Consistent with global trends, women’s participation in the region is near parity in the civil service overall, but women remain severely underrepresented at all decision-making levels in public administration.

## Gender equality in public administration in Asia-Pacific<sup>4</sup>

**FIGURE 1**  
Availability of gender-disaggregated data on public administration employment between 1970 and 2020



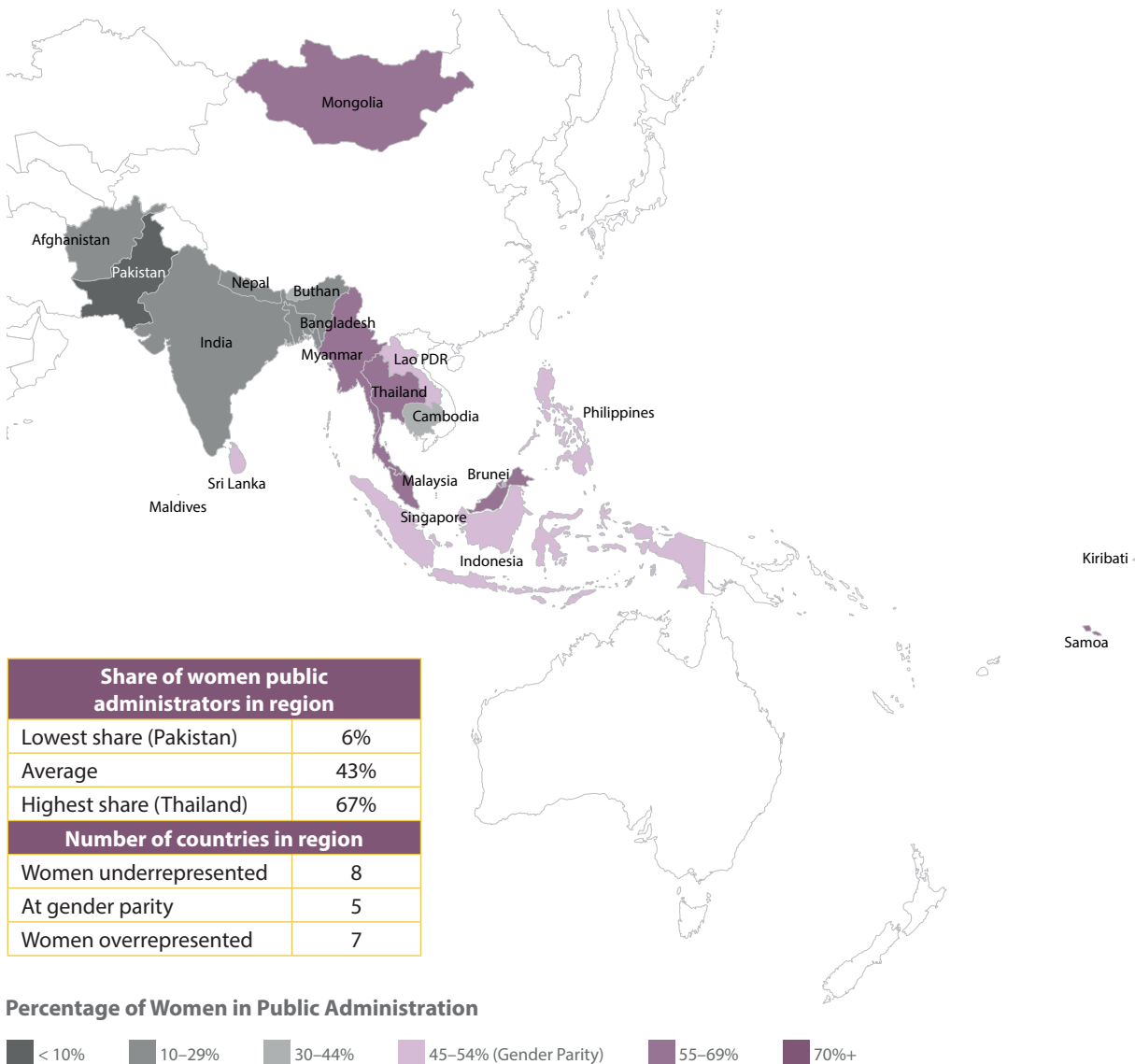
**Source:** Gender Parity in Civil Service (Gen-PaCS) dataset, December 2020.

1 Hughes, Melanie M., Müge Kökten Finkel, and Brianna Howell. 2021. "Gender Parity in Civil Service (Gen-PaCS) Dataset."  
 2 Ibid.  
 3 UNDP-UN Women-UPITT. 2021. "COVID-19 Global Gender Response Tracker Task Force Dataset." Living database, version 2 (November 11, 2021). Accessible at <https://data.undp.org/gendertacker/>.  
 4 Hughes, Melanie M., Müge Kökten Finkel, and Brianna Howell. 2021. "Gender Parity in Civil Service (Gen-PaCS) Dataset."



The availability of gender-disaggregated data has improved over time in every region of the world. In the Asia-Pacific region, there are 26 countries or territories with publicly available gender-disaggregated data on public administration (see appendix). All 26 countries have data on overall employment, 17 on decision-making, and 12 countries have ministry-level data. Intersectional data on public administration remains a large gap in the region: data on age is available in only six countries, race/ethnicity data in only four countries, and data on disability status is available for only the Philippines.

**FIGURE 2**  
**Percentage of women’s participation across all levels of public administration**



**Note:** The map indicates the overall share of women in public administration for countries in the region using the most recent year of data available. Data prior to 2015 are excluded. The depiction and use of boundaries, geographic names and related data shown on the map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations, including UNDP, or UN Member States.

**Source:** Gender Parity in Civil Service (Gen-PaCS) dataset, December 2020.

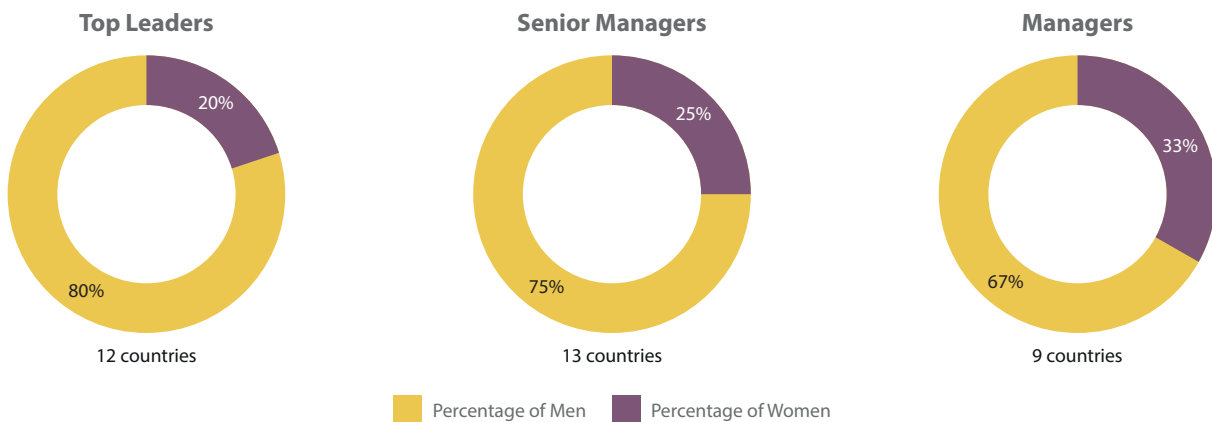


## Women's participation in public administration

Of the 20 countries in the Asia-Pacific region with recent available data,<sup>5</sup> women account for 43 percent of civil servants in the region at large – just below the threshold of gender parity.<sup>6</sup> At the country level, five countries reach gender parity: Indonesia, Lao PDR, Philippines, Samoa, and Sri Lanka. Each of these countries has consistently reached gender parity for all years with available data since 2015. Women are consistently overrepresented in seven countries: Brunei, Maldives, Malaysia, Mongolia, Myanmar, Singapore, and Thailand. In fact, women account for more than 60 percent of public administrators in Maldives, Mongolia, and Thailand. Despite these overall high rates of women's participation in the region, women are still underrepresented in eight countries. This includes Nepal and Pakistan where women make up only 11 and 6 percent of public administrators, respectively.

## Women in public administration decision-making positions

**FIGURE 3**  
Share of women among public administration decision-making positions



**Note:** Data is displayed for most recent year available. Data prior to 2015 is excluded.

**Source:** Gender Parity in Civil Service (Gen-PaCS) dataset, December 2020.

Women are underrepresented at all levels of decision-making in public administration in the Asia-Pacific region. The gender disparity is most noticeable at the highest levels of decision-making. In these top leadership positions, women make up only 20 percent of public administrators across 12 countries with available data. Myanmar is the only country in the region where parity is reached among top leaders in the civil service. Women fare slightly better at the next highest decision-making level of senior managers. Across the 13 countries with available data, women average 25 percent of senior management positions in public administration. Only the Philippines and Sri Lanka come close to achieving parity, with 42 and 40 percent women senior managers, respectively. At both of the highest decision-making levels, Nepal stands out for its lack of women's inclusion. Women in Nepal account for just 4 percent of top leaders and 5 percent of senior managers. Women overall are much better represented at the managerial level of the public service, the lowest decision-making level considered, where they account for 33 percent of civil servants. At this level, women are overrepresented in Malaysia (66 percent) and achieve parity in Brunei (46 percent). The seven other countries with managerial data all have an underrepresentation of women, though Afghanistan lags furthest behind with women making up only 15 percent of managers in the civil service.

<sup>5</sup> Countries with data from prior to 2015 were excluded from this analysis. See appendix to review which countries are included in this analysis.

<sup>6</sup> Parity is defined as an equal number of men and women, however small deviations from 50 percent women and men are expected, in some cases simply because of an odd number of positions. This brief therefore considers parity to have been reached once there are 45 percent women, and women's overrepresentation begins at 55 percent.



## COVID-19 leadership and policy response in Asia-Pacific<sup>7</sup>

COVID-19 task forces are any executive branch institution that was created by the national government in response to the pandemic. There are 67 COVID-19 task forces across 45 countries/territories in the Asia-Pacific, including 38 task forces with data on membership and 66 task forces with leadership data.

## Women's representation on national COVID-19 task forces<sup>8</sup>

Women make up only 15 percent of task force members in the region, 9 percent below the global average of 24 percent. No task force in the region achieves gender parity, and there are just two task forces dominated by women, both from Bhutan. Notably, seven countries have at least one task force with no women at all, including in Myanmar, Nepal, Papua New Guinea, and Thailand. Consistent with global trends, women are better represented on task forces with a public health focus (27 percent) than economic or multi-sectoral task forces (14 percent). Though Fiji's task forces have limited data on membership, it is evident that the country had a gender-sensitive approach to the pandemic response. The COVID-19 Gender Response Working Group, created by Fiji's Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation, developed a report with policy recommendations based on a rapid gender analysis of the effects of the pandemic on Fijian women and girls.

## Gender sensitive COVID-19 policy response<sup>9</sup>

The UNDP/UN Women COVID-19 Global Gender Response Tracker monitors policy measures taken by governments in response to COVID-19 and analyzes them with a gender lens. The tracker contains 805 measures in the Asia-Pacific region from 43 countries/territories, including 264 measures (33 percent) identified as gender sensitive. Measures addressing violence against women are the most prevalent in the region with 176 distinct measures, with 65 percent of these targeted at strengthening or expanding existing services for survivors, such as hotlines, shelters, or judicial response. Notably, there have only been 17 measures taken by 10 countries/territories in the region that tackle unpaid care work. In fact, only 14 percent of all socioeconomic measures in the region were identified as gender sensitive. These include measures such as social protection benefits, like cash or in-kind transfers to women-headed households, and economic measures which target workers from female-dominated sectors, such as textile manufacturing, tourism, or health care. See the box below for details on measures taken by the Philippines Civil Service to adapt to the COVID-19 context.

### Flexible working arrangements in Philippines Civil Service during COVID-19

In response to COVID-19, the Philippines implemented a noteworthy policy for the country's civil service members. In 2020, the Civil Service Commission allowed all civil servants to have alternative working arrangements for the duration of the pandemic, including a work-from home agreement, skeleton workforce, a four-day workweek, and flexible working hours. Employees who were assigned to a skeleton workforce were given hazard pay.<sup>10</sup> Many potentially vulnerable populations were assigned to work from home, including employees younger than age 21 and over age 60, those with health risks, pregnant women, and those in quarantine.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>7</sup> For the most up-to-date information on COVID-19 task forces and policy responses, visit <https://data.undp.org/gendertacker/>.

<sup>8</sup> UNDP-UN Women-UPITT. 2021. "COVID-19 Global Gender Response Tracker Task Force Dataset." Living database, version 2 (November 11, 2021). Accessible at <https://data.undp.org/gendertacker/>.

<sup>9</sup> UNDP-UN Women. 2021. "COVID-19 Global Gender Response Tracker Policy Measures Dataset." Living database, version 3 (November 11, 2021). Accessible at <https://data.undp.org/gendertacker/>.

<sup>10</sup> Republic of the Philippines Civil Service Commission. 2020. "Resolution 200912." <http://www.csc.gov.ph/phocadownload/MC2020/MC18/Resolution%20No.%202000912.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> Republic of the Philippines Civil Service Commission. 2020. "CSC Revises Interim Guidelines on Alternative Work Arrangements in Government." <http://www.csc.gov.ph/new-updates/2020-csc-revises-interim-guidelines-on-alternative-work-arrangements-in-gov%E2%80%99t.html>



## Appendix

### Women's participation in public administration in Asia-Pacific<sup>12</sup>

Country or territory	Percentage of women in public administration overall	Decision-making positions		
		Top leaders (percent)	Senior managers (percent)	Managers (percent)
Afghanistan	22 (2018)	11 (2018)	16 (2018)	15 (2018)
Bangladesh	27 (2017)	–	19 (2017)	26 (2017)
Bhutan	38 (2019)	11 (2019)	14 (2019)	29 (2019)
Brunei	55 (2019)	–	37 (2019)	46 (2019)
Cambodia	41 (2019)	13 (2019)	18 (2019)	–
Fiji	30 (2014)	–	–	–
India	23 (2015)	12 (2016)	–	–
Indonesia	52 (2019)	18 (2019)	14 (2019)	34 (2019)
Kiribati	38 (2015)	–	–	–
Lao PDR	46 (2017)	–	–	–
Malaysia	59 (2019)	–	37 (2019)	66 (2019)
Maldives	61 (2018)	29 (2018)	35 (2018)	35 (2018)
Micronesia	30 (2010)	–	–	–
Mongolia	60 (2018)	–	–	–
Myanmar	59 (2017)	47 (2017)	–	–
Nauru	41 (2011)	–	–	–
Nepal	11 (2015)	4 (2015)	5 (2015)	–
Pakistan	6 (2018)	11 (2018)	17 (2018)	22 (2018)
Philippines	51 (2019)	–	42 (2019)	–
Samoa	53 (2018)	–	–	–
Singapore	56 (2018)	29 (2018)	–	–
Solomon Islands	27 (2009)	–	–	–
Sri Lanka	45 (2016)	33 (2016)	40 (2016)	–
Thailand	67 (2018)	27 (2018)	28 (2018)	28 (2018)
Timor Leste	29 (2013)	–	–	–
Vanuatu	40 (2011)	–	–	–

## Acknowledgments

This regional brief was developed by researchers at the Gender Inequality Research Lab (GIRL) at the University of Pittsburgh: Dr. Müge Kökten Finkel (co-director), Dr. Melanie Hughes (co-director), with thanks for support from student researchers, I Younan An, Francisco Hernandez, Caroline Kimbro, Katrina Lenhart, and Yiyang Sun. Thanks also to Juhie Bhatia (UNDP), Joanna Hill (UNDP), Brianna Howell (UNDP), and to Koh Miyaoi from the Regional Hub for Asia-Pacific (UNDP).



<sup>12</sup> Table displays data for most recent year available.