



Forging and Fostering Peace  
ASEAN Institute for  
Peace and Reconciliation

POLICY RESEARCH:

# Advancing gender-responsive conflict and crisis prevention in ASEAN

POLICY RESEARCH:  
**ADVANCING GENDER-RESPONSIVE  
CONFLICT AND CRISIS PREVENTION  
IN ASEAN**

# ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

|                  |   |
|------------------|---|
| <b>AADMER</b>    | ASEAN Agreement on Disaster Management and Emergency Response               |
| <b>ASEAN</b>     | Association of Southeast Asian nations                                      |
| <b>ASEAN-IPR</b> | ASEAN Institute for Peace and Reconciliation                                |
| <b>BARMM</b>     | Bangsamoro Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao                             |
| <b>BNPT</b>      | National Counter Terrorism Agency (Indonesia)                               |
| <b>CCCW-SBP</b>  | Coordination Centre for Children and Women in the Southern Border Provinces |
| <b>CRS</b>       | Conflict reporting system   |
| <b>CSO</b>       | Civil society organisation  |
| <b>DRR</b>       | Disaster risk reduction   |
| <b>EWER</b>      | Early warning and early response  |
| <b>GBV</b>       | Gender-based violence   |
| <b>GPH</b>       | Government of the Philippines   |
| <b>KII</b>       | Key informant interview   |
| <b>MRC</b>       | Mekong River Commission   |
| <b>NAP</b>       | National action plan  |
| <b>NGO</b>       | Non-governmental organisation   |
| <b>P/CVE</b>     | Preventing and countering violent extremism                                 |
| <b>RPA</b>       | Regional plan of action   |
| <b>RRG</b>       | Religious Rehabilitation Group  |
| <b>SBPs</b>      | Southern Border Provinces   |
| <b>WPS</b>       | Women, peace and security   |

## ABOUT THE PUBLICATION:

This publication is a result of the collaborative efforts and partnership between the ASEAN Institute for Peace and Reconciliation (ASEAN-IPR) and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women). The views expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views and policies of ASEAN-IPR, UN Women, the United Nations or any of its affiliated organisations. The designations employed and the presentation of material do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of UN Women concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city, or area or of its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries. For a list of any errors or omissions found subsequent to the report launch, please visit the ASEAN WPS website and the ASEAN-IPR Website.

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Women, peace and security (WPS) is a priority for the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN),<sup>1</sup> as mandated by the ASEAN Regional Plan of Action (RPA) for WPS. The WPS agenda recognises that women and men often experience conflict and crises differently, and that women are disproportionately affected by gender-based violence (GBV), displacement and economic insecurity during times of conflict and crisis, which can increase vulnerability and affect response and recovery. The WPS agenda calls for states to address the different impacts of these crises on women and men and to support women's roles in promoting and sustaining peace. ASEAN recognises the importance of gender equality and women's roles in peacebuilding for the longstanding stability and prosperity of the Southeast Asian region.

In the face of the cross-border security challenges as well as non-traditional peace and security issues, confronting ASEAN Member States, which affect state stability, human security and social cohesion, this report assesses the gender-responsiveness of existing peace infrastructure. Gender-responsive policy and practice combines the inclusivity of gender perspectives with the operational and practical capacity to address gender inequalities and intersecting forms of discrimination.<sup>2</sup> The report identifies gaps and opportunities for strengthening peace infrastructure or mechanisms to prevent conflicts and crises. It highlights enabling factors and cases of effective and meaningful participation of diverse women, which has facilitated the prevention of conflicts and crises in Southeast Asia.

The report found that while a conducive policy environment is in place to promote greater participation of women in conflict/crisis prevention, there are gaps between policies and their implementation and a need for coordination mechanisms, capacity-building and additional financial and human resources. Some promising good practices that demonstrate gender-responsiveness were identified by the research: 1) Women's leadership in preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) in Indonesia, 2) Women's participation in early-warning community initiatives to enhance protection of women and marginalized groups in the southern Philippines and 3) Multi-stakeholder mechanisms that provide a critical space for women-led subnational conflict resolution in the Southern Border Provinces (SBPs) of Thailand. These cases illustrate how women's meaningful participation in conflict and crisis prevention can diffuse security threats and build and sustain peace.

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1 Joint Statement on Promoting WPS in ASEAN at the 31st ASEAN Summit, November 2017, at [https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/8.-ADOPTION\\_Joint-Statement-on-Promoting-Women-Peace-and-Security-in-ASEANACWC-Endorsed\\_rev2.pdf](https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/8.-ADOPTION_Joint-Statement-on-Promoting-Women-Peace-and-Security-in-ASEANACWC-Endorsed_rev2.pdf).

2 The ASEAN Declaration on Human Rights and other regional normative frameworks and declarations address these forms of discrimination.

Women have a comparative advantage and the flexibility to navigate security challenges and identify concrete conflict prevention/resolution strategies, including detecting early warning signs of conflicts/crises in their communities. However, women often experience unique challenges in participating in or leading conflict/crisis prevention. Traditional gender norms may undermine their confidence and knowledge to engage with security challenges and become agents of change in their communities.<sup>3</sup> Mediation roles have typically been the domain of male leaders. In addition, the historical underrepresentation of women in the security sector has led to gender bias in law enforcement and an emphasis on hard security approaches to preventing conflict and crises. However, if women are economically empowered, given space, and encouraged to take active roles in conflict and crisis prevention, the gains for communities and their social cohesion can be significant. Moreover, emerging good practices, such as the growing recruitment of women into the security sector in ASEAN Member States and the policy commitments of states to promote and implement protection, gender, and inclusion frameworks for climate-related disaster preparedness and to address cybersecurity, have the potential to reduce risks within and across communities.

Building on these findings on emerging good practices in gender-responsive conflict and crisis prevention, the report suggests strategic entry points where further efforts can advance conflict and crisis prevention in Southeast Asia. Recommendations aim to: 1) Strengthen regional and national-level coordination, 2) Bolster local and national-level data and evidence, 3) Strengthen policy and implementation, 4) Enhance capacity-building and 5) Improve the allocation of financial and human resources. A key opportunity for advancing ASEAN's gender-responsive prevention of conflict and crises lies in institutionalising multi-stakeholder coordination among government mechanisms, civil society and women's organisations on localised security challenges. Thus, the report recommends:

- Establishing a regional conflict and crisis prevention mechanism to better integrate current mechanisms and responses to distinct security challenges and for future conflict and crisis prevention;
- Expanding the ASEAN Women for Peace Registry under the ASEAN Institute for Peace and Reconciliation (ASEAN-IPR) to include experts specialised in conflict and peace mediation, and facilitate 'lessons learned' dialogues;
- Coordinating among agencies at the national level to bring together local actors and peace infrastructure under a common framework;
- Ensuring women's participation in these coordination mechanisms, including female parliamentarians and representatives at the subnational level.

Gender-sensitive analysis of security challenges is vital for informing effective, gender-responsive conflict and crisis prevention. But the lack of adequate evidence to inform decision-making and resource allocation makes it almost impossible to address the gender-specific needs of men and women in conflict prevention, security and peacebuilding. The report therefore recommends:

- Gender-sensitive data collection and analysis to support regional and national coordination of conflict and crisis prevention mechanisms, and involving women and civil society organisations in local data collection with the support of the ASEAN-IPR;

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3 As noted in RPA WPS Priority Action 3.2.3.

- Consolidation of gender perspectives on non-traditional security issues in an ASEAN-wide WPS approach, for example, in an ASEAN handbook;
- Gender-sensitive indicators for security risks in different localised contexts to enable the gendered impacts of conflicts and crises to be identified and addressed;
- An annual ASEAN WPS Outlook that analyses and updates these indicators.

To improve the gender responsiveness of disaster risk reduction (DRR) and disaster management in the region, the report recommends:

- Establishing mechanisms that ensure sex-and-age disaggregated data in DRR, and tailoring risk reduction strategies to address intersectional and gender-specific vulnerabilities;
- Extending lessons learned from disaster preparedness to climate-security risks, especially in climate-prone areas.

To address the gendered nature of cybersecurity risks and vulnerabilities, the report recommends:

- Promoting gender-responsive approaches in cybersecurity by integrating gender considerations in the ASEAN Cyber Security Cooperation Strategy<sup>4</sup> and in national cybersecurity strategies and training.

Concerning capacity-building for gender-responsive conflict and crisis prevention, the report recommends:

- Upskilling security sector and peacemaking professionals to be responsive to different gender-specific regional threat scenarios and their prevention;
- Promoting the impact of women leaders in crisis prevention and peace infrastructure and the benefit of their leadership to wider communities in the region.

Sufficient financial and human resources are required for the implementation of effective and gender-responsive conflict and crisis prevention policies to fulfil ASEAN Member State WPS commitments, ensuring gender equality and security priorities are met. Thus, the report recommends:

- Increasing women's presence in the security sector, including cybersecurity, and addressing the specific barriers women face in accessing these institutions as clients and as employees;
- Leveraging gender-responsive budgeting tools and prioritizing resources through National Action Plans (NAPs) on WPS;
- Creating a tracking mechanism to monitor the allocation and impact of these resources on conflict and crisis prevention.

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4 [https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/01-ASEAN-Cybersecurity-Cooperation-Paper-2021-2025\\_final-23-0122.pdf](https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/01-ASEAN-Cybersecurity-Cooperation-Paper-2021-2025_final-23-0122.pdf).

# INTRODUCTION

Women, peace and security (WPS) is a priority for the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).<sup>5</sup> ASEAN recognises the importance of gender equality and women's roles in peacebuilding for the longstanding stability and prosperity of the region. WPS is central to ASEAN's vision of 'security for all.' As affirmed by ASEAN leaders' 2017 Joint Statement on WPS, reaffirmed by foreign ministers in 2019 and noted in the ASEAN Regional Study on WPS,<sup>6</sup> ASEAN's definition of security is broad—encompassing economic security, pandemics, disasters, the impacts of climate change, violent extremism, and transnational crime, among others. ASEAN's Regional Plan of Action (RPA) on WPS is rooted in the four pillars of the WPS agenda – participation, protection, relief and recovery, and prevention.<sup>7</sup> These pillars provide a holistic framework enabling governments and people to better prevent, prepare for and recover from conflicts and crises. They acknowledge that security extends beyond the absence of conflict and includes interconnected social, economic and political dimensions, and thus encompasses both traditional and non-traditional security challenges (cross-border challenges that affect state stability, human security and social cohesion).<sup>8</sup> The WPS agenda calls for states to address the different impacts of these crises on women and men and to support women's roles in promoting and sustaining peace.

Women often experience conflict and crises differently than men and are disproportionately affected by gender-based violence (GBV), displacement and economic insecurity during times of conflict and crisis, which increase vulnerabilities to exploitation. Recognising and addressing these gender-specific impacts is essential for strengthening effective conflict prevention practices and building sustainable peace. Gender responsiveness is also increasingly recognised as a critical component in addressing environmental threats, such as climate-induced disasters. Again, women may be disproportionately affected by environmental changes and natural disasters, but they are also key agents of change in sustainable resource management and resilience-building efforts at local and national levels. Harnessing women's meaningful participation in protection, prevention, relief and recovery is vital for the ASEAN region's future stability and prosperity.

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5 Joint Statement on Promoting WPS in ASEAN at the 31<sup>st</sup> ASEAN Summit, November 2017, at [link](#).

6 ASEAN, USAID PROSPECT and UN Women. 2021, *ASEAN Regional Study on Women, Peace and Security*, March, p. 1, at [link](#).

7 United Nations Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs. (2021). *Gender, Women, Peace and Security*. Available at: [link](#)

8 *ASEAN Regional Plan of Action on Women, Peace and Security (RPA WPS) 2022*, p. 42. Available at: [link](#).

The ASEAN RPA WPS provides a platform to strengthen gender mainstreaming in peace infrastructure, encompassing ASEAN's broad definition of security. Under strategic outcome 3, it states that 'ASEAN sectoral bodies, institutions and Member States play an active role in contributing to global, regional and national conflict prevention, and prevention of violence, disasters and other threats to peace and security, with the principles of the WPS agenda central to these activities.'<sup>9</sup> From a gender and WPS perspective, integrating women's perspectives and expertise enhances both the effectiveness and inclusivity of ASEAN's peace and security framework.

This report assesses the gender-responsiveness of existing peace infrastructure in ASEAN and identifies gaps and opportunities for strengthening it. It aims to highlight enabling factors and delve into cases of effective and meaningful participation of diverse women in policy planning, programmes and efforts to prevent conflict and promote security.

The report consists of four main parts. In the first part, it highlights the dynamic and overlapping nature of both traditional and non-traditional security threats confronting ASEAN Member States, which demand coordinated responses. Considering these security challenges, part two examines current gaps and opportunities in conflict and crisis prevention mechanisms, referred to as 'peace infrastructure' (mechanisms that prevent conflict and/or crises). The specific challenges faced by women in participating or leading this peace infrastructure are highlighted, to understand the barriers to women's full involvement in confidence-building measures, preventive diplomacy, peacemaking, conflict resolution and post-conflict peacebuilding.<sup>10</sup> Women's participation and leadership in conflict and crisis prevention builds on the progress that women in ASEAN Member States have made in addressing peace and security challenges as well as ASEAN's commitment to WPS.

The third part of the report focuses on good practices that demonstrate greater gender-responsiveness to the diverse needs of women and men in the types, level of participation and roles of women and men in peace infrastructure and in preventing crises. Non-traditional security challenges offer an opportunity for diverse groups of women to influence more gender-responsive approaches to security, an area where they have historically been underrepresented. Part four identifies strategic entry points where further efforts can provide greater space for women's participation and empowerment at national and local levels, in line with the RPA WPS. Finally, the report sets out recommendations for policy and programming to improve the coordination, effectiveness and gender-responsiveness of existing peace infrastructure. A key finding is that incorporating gender-specific markers/indicators into conflict and crisis prevention mechanisms for both traditional and non-traditional security issues would enable the gendered impacts of conflicts and crises to be identified and addressed, including GBV, which may be neglected without these indicators.

An executive summary condenses the main findings and recommendations of this report. The full report examines the security challenges and gaps in ASEAN from a gender perspective, and the opportunities to address them through gender-responsive peace infrastructure. Key definitions and criteria for this analysis are set out below.

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9 ASEAN. (2022). ASEAN Regional Plan of Action on Women, Peace and Security (RPA WPS), p. 27. Available at: [link](#)

10 As noted in RPA WPS, Priority Action 3.2.3.

## DEFINITIONS AND CRITERIA

In this report, mechanisms that prevent conflict and/or other crises are referred to as ‘peace infrastructure.’ Peace infrastructure is defined by the United Nations Development Programme (2015) as “a network of interdependent systems, resources, values and skills held by government, civil society and community institutions that promote dialogue and consultation; prevent conflict and enable peaceful mediation when violence occurs in a society.”<sup>11</sup>

Adopting this definition of peace infrastructure, the report focuses on formal and informal “institutions promoting dialogue and consultation...” to prevent crises and/or conflict that are the result of traditional and non-traditional security challenges. Peace infrastructure is not the mere existence of policies that intend to be responsive to gender inequalities and differences but the institutional capacities and mechanisms to implement such policies and frameworks. Typically, peace infrastructure coordinates or can coordinate activities and actions of government and civil society.

### *Assessing gender responsiveness*

A clear definition of ‘gender-responsiveness’ is needed to assess the gender-responsiveness of peace infrastructure focused on conflict/crisis prevention. This report adopts a rigorous definition of ‘gender-responsive’ that combines the **inclusivity of gender perspectives** that analyse inequalities, exclusions and differences with the **operational and practical capacity** to address these inequalities, exclusions and differences.

**Gender-responsive:** Informed by gender-sensitive analysis and/or agreement, gender-responsiveness as a concept and a practice seeks to enable operational and practical capacity to address gender inequalities, exclusions and differences through action or implementation efforts that are feasible, monitored and evaluated.<sup>12</sup>

Equal representation of diverse women and men is vital to ensure the inclusivity of gender perspectives and their operationalisation in policy and practice.

**Focusing on peace infrastructure in local and national-level settings** is important for inclusive analysis that reduces gender bias: Women are more likely to be present and actively participating in local initiatives and activities, while men may be overrepresented in regional and national-level peace infrastructure.

As stated in the RPA WPS, ASEAN has a “long history of innovative local approaches on peace and security, often led by women.” Some of these approaches are highlighted in the good practices and emerging good practices of gender-responsive crisis prevention that follow. Women are often located on the frontlines of recovery – which positions them well to prevent crises and conflict. The purpose of this report is to inspire broader development and application of good practices and emerging good practices where relevant, and in the spirit of the RPA WPS to support “the forging of new and mutually beneficial relationships between local innovative initiatives and national and regional approaches on WPS.”<sup>13</sup>

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11 United Nations Development Programme. (2015). *Issue Brief: Infrastructure for Peace*. Available at: [link](#).

12 UN Women (2018) Expert Group Meeting on women’s meaningful participation in peace negotiations and processes, New York: United Nations: Glossary p. 44.

13 ASEAN RPA WPS (2022), pp. ii-iii. Available at: [link](#).

Recommendations are provided at the end of the report on how to support this local participation to influence national policy and programming and vice versa so that national frameworks can support conflict and crisis prevention activity within and across communities. There are opportunities for early warning of crises and front-line responses to them at the community level, with women playing a key role in on-the-ground services and programme implementation. There is also a need to further integrate gender considerations into recovery plans, especially when it comes to the increasing impacts of climate change on peace and security in the ASEAN region.

## METHODOLOGY

This report employs a **mixed-methods approach** to assess the gender-responsiveness of peace infrastructure in ASEAN. The methodology integrates **desk research, policy analysis, case study examination, and quantitative data review** to provide a comprehensive understanding of the gaps, challenges, and opportunities for gender-responsive conflict and crisis prevention.

### *1. Desk Research and Literature Review*

The study relies on an extensive review of existing literature, including academic research, reports, policy briefs, and strategic documents from ASEAN institutions, Member States, and international organisations. Key sources include:

- ASEAN Regional Plan of Action on Women, Peace and Security (RPA WPS)
- ASEAN sectoral reports on peace and security
- United Nations frameworks on WPS and conflict prevention
- National Action Plans (NAPs) on WPS from ASEAN Member States
- Reports from civil society organisations and think tanks on gender, peace, and security

This literature review helps contextualise ASEAN's peace and security challenges within the broader WPS agenda and identifies existing policy frameworks supporting gender-responsive conflict prevention.

### *2. Policy and Institutional Analysis*

The study examines ASEAN's policy frameworks, institutional mechanisms, and national-level initiatives to analyse their gender responsiveness.

### *3. Case Study Analysis*

To illustrate effective gender-responsive approaches, the report examines case studies from ASEAN Member States that demonstrate good practices in conflict and crisis prevention. The selection criteria for these case studies include:

- **Relevance to WPS priorities**, particularly in preventing violent extremism, early warning systems, and community-led peacebuilding.
- **Documented impact**, based on available reports, evaluations, and policy reviews.
- **Diversity of security challenges**, representing different types of threats (e.g., conflict, natural disasters, cybersecurity).

The case studies highlight some emerging innovative local initiatives and lessons that can inform broader gender-responsive security strategies for ASEAN and ASEAN Member States.

#### *4. Quantitative Data Review*

The report utilizes **secondary quantitative data** from publicly available national and regional sources to analyse trends in gender and security

### **LIMITATIONS**

While the report provides a robust analysis, it has some limitations:

- **Lack of primary qualitative data:** No interviews or direct fieldwork were conducted, which limits firsthand insights from policymakers and practitioners.
- **Policy-practice gap:** Although the study identifies promising policies, it does not fully capture their implementation at the local level, which could be further explored.

Despite these limitations, the methodology provides a rigorous, evidence-based approach to assessing gender-responsive peace infrastructure in ASEAN.

This section identifies gaps and opportunities to build greater gender responsiveness

# GAPS, CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR GENDER-RESPONSIVE CONFLICT/CRISIS PREVENTION

in addressing common security threats in the ASEAN region. Peace Infrastructure can be more inclusive of a gender perspective by creating greater space for women's participation and empowerment in local and national-level settings. This gender-responsiveness, in turn, enhances efforts to prevent conflicts/crises and to harness all the population's capacities to promote stability and peace.

For the past four and a half decades, ASEAN has provided a regional platform for multilateral cooperation, stability and peace in Southeast Asia in the face of traditional and non-traditional security challenges. Traditional security challenges include competition between major powers, territorial disputes and state insecurity. Non-traditional security challenges include the transnational threats of terrorism and violent extremism, cybersecurity and other transnational crimes such as trafficking, climate change and natural disasters, and forced migration and displacement.<sup>14</sup>

Gender intersects with various national and global security challenges including terrorism, transnational crime and cybersecurity. Understanding the gender dimensions of these threats is essential for developing effective and gender-responsive prevention strategies. Neither cyber threats nor climate change insecurity are gender-neutral, for example. Rather, gender mediates how men, women, boys and girls experience these dynamics in different ways. Frequently, however, sectoral policies may only partially recognise or account for these different experiences. Gender-responsive conflict/crisis prevention policies and actions aim to anticipate these different experiences and impacts.

Specific challenges for women in participating and leading peace infrastructure that aims to respond to security threats are noted. Women agents of peace often adapt their activities to respond to and prevent different crises, therefore it is important to harness their full capacities for the benefit of more stable communities. This adaptation occurred, for example, during COVID-19, when women peacebuilders who previously focused on preventing conflict retooled to prevent the spread of the pandemic, distributing humanitarian aid to those most in need using their existing networks and know-how.<sup>15</sup> Opportunities to strengthen women's participation and leadership are discussed.

## CIVIL AND COMMUNAL CONFLICT

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14 ASEAN Secretariat. (2021). ASEAN Security Outlook; pp. 4-5. Available at: [link](#).

15 See Amporn Marddent and Vithaya Arporn. 2021. "Or Sor Mor" and "Ai Khai": Frontliners in Thailand's Fight against COVID-19. *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 43, 1: 24-30, Available at: [link](#)

In some ASEAN Member States, peace infrastructure to address communal or civil conflicts often prioritises negotiation and conflict mediation among national-level actors and non-state actors that engage in the most violence. Conflict prevention and resolution, even at the local level, may be male-dominated and seen through a patriarchal lens in terms of the types of violence and measures to address it, such as armed civil violence, ceasefires and amnesties on weapons. Economic measures may be designed to reintegrate former non-state combatants, who tend to be men. However, these measures may be challenging or take a long time to implement, potentially fuelling new grievances. Programmes that focus on women's economic empowerment and increase the resources available to families and communities can provide a strategic entry point to address conflict prevention, such as in conflict-affected sub-regions like Southern Thailand and the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) in Southern Philippines. When delivered in partnership between government and civil society, such programmes allow engagement and inclusion of diverse groups of stakeholders across sectarian communities who otherwise may not have been previously able to collaborate. Economic empowerment programmes targeted at women and communities can also help to promote the inclusion of marginalised groups in peacebuilding efforts and/or the normalisation process in post-conflict settings. An example of this promising practice for building social cohesion and conflict resolution and prevention is discussed in the next section in the context of initiatives in the Southern Border Provinces (SBPs) of Thailand.

With limited gender analysis of peace and security challenges that examines women's and men's different experiences of conflict and distinct capacities for preventing the escalation of conflict, a key challenge for gender-responsive conflict prevention is that policymakers and security stakeholders may not make the connection between gender equality and the stability of the state and Southeast Asian region. Without WPS analysis of the root causes of peace and security challenges and the gendered impacts of insecurity to help inform policy dialogue and action, gender inequality may not be seen as a fundamental issue that needs to be addressed to promote and sustain peace. Moreover, influential state and non-state actors may see gender equality as only relevant to particular localities or groups rather than as important for the security of all (as can be the case in the Philippines, which is widely seen as a gender equality leader in the ASEAN region).<sup>16</sup> Thus the motivation is lacking to incorporate gender perspectives on conflict in the first place to drive gender-responsive capacity and action. Sometimes, no information or knowledge about gender inequalities, differences or exclusions in a peace and security domain can lead to the assumption that there is no problem. Similarly, the broad acceptance of women's roles in most public domains but limited women's participation in peace and security decision-making can be so normalised in some contexts that the opportunity to harness women's participation for conflict resolution is not readily understood.

## **VIOLENT EXTREMISM AND TERRORISM**

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<sup>16</sup> Key informant interviews (KIIs). Civil Society. January 2024, KIIs. Government. January 2024.

Violent extremism and terrorism are a major transnational security threat in Southeast Asian. ASEAN's RPA WPS acknowledges that a significant factor in effectively addressing violent extremism is prevention, which requires examination of the root causes, such as gender inequality, poverty and discrimination.<sup>17</sup> For example, the siege of Marawi, which occurred in May-October 2017, resulted in the death of 900 militants and more than 160 Government of the Philippines (GPH) soldiers, and the displacement of 400,000 people. It was a watershed moment for the GPH. Indonesia also faced a critical juncture in its approach to preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) with the increase in attacks by ISIS affiliates after 2014, and especially following the family suicide attacks in Surabaya, East Java in May 2018. Since then, P/CVE efforts have been significantly increased and expanded across the region.<sup>18</sup>

National action plans (NAPs) on P/CVE have been adopted specifically to enhance preventive approaches in the Philippines, Indonesia and Malaysia. These NAPs on P/CVE provide an opportunity to integrate gender-responsiveness into the assessment and prevention of violent extremism. (Philippines, for example, has also taken significant steps to mainstream gender-responsiveness into its policies and programmes for addressing other key threats, such as violent extremism and climate change. The Government of Malaysia launched a process for developing an NAP on P/CVE to create a coordinated whole-of-government approach to addressing the drivers of violent extremism and terrorism).

Developing counter-narratives to address online and in-person extremist propaganda, misinformation, and hate speech has been one approach adopted in the Philippines and Indonesia,<sup>19</sup> where women, men, children, and people of diverse socioeconomic backgrounds and status are being targeted by radical groups.<sup>20</sup> This provides an opportunity to target these counter-narratives to diverse groups, to be more effective and gender-responsive. Violent extremist content online regarding women (whether targeting them for radicalisation or spreading misogynistic content) varies depending on the extremist group, the geo-location and the gender norms within their ideology.<sup>21</sup> A study by UN Women, focusing on Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines and Bangladesh, for instance, found that women are actively searching online for violent extremist content, with women being responsible for 32 per cent of searches.<sup>22</sup> These studies highlight the spectrum of women's and men's experiences, ranging from victimisation to agency in purposefully seeking out such violent content.

Understanding of women's involvement in violent extremism has been evolving, moving from a victim-centred approach to understanding the dynamic role that women can play in its perpetration and prevention. Singapore's recruitment of women counsellors in its

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17 ASEAN. (2022). ASEAN RPA WPS. p. 2. Available at: [link](#).

18 ASEAN (2002): 2).

19 Global Counter-Terrorism Forum. (2022). Gender and Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism - Policy Toolkit. Global Counterterrorism Forum. Available at: [link](#).

20 See Johnson, M, M. Iqbal and J. True. 2020. "The Lure of (Violent) Extremism: Gender Constructs in Online Recruitment and Messaging in Indonesia." *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, DOI: 10.1080/1057610X.2020.1759267 Available at [link](#).

21 UN Women. (2021). Gender Analysis of Violence Extremism and the Impact of COVID-19 on Peace and Security in ASEAN: Evidence Based Research for Policy. Available at: [link](#).

22 UN Women. (2019). Who's behind the keyboard? A gender analysis of terrorism and violent extremism in the online space in Bangladesh, Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines. Available at: [link](#).

Religious Rehabilitation Groups (RRGs)<sup>23</sup> to address female deradicalisation, for example, presents an opportunity that could be applied by other governments in ASEAN to strengthen competencies to support more effective deradicalisation and rehabilitation. Together with ASEAN's handbook on promising practices on deradicalisation, the female counsellors could help the government, initiatives like the RRGs, and the broader public to understand the gendered dynamics of (de)radicalisation and rehabilitation and produce lessons that could enhance their prevention approach.<sup>24</sup>

The ASEAN Plan of Action to Prevent and Counter the Rise of Radicalisation and Violent Extremism (2018-2025) has listed as a priority developing women's capacity, participation and leadership to promote moderation and tolerance and prevent radicalisation.<sup>25</sup> While the Plan of Action is enabling, implementing its intent confronts some barriers. First, the gender bias of law enforcement continues to be a challenge. Law enforcement has not adapted to the fact that women are also perpetrators of violent extremism and as a result, its efforts to address the issue are undermined by gender biases.<sup>26</sup> The few women in policing, especially in teams focused on the prevention of and response to terrorism, likely exacerbate this gender bias – and the potential for violent extremist groups to evade security measures. Second, a key barrier to preventing and countering violent extremism, and to women's participation in addressing this security threat, is the enduring use of a hard security/military approach. Such an approach prioritises the resourcing and short-term deployment of military units or special police forces over the implementation of NAPs that set out a long-term, prevention-focused, community-centred and gender-responsive approach to violent extremism.

## CYBERSECURITY

Considering the intersection of violent extremism, cybersecurity and gender presents an opportunity to enhance conflict prevention. ASEAN has seen a large increase in regional connectivity, having the fastest-growing internet market globally.<sup>27</sup> While the increase in internet users has had a positive effect on the economy,<sup>28</sup> it presents increased risks of cybercrime, cyber-abuse and cyber-emergencies. Cyber threats become increasingly critical, especially as they enable other security issues like violent extremism and transnational crime.

Current policies that seek to combat online security threats often miss gender perspectives, addressing the aggressor and defence of the state but not responding to individual (gendered) vulnerabilities. In a UN Women report examining five Asian countries (two of them in ASEAN) on gender-based cyber violence, factors such as gender inequality, misogyny and negative

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23 Religious Rehabilitation Groups are led by [Islamic scholars](#) and [teachers](#) in Singapore to assist in the religious rehabilitation and counselling of [radicalised](#) individuals who threatened or conducted acts of violent extremism. Formed in 2003, RRG's initially aimed to rehabilitate detained members of the regional terrorist group, [Jemaah Islamiyah](#) (JI). Since then it has expanded to provide counselling and financial support for families of the detainees to prevent further radicalisation.

24 ASEAN. (2023). ASEAN Handbook: Promising Practices on Deradicalisation, Rehabilitation and Reintegration of Prison Inmates related to Terrorism and Violent Extremism. Available at: [link](#).

25 ASEAN. (2018). ASEAN Plan of Action to Prevent and Counter the Rise of Radicalisation and Violent Extremism (2018-2025). pp. 16-18. Available at: [link](#).

26 KII's. Civil society. February 2024.

27 World Economic Forum. (2022). Digital ASEAN. Available at: [link](#).

28 *ibid*.

cultural perceptions of women were found to increase the risk of cyber violence.<sup>29</sup> Moreover, women who are in the public eye, particularly those in positions of leadership, are subject to higher rates of gender-based cyber violence, which negatively affects their participation in public life. With the exception of Singapore and the Philippines, most ASEAN Member States do not have specific policies in place to address this gender-based cyber violence.<sup>30</sup>

A major issue is the gender neutrality of the cybersecurity analysis base and the lack of gender-sensitive knowledge on cybersecurity risks. There is very little policy research or evidence-based study that highlights the different gendered impacts of cybersecurity and cybercrime in the region to inform policy/decision-making, apart from the more recent work of UN Women.<sup>31</sup> Because cybersecurity issues are still relatively new, even in Southeast Asia countries that have recognised that there is a gender dimension, more effort is needed to implement gender-responsive policies and practices to enhance cybersecurity. Cybersecurity risks are heightened by and overlap with the rise of technology-facilitated gender-based abuse, the online circulation of deep-fake sexualised images and gendered disinformation targeting both states and leaders.<sup>32</sup> The underrepresentation of women in the cybersecurity workforce likely exacerbates the lack of gender perspectives in addressing these cyber threats. To address this gap, encouraging more women to take up careers in the cybersecurity sector and requiring unconscious bias and gender-sensitivity training for all cybersecurity professionals is crucial to avoid reinforcing gender biases and to address the specific cyber threats targeted at women.

## TRAFFICKING

Human trafficking is another form of transnational crime and one of the most pressing regional priorities in Southeast Asia. Trafficking in the region comprises a complex web of syndicates involving a multitude of land and sea routes. Two of the primary forms of trafficking are human trafficking for sexual exploitation and human trafficking for forced labour.<sup>33</sup> Traffickers often choose victims who are vulnerable or displaced as a result of conflict or, increasingly, climate-induced disasters.<sup>34</sup> Human trafficking has been linked to several other transnational crimes, including online scamming and drug trafficking, as well as security concerns such as violent extremism, as has been documented in Mindanao, Philippines.<sup>35</sup> All these threats should be viewed through a gender-sensitive analytical lens to understand the risks and the protective factors for them and to develop gender-responsive policies and practices.

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29 UN Women. (2020). *Online Violence Against Women in Asia: A Multi-country Study*. p. 9. Available at: [link](#).

30 Sey, A. (2022). *Gender Security and Safety in the ASEAN Digital Economy*. Economic Research Institute for ASEAN and East Asia. (46). p. 13. Available at: [link](#).

31 UN Women and UN University Institute in Macau. (2023). *Gender-Sensitive AI Policy in Southeast Asia*. pp. 8-9. Available at: [link](#).

32 See L. Sharland et al (2021) *System Update: Towards a Women, Peace and Cybersecurity Agenda*, UNIDIR Available at [link](#); Elsa Hedling (2024) *Gendered Disinformation in Feminist Foreign Policy Analysis: A New Subfield*, eds. K. Aggestam and J. True pp. 137-153.

33 Thanh Luong, H. (2020). *Transnational crime and its trends in South-East Asia: A detailed narrative in Vietnam*. *International Journal for Crime, Justice and Social Democracy*. 9(2). Available at: [link](#).

34 Caballero-Anthony, M. (2018). *A Hidden Scourge: Southeast Asia's refugees and displaced people are victimised by human traffickers but the crime usually goes unreported*. *IMF Finance and Development*. p. 20. Available at: [link](#).

35 UN Women. (2020). *Gender at the Nexus of Violent Extremism and Trafficking in Persons in Muslim Mindanao*. pp. 7-8. Available at: [link](#).

The ASEAN Convention Against Trafficking in Persons Particularly Women and Children has been adopted in all 10 Member States.<sup>36</sup> In addition, gender-sensitive guidelines for handling women victims of trafficking were launched in 2019.<sup>37</sup> However, the diversity in Member States' capacities to implement ASEAN strategies is an obstacle to effectively addressing this security challenge.<sup>38</sup> Recognising the increase in cross-border human trafficking, especially involving women and girls, ASEAN has facilitated regional, gender-sensitive training for border officials operating on the frontlines of this issue, with training conducted by the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights.<sup>39</sup> The training focused on equipping female and male officers with the skills needed to create an enabling environment for victims.<sup>40</sup>

There is an opportunity for peace infrastructure for other transnational security issues to adopt gender considerations into their frameworks or policies. For instance, the ASEAN Declaration on the Protection of Migrant Workers and Family Members in Crisis Situations calls for migrant workers and their families to be integrated into crisis response and recovery frameworks, including the provision of safety, healthcare and psychosocial support, and to facilitate their repatriation.<sup>41</sup> Prompted by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on migrant workers, there is an opportunity to support the declaration through gender-responsive policy and practice. There is presently a gap, however, regarding comprehensive, sex-disaggregated data on intra-regional migration. Collection of this data presents an opportunity for ASEAN and Member States to better understand gender-specific vulnerabilities, capacities and inequalities, and to enhance gender-responsive policy and practice on migration.<sup>42</sup>

## DISASTERS AND CLIMATE INSECURITY

Climate change itself does not directly cause violent conflict, but it can intensify underlying factors that contribute to conflict.<sup>43</sup> As noted by Caballero et al, "climate change and conflict, separately and together, undermine livelihoods, hinder adaptation and weaken social cohesion."<sup>44</sup> The Southeast Asian region is subject to compounding crises, in which climate change is a driver and threat multiplier creating human insecurity with cross-border implications. For instance, if humanitarian aid delivery is not responsive to gender and other

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36 ASEAN. (n.d). Irregular Movement of People, People Smuggling, and Trafficking in Persons; Major Sectoral Bodies and Committees. Available at: [link](#).

37 UN Women Asia & the Pacific. (2019). ASEAN launches gender-sensitive guidelines for handling women victims of trafficking. Available at: [link](#).

38 Sundram, P. (2024). ASEAN cooperation to combat transnational crime: progress, perils and prospects. *Front. Polit. Sci.* 6. p. 1. Available at: [link](#).

39 ASEAN Secretariat. (2021). AICHR training for frontline officers emphasises on human rights, child-friendly, gender-sensitive approaches in addressing trafficking in persons. Available at: [link](#).

40 *ibid*.

41 ILO. (2023). ILO welcomes the ASEAN Declaration protecting migrant workers and families in crisis situations. Available at: [link](#).

42 ASEAN Secretariat. (2022). Women Migrant Workers in the Laws and Policies of ASEAN Member States. p. 17. Available at: [link](#).

43 Koubi, V. (2019). Climate change and conflict. *Annual Review of Political Science*. 22(1), 343–360. Available at: [link](#).

44 Mely Caballero-Anthony, Julius Cesar Trajano, Alistair D. B. Cook, Nanthini D/O T Sambanthan, Jose Ma. Luis Montesclaros, Keith Paolo Landicho, and Danielle Lynn Goh, (2023) Climate Change and its Impact on Peace and Security in Southeast Asia, Centre for Non-Traditional Security Studies S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore, November, p. 5.

local dynamics of victims, the impacts of climate-related disasters may provide opportunities for violent extremist groups to radicalise people by providing humanitarian aid in community situations where state access and services are limited.<sup>45</sup> Thus, climate security in Southeast Asia needs to consider the relationship between the effects of climate change and ongoing security challenges in the region. An ASEAN-UN dialogue has recognised the need to integrate climate change considerations into prevention, mediation and peacebuilding strategies at regional and national levels.<sup>46</sup>

Global evidence suggests that climate change is changing weather systems and driving unprecedented humanitarian disasters, presenting increasing challenges for women living in poverty and exclusion. The Southeast Asian region is particularly susceptible to climate-related disasters because of its extensive coastlines, rapid urbanization and its dependence on vulnerable natural resources amidst global competition for them.<sup>47</sup>

The interlinked nature of climate change, peace and security challenges is evident, particularly in contexts of social vulnerability, where climate-related events are most prevalent. Climate change and environmental degradation substantially affect women and girls in Southeast Asia because they are many of the poorest and most vulnerable, living in the most climate-affected areas.<sup>48</sup> Climate insecurity often increases fragility and escalates tensions that may lead to conflict, while at the same time undermining societal capacities to respond to shocks and adapt to climate change. Gender-based violence (GBV) and crime, for instance, have also been found to increase with food insecurity and men's reactions to the lack of resources.<sup>49</sup>

The S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies 2023 report on climate, peace and security in Southeast Asia notes that “the exposure of affected communities in the southern Philippines to more extreme weather events will overlay the pre-existing tensions in Mindanao,” while “transboundary water management issues among the Mekong countries could only become more complex, and would also likely be exacerbated by changes to the river due to climate change.”<sup>50</sup>

A causal pathway that is visible in the case of Southeast Asia shows the effects of climate change on resource scarcity. Increased susceptibility to extreme climate events and climate-related disasters have, in some cases, resulted in even greater scarcity of natural resources, such as land and water, on which economic livelihoods depend.<sup>51</sup> This impact of climate-related events may drive and/or exacerbate conflict within and between communities,

45 Se Mardialina, M., Anam, S., Karyajaya, P. L., Hidayat, A., & Lestari, U. S. (2024). The ASEAN coordinating centre for humanitarian assistance on disaster management (AHA Centre): Examining gender-based approach in the 2018 Lombok Earthquake. *Journal of ASEAN Studies* 12, 2: DOI: <https://journal.binus.ac.id/index.php/jas/issue/view/470>.

46 ASEAN-IPR, ASEAN-UN Regional Dialogue VI on Climate, Peace and Security (CPS) 21-22 November 2023, Jakarta, Indonesia, Outcomes and Recommendations.

47 See UN Women (2024) “Women, Peace and Climate Security in Asia and the Pacific.” Brief. Available at: [link](#).

48 ASEAN (2024) ASEAN Gender Outlook 2024. September. Available at: [link](#).

49 Mannell J, Brown LJ, Jordaan E, Hatcher A, Gibbs A (2024) The impact of environmental shocks due to climate change on intimate partner violence: A structural equation model of data from 156 countries. *PLOS Clim* 3(10): e0000478. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pclm.0000478>.

50 Caballero et al (2023): 7.

51 Nordqvist, P., & Krampe, F. (2018). Climate Change and Violent Conflict: Sparse Evidence from South Asia and Southeast Asia, *SIPRI Insights on Peace and Security*. 4. p. 6. Available at: [link](#).

especially in combination with other risk factors such as weak state institutions and people's low adaptive capacities due to poor access to education, health care and income, and dependency on primary resources for livelihoods.<sup>52</sup> Moreover, a lack of alternative options for income generation can lead populations to engage in illegal activities or become part of armed groups, which may also increase violence and crime, including child marriage, as a coping strategy.<sup>53</sup> Women play crucial roles in the natural resource management of land and water, and have the capacity to prevent these negative impacts of climate-related resource scarcity, including conflict and transnational crime.

Women are often the first responders in disasters and humanitarian crises and have unique community and environmental knowledge to accelerate community preparedness, responses and recovery.<sup>54</sup> They are on the frontline of climate change collective action to sustain peace. Understanding the gender dimensions of climate-related insecurity therefore is essential to avoid exacerbating vulnerabilities and to identify opportunities for enhancing climate resilience and sustaining peace. Women's local leadership often makes a difference within and across communities exposed to climate-related events. Yet, they are often excluded from environmental and climate change-related decision-making.

With limited access to decision-making, rural women especially are often invisible in policymaking due to their lack of resources. ASEAN recently released a report assessing its capacity for Multi-Hazard End-to-End Early Warning Systems for Natural Disasters. It found a lack of systematic engagement with both rural and urban populations, resulting in limited knowledge of the specific needs of different groups, including women and children, people with disabilities, marginalised communities and older people.<sup>55</sup> Without adequate representation of diverse women in these discussions, we may miss the opportunity for more impactful solutions to climate insecurities that could make a difference in the lives of women, girls and communities. To design such solutions, we need to understand the realities of climate change and disasters for women and girls, which may include the changing burden of unpaid work, increased prevalence of GBV and food insecurity, and institutionalised marginalisation of women's voices and leadership. Women face heightened risks during and in the aftermath of climate-induced disasters due to displacement and the breakdown of normal protection structures and support. In addition, they may face an increase in care-related tasks, such as providing food and water and caring for the sick.<sup>56</sup> The manifestations of climate change and insecurity are intricately tied to the context and social dynamics of the affected areas.

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52 See J. Barnett and W. Neil Adger (2007), "Climate change, human security and violent conflict." [Political Geography 26, 6](#): 639-655. Also UN Women, (2024). Women, Peace and Climate Security in Asia and Pacific. In Brief, available at [link](#).

53 For example, in agricultural-dependent areas, armed groups might escalate violence during droughts to ensure their group's food security. This pattern has been observed with the Barisan Revolusi Nasional-Coordinated (BRN-C) rebels in Southern Thailand.

54 ActionAid and Monash University (2019) Gender-responsive alternatives to climate change. Available at: [link](#).

55 ASEAN Secretariat (2024). Strengthening Asean Multi-Hazard End to End Early Warning Systems for Natural Disasters: an assessment of current capacity, p. 27. Available at: [link](#).

56 Caballero et al (2023), p. 52. See also the *ASEAN Declaration on Strengthening the Care Economy and Resilience Towards the Post-2025 ASEAN Community*, which recognises the impact these crises are having on women and girls and others who are unpaid and paid care workers, "which impacts the ability of the ASEAN Community to build resilience to future crises."

A gender-responsive framework for addressing climate-related peace and security risks is vital. There is an opportunity to harness women's peacebuilding networks, which effectively link women's action between conflict/crisis response and conflict/crisis prevention through long-term sustainable development initiatives that address resource scarcity.<sup>57</sup>

Decentralisation reforms provide a key opportunity for greater participation of women in decision-making and leadership positions in local environmental governance. Some ASEAN Member States are implementing reforms to sub-national structures to empower women and require their representation. These reforms have the potential to enhance disaster preparedness and crisis prevention.<sup>58</sup> The participation of women is a key factor in managing and mitigating climate-induced security risks, particularly at the local/community level. Evidence to date shows, for instance, that increased women's representation in legislatures is leading to more effective climate change policy outcomes.<sup>59</sup>

In responding to and preventing crises, there is an opportunity for women's increased participation in the security sector. Women's meaningful participation is a core pillar of the WPS agenda, which recognises that women have insights and approaches to share that are effective and inclusive of community security needs and priorities. Women in law enforcement can foster trust with local communities and gain access to female victims of transnational crime, as recognised in a joint report by the UN Office for Drugs and Crime, UN Women and Interpol.<sup>60</sup> There is an opportunity to build on the evolution of women's peacebuilding and networks in the region by creating an enabling environment for women's increased participation in the security sector, addressing structural barriers to women's recruitment, deployment and promotion.<sup>61</sup> The ASEAN Gender Outlook study of the progress achieved in reaching the UN Sustainable Development Goals recognises that "involving more women in peacekeeping and national security institutions could help to further enhance safety in the ASEAN region."<sup>62</sup> Female victims and perpetrators are often "more comfortable seeking help from women in security forces."<sup>63</sup> Improving gender balance in security decision-making and incorporating gender perspectives will enhance the capacity of ASEAN Member States to address a range of security challenges.<sup>64</sup>

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57 Maria Tanyag and Jacqui True (2019). Gender Responsive Alternatives to Climate Change: Country Report on Cambodia, <https://actionaid.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Monash-GRACC-Report-Cambodia-.pdf>.

58 Klls. Civil society. January 2024.

59 Astghik Mavisakalyan and Yashar Tarverdi (2019) "Gender and Climate Change: Do Female Parliamentarians Make a Difference?" *European Journal of Political Economy* 56, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ejpoleco.2018.08.001>.

60 UNODC, UN Women & Interpol. (2019). Women in Law Enforcement in the ASEAN Region, p. 30 Available at: [link](#).

61 See ASEAN and UN Women, 2021. *ASEAN Gender Outlook: Achieving the SDGs for all and leaving no woman or girl behind*, [https://data.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/documents/Publications/2024/ASEAN-gender-outlook\\_2024.pdf](https://data.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/documents/Publications/2024/ASEAN-gender-outlook_2024.pdf). While more women are now participating in decision-making, parity has not been reached: just 20% of seats in parliament are occupied by women, 29% of individual police and 5% of UN peacekeepers are women, and women make up 24% of middle and senior managers in the private sector.

62 ASEAN et al, *ASEAN Gender Outlook* (2021), p. 35.

63 *ibid.*, p. 36.

64 ASEAN. (2022). ASEAN Regional Plan of Action on Women, Peace and Security. p. 18. Available at: [link](#).

# GOOD PRACTICE THEMATIC CASE STUDIES

Three good practice and three emerging good practice thematic case studies demonstrate the benefits and opportunities of gender-responsive conflict/crisis prevention. These case studies incorporate both the inclusivity of gender perspectives and women's meaningful participation, which are both necessary for policy and practice to be gender-responsive. They identify the enabling factors in these success stories and how women's participation and leadership can enhance efforts to prevent conflict and promote security. ASEAN Member States have experience in incorporating gender and WPS perspectives in order to prevent violent extremism,<sup>65</sup> to early warning community protection, peace dialogues and regional disaster management and climate change preparedness.<sup>66</sup> Sharing these good practices and lessons learned is intended to inspire further initiatives across ASEAN. They show how gender-sensitive knowledge and analysis can be incorporated and how building women's knowledge and confidence and resourcing their capacities in responding to various security threats can enhance crisis prevention.

## WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP IN P/CVE

Women-led civil society organisations (CSOs) have been navigating complex contexts in the ASEAN region, from conflict, post-conflict and transnational violent extremism to issues of land rights and recovery from disasters and pandemics. In Indonesia, women's experience of grassroots peacebuilding and fostering inter-faith cooperation in post-conflict communities has expanded to tackle violent extremism. While starting at the local level to prevent the occurrence of violence, the establishment of women's leadership forums and networks across communities enabled greater influence on improved nationwide approaches to countering and preventing violent extremism. The Surabaya family suicide bombing attacks in May 2018, which involved both women and children as perpetrators, revealed the intensification of violent extremism and the threat it posed to Indonesia. The attacks opened a policy window for considering gender-responsive approaches to preventing violent extremism and terrorism, drawing on women's roles as agents of change in local communities.<sup>67</sup>

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65 UN Women and Wahid Foundation, 2019. 'The Peace Village Initiative: Women Leading Peace in Indonesia.' *Research Brief*. Bangkok, [https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2019/11/the-peace-village-initiative\\_asia](https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2019/11/the-peace-village-initiative_asia).

66 Tanyag and True (2019).

67 UN Women. (2020). *Misogyny & Violent Extremism in Indonesia, Bangladesh, and the Philippines: Implications for Preventing Violent Extremism*. Available at: <https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Field%20Office%20ESEAAsia/Docs/Publications/2020/05/BLS20099UNWMisogynyVEMonashWEB0062b.pdf>

Indonesian women have been very active in conflict resolution at the community and grassroots levels, campaigning for safer conditions for women, responding to incidents of GBV and strengthening women's leadership capacities.<sup>68</sup> Studies have found that they are uniquely positioned, due to gender-related societal structures, to prevent violence without the use of force.<sup>69</sup> During the conflict in Ambon, Maluku, for example, women from different religious backgrounds came together and initiated dialogue to negotiate safe passage through neighbourhoods.<sup>70</sup> These women went on to form the Concerned Women's Movement (Gerakan Perempuan Peduli or GPP), an interfaith coalition of women that was central in campaigning to end the conflict in Maluku.<sup>71</sup> The Women's School for Peace (Sekolah Perempuan untuk Perdamaian, SPP) which began in Poso, Sulawesi, encouraged women to be "agents of peace," with the concept of peace starting in their own families.<sup>72</sup> Through the efforts of the non-governmental organisation (NGO) Aman Indonesia, these Schools for Peace have spread to 41 communities across seven provinces, empowering women to promote religious tolerance and prevent the escalation of inter-religious tensions into violence.<sup>73</sup>

With government and international support, most CSOs in Indonesia now implement women's empowerment programmes using gender equality, peace education and peace dialogues, along with early warning and early detection mechanisms for prevention of violent extremism.<sup>74</sup> "Peace villages" have been established across several communities, with women's leadership and participation at the forefront. In these villages, the entire community, women included, declares its commitment to fostering tolerance and agrees on certain guidelines and indicators. The women work with village leaders and the village apparatus through a bottom-up practice of *musrenbang* (regional development planning meetings). As a result, people, particularly men, reported being less likely to condone the use of violence as a political tool to address poverty and inequality in these villages, while women's confidence to report concerns about violent extremism in the family, neighbourhood and community increased. Women are also more willing to join government or community-led initiatives to prevent or counter violent extremism in peace villages, which has strengthened these initiatives.<sup>75,76</sup>

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68 HD Centre. (2010). *Women at the Indonesian peace table: Enhancing the contributions of women to conflict resolution*. Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue. pp. 23-24. Available at: [link](#).

69 See True, J and S Eddyono. 2021. "Preventing Violent Extremism - What Has Gender Got to Do with It?" *European Psychologist* 26, 1: 55-67.

70 HD Centre. (2010). *Women at the Indonesian peace table: Enhancing the contributions of women to conflict resolution*. Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue. pp. 23-24. Available at: [link](#).

71 *ibid*.

72 True and Eddyono (2021), p. 62; Also Trisubagya, Y. T. (2009). Women's agencies for peacebuilding and reconciliation: Voices from Poso, Sulawesi. In B. Bräuchler (Ed.), *Reconciling Indonesia: Grassroots agency for peace* (pp. 155–172). Routledge.

73 Trihartono, A. & Viartasiwi, N. (2015). Engaging the quiet mission: Civil society in breaking the cycle of violence in the post-conflict Poso, Indonesia. *Procedia Environmental Sciences*, 28. p. 121. Available at: [link](#); AMAN. (2021). Women's Schools as a Locomotive of Transformation. Available at: [link](#) [in Bahasa].

74 Klls. Civil society. February 2024.

75 UN Women and Monash University (2018). Research brief: Empowering women for peaceful communities: Evidence from Indonesia and Bangladesh. [https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Field%20Office%20ESEAsia/Docs/Publications/2018/06/UNW18009\\_report\\_with%20date.pdf](https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Field%20Office%20ESEAsia/Docs/Publications/2018/06/UNW18009_report_with%20date.pdf); True and Eddyono 2021: 63.

76 UN Women. (2021). Review and Scoping Study of the Peace Villages Initiative in Preventing Violent Extremism in Indonesia. pp. 13-15. Available at: [link](#).

Women's increased participation in local-level P/CVE initiatives, together with the rich network of women-led CSOs with contextualised knowledge about community challenges and ways of effectively engaging with traditional authorities to drive policy change, has enabled a joined-up and gender-responsive approach to the prevention of violent extremism. Women, particularly at sub-national and local levels, have a unique understanding of how to effectively engage with traditional male leaders and work within the existing social and customary norms to expand the spaces for women's participation. The prevention of violent extremism was identified as a cross-cutting issue that required local and national coordination with CSOs.<sup>77</sup> Thus, in cooperation with civil society and local governments, the Indonesia government took measures to be more gender-responsive engaging CSOs in consultations for the development of the 2020-2024 National Action Plan for Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism that Leads to Terrorism.

The Plan takes a "whole of government and whole of society approach" by committing to improving coordination among government bodies and with civil society and other stakeholders<sup>78</sup> While the National Counter Terrorism Agency (BNPT) oversees the implementation of P/CVE in Indonesia,<sup>79</sup> collaboration across 48 government ministries, especially the ministries of Social Affairs, Education, Culture, Research and Technology, and Religious Affairs, enabled the development of a gender-responsive framework for preventing violent extremism and terrorism. While counterterrorism is still a male-dominated arena, with women more represented at the grassroots level, a cooperative relationship and mutual respect between civil society and national and local government has developed in the context of the formation and implementation of the P/CVE Plan.<sup>80</sup>

BNPT established the Forum Koordinasi Pencegahan Terorisme as a strategic partner to coordinate the prevention of terrorism at the regional level.<sup>81</sup> A joint secretariat supports the Forum consisting of three working groups known as Sekretariat Bersama (Sekber), each focusing on one of the pillars of the Plan.<sup>82</sup> The Partnership pillar works with a thematic working group consisting of 36 CSOs and seven primary focus areas, including gender mainstreaming, which indicates the government's commitment to gender responsiveness in P/CVE and terrorism measures.<sup>83</sup> Significant progress has been made in addressing the issue of violent extremism more holistically. While there are challenges in varying implementation across jurisdictions, creating a gender-responsive framework and mobilisation of a network of women leaders in local communities have been critical factors in preventing violent extremist incidents.<sup>84</sup>

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77 U.S. Department of State. (2022). Country Reports on Terrorism 2022: Indonesia. Bureau Of Counterterrorism. Available at: [link](#).

78 Gayatri H.I. (2021). Indonesia's NAP CVE as an Instrument of a Gendered Non-Traditional Security Approach in Indo-Pacific. Australian Institute of International Affairs. Available at: [link](#).

79 UN Women. (2023). Women, Peace and Security in Indonesia. UN Women. p. 1. Available at: [link](#).

80 Klls. Civil society. February 2024.

81 I-KHUB BNPT. (2023). Counter Terrorism and Violent Extremism Outlook, p. 41. Available at: [link](#).

82 The Pillars of Indonesia's National Action Plan on P/CVE are: Prevention: Preparedness, Counter-Radicalism and Deradicalisation Preparedness Aspect; Law Enforcement, Protection of Witnesses and Victims and Strengthening of National Legislative Framework and Partnership & Cooperation. PeaceGen Indonesia. (2023). Tracking the Impact of P/CVE in Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) in Indonesia. Peace Generation Indonesia: 4. Available at: [link](#).

83 The seven areas are: gender mainstreaming; witness protection and victim rights fulfilment; youth involvement; communication; national preparedness; rehabilitation and reintegration; and human rights. *ibid*.

84 Klls. Civil society. February 2024.

## EARLY WARNING COMMUNITY PROTECTION

Early warning mechanisms play an important role in identifying and preventing security challenges at their root, often at the community or local level. Gender-responsive crisis prevention means recognising that distinct warning signs for conflict are often observed by women and men in everyday life, due in part to the different roles and positions they have in the home, community and society.

Early warning and response are vital to prevent *rido*, a long-standing and pervasive form of local-level conflict between clans, local elites and rival armed groups in the Philippines. The causes of *rido* (which is centred in the BARMM) vary and are highly contextual, ranging from small offences like theft to more serious factors such as murder, land disputes or political competition. A study found that between the 1930s and 2005, more than 1,200 cases of *rido* had been documented in Mindanao, resulting in the deaths of over 5,500 people and displacing thousands.<sup>85</sup>

Traditional roles and stereotypes affect both men's and women's experiences in *rido*. For instance, forced marriage is often tied to *rido*, such as in Sulu, BARMM, where young girls have been abducted, raped and then forced into marriage by armed clan groups, in that order.<sup>86</sup> Daughters are offered for marriage to appease warring clans, though even their sacrifice may not prevent the recurrence of clan violence. These gendered experiences of *rido* necessitate a gender-responsive approach to prevent violence and sustain peace.

While violence against women and girls is often at the heart of *rido*, traditional approaches to settling *rido* have been led by male heads of local authorities, clans and local elders. Men and women's experiences of *rido*, moreover, are shaped by traditional gender roles and stereotypes where, for instance, men are expected to protect women, family and clan honour. Efforts to prevent *rido* have not for the most part involved women, although women mediators have provided auxiliary support capacity and played roles in negotiating *rido* in certain cases, for example in Lanao del Sur.<sup>87</sup> Formal approaches to resolving *rido* have not taken on a gender-sensitive perspective either. The Office of the Chief Minister created the Peace, Security and Reconciliation Office with a mandate to mediate and resolve *rido* among factions of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front in BARMM.<sup>88</sup> However, recently a new initiative to increase women's role in conflict mediation and resolution has had promising outcomes.

In 2023, the Philippines Ministry of Public Order and Safety established a conflict reporting system (CRS) composed of early warning and early response (EWER) platforms and rolled it out in 10 local government units across four provinces via the NGO Magungaya Mindanao Incorporated (with support from UN Women and Nonviolent Peaceforce). To support the CRS, 450 volunteer Community Protection Monitors have been trained and supported to form EWER platforms, which enable participants to collect and pool conflict data and report it

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85 Inok, J. (2023). Year-End Review: Bangsamoro Gov't champions inclusive, transformative developments in 2023. Bangsamoro Information Office. Available at: [link](#).

86 Davies, S.E, J. True and M. Tanyag. 2016. "How Women's Silence Secures the Peace: Analysing Sexual and Gender-Based Violence in a Low-Intensity Conflict." *Gender and Development* 24, 3: 463.

87 Torres III, W. M. (2014). *Clan Feuding and Conflict Management in Mindanao* (Expanded Edition). Ateneo de Manila University Press. Available at: [link](#).

88 Office of the Chief Minister. (2022). Executive Order No. 0008 Creating and Establishing the Peace, Security, and Reconciliation Office (PSRO) under the Office of the Chief Minister and Defining its Scope of Authority. Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao. Available at: [link](#).

to local authorities. (EWER is an approach to the prevention of conflict that identifies and monitors warning signs and indicators of future conflict). Of the EWER platforms that were operational in February 2024, 90 per cent were led by women. In 2023, the Ministry reported that it had successfully settled 309 inter- and intra-communal *rido*.<sup>89</sup>

These outcomes are the result of a deliberate policy. In some cases, because women are seen as less 'political' or are not direct targets of conflicts within the context of *rido*, they can engage more freely across clan lines to share information for EWER.<sup>90</sup> Women also tend not to be the 'direct' targets of conflicts that are largely driven by different groups of men. As such, they have a comparative advantage and flexibility to identify and navigate safe spaces and concrete conflict prevention/resolution strategies, including detecting early warning signs of violent conflicts in their communities.

In BARMM, the development of a community of practice of women mediators has involved creating a new curriculum, training women mediators, and developing policies and guidelines. As part of this work, the Bangsamoro Women Mediation Agenda has been established to express the issues, interests and recommendations of BARMM women mediators. The Ministry of Public Order and Safety has enabled women mediators to use collective action and iterative experience-sharing and lesson-learning to drive more effective action for an increase in gender-responsive conflict prevention and resolution in the BARMM. Women's participation is especially effective in the resolution of GBV and disputes. Early results from UN Women show that women's participation in the EWER platforms is also contributing to their empowerment, giving them agency in conflict prevention as well as humanitarian response.<sup>91</sup>

A key mechanism for gender-responsive conflict/crisis prevention is to integrate gender markers into the CRS and EWER platforms, although the limited collection of sex-disaggregated data is a challenge. EWER platforms, capacity-building and reporting to local government could be expanded beyond the prevention of *rido* to monitor risk and protective indicators for disaster and climate-induced insecurities. These initiatives for gender-responsive conflict and climate insecurity prevention could be supported by the overarching national-level and BARMM regional-level plans on WPS to help address local contextual realities and priorities.<sup>92</sup> Women-led EWER is a good practice, moreover, that could be implemented in other ASEAN contexts to track different traditional and non-traditional security risks.

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89 Inok, J. (2023). Year-End Review: Bangsamoro Gov't champions inclusive, transformative developments in 2023. Bangsamoro Information Office. Available at: [link](#).

90 Mahinay, A.C., Tato, S.A., Traje, A., Romo, G.D.A., & Sarmiento, J.M.P. (2022). Women in BARMM: Towards Normalisation of Major MILF Camps in Mindanao, Philippines. VSO Philippines. Available at: [link](#).

91 UN Women. (2022). "Women's groups relieve fragile conflicts in communities in the Philippine's Bangsamoro region." Available at: [link](#).

92 OPAPRU. (2023). Philippine National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security. (NAPWPS) 2023-2033. Office of the Presidential Adviser on Peace, Reconciliation and Unity. Available at: [link](#); BWC. (2024). Launching of the Bangsamoro Regional Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security 2023-2028 Programme. Bangsamoro Women Commission. Available at: [link](#).

## WOMEN-LED SUB-NATIONAL CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Creating peace dialogues in the Southern Border Provinces (SBPs) in Thailand has been a proactive approach of the government in collaboration with CSOs to restore peace and security. These dialogues have been key to reducing violence and fostering social cohesion. Women's economic empowerment has been a key entry point, with numerous initiatives aimed at addressing economic needs to enhance women's participation in peacebuilding efforts. Notably, organisations such as the Network of Civic Women for Peace and the Women's Peace Association have played an essential role in advancing women's leadership in conflict prevention and resolution. Women's engagement, and the perception of women as non-political, can diffuse security threats and hasten agreement between parties.

Since 2013, formal peace dialogues have been conducted in alignment with the General Consensus on Peace Dialogue Process, establishing the Steering Committee for Peace Dialogue, the Peace Dialogue Delegation, and an Area-based Inter-agency Coordination Working Group.<sup>93</sup> Over the last 10 years both parties – the Thai Government and perpetrators – have repeatedly agreed that the conflict must be resolved through negotiation rather than force, and most peace dialogue initiatives have been kept confidential.<sup>94</sup> Since 2020, five rounds of meetings have been held under the mediation of the Government of Malaysia. In February 2024, both parties were reported to agree to the plan of signing a formal peace agreement.<sup>95</sup> Women have been traditionally underrepresented in track 1 peace negotiation meetings and initiatives.<sup>96</sup> However, they can play an even more effective role in tracks 1.5 (informal government and non-government processes), and 2 and 3 (expert, non-government and civil society processes). It is these more informal peace talks that are contributing to promoting and sustaining peace in Southeast Asia, especially in the context of Southern Border Provinces of Thailand or SBPs. Women representatives from both government and community-based actors have been given space within the dialogue processes to discuss key concerns, addressing the causes and the consequences of the conflict.<sup>97</sup> The gains that can be made in these dialogue processes are especially relevant to the lives of women and girls and communities on the ground.

Many women living in the SBPs are either widows or have husbands working in other countries.<sup>98</sup> Thus, they often need to provide for their families' subsistence while simultaneously caring for elderly family members and children. Security-oriented staff and decision-makers intervening in the area tend to miss some key cross-cutting implications of the challenges facing local women and men, such as the lack of access to public services and the impact of security measures on people's grievances. This omission may deepen communal conflict and locals' trust in police and other state institutions.<sup>99</sup> Social cohesion has been a major challenge in SBPs, where state capacity to deliver social services is relatively weak.<sup>100</sup> To

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93 Royal Thai Government. (2012). General consensus on peace dialogue process. Available at: [link](#).

94 International Crisis Group. (2022). Sustaining the Momentum in Southern Thailand. Available at: [link](#).

95 Aljazeera. (2024). Thailand, Muslim separatists agree on a new plan to end violence. Available at: [link](#).

96 ASEAN Institute for Peace and Reconciliation. (2021). Local Women and Peacebuilding in Thailand Deep South. Perspective from the Peace Survey. Available at: [link](#).

97 For security reasons, names and roles of women were not disclosed. KIIs. Government. January 2024.

98 KIIs. Civil society. January 2024.

99 *ibid*.

100 Alisa Hasumoh (2020) "Civil society in Thailand's deep south and the weak state." *Kyoto Review of Southeast Asia*. Available at: [link](#).

address this challenge, in parallel with the official peace dialogues, several initiatives have arisen to empower the local population, focusing on social cohesion with particular attention to economic empowerment of women and marginalised groups. Women's participation in informal peace processes is highly valued because it can make a real difference to these concrete issues affecting people's lives.

Over the past decade, both government and civil society in the SBPs have embraced sustaining peace and conflict prevention mechanisms that have facilitated multi-stakeholder collaboration, including government, civil society and women's organisations. At the same time, local CSOs have demonstrated increasing dedication to advancing women's economic empowerment. More than 15 organisations that are members of the Committee of Coordination Centre for Children and Women in the SBPs have played a key role in advancing responses to women and children protection, violence against women and women's insecurity, gender-responsive disaster preparedness and risk reduction. An improved government strategy focused on women-specific, long-term programming has been identified by stakeholders as vital to crisis prevention and redressing the impacts of conflict.<sup>101</sup>

In the SBPs, the government's strategy has shifted away from peacekeeping toward peacebuilding. Military operations have been consistently reduced, including the number of troops deployed.<sup>102</sup> The commitment to community empowerment is reflected in, and integral to, the national security agenda. The National Security Policy and Plan 2023-2027 states that government policies have been increasingly redirected to "win the trust of local people and to promote tangible recognition and acceptance of a multicultural society."<sup>103</sup> In this context, the parallel dialogues led by women have played an important role.

To institutionalise gender-responsive conflict prevention, the Coordination Centre for Children and Women in the Southern Border Provinces (CCCW-SBP) was established in 2019. It serves as a multi-stakeholder mechanism that coordinates among line ministries, NGOs and civil society actors at both central and local levels, to address women's and children's issues in the SBPs. Moreover, the CCCW-SBP coordinates the implementation of measures and guidelines on WPS, enabling the localization of the WPS agenda, including women's participation in peace dialogues and the inclusion of social and economic issues that can facilitate the resolution of the conflict.<sup>104</sup> As a result of the CCCW-SBP, over 350 women and young people in pilot communities have developed strategies for peacebuilding, mediation and business development based on community needs.<sup>105</sup> The CCCW-SBP has the potential to provide a greater space for women's participation.

A key outcome of the CCCW-SBP has been the remarkable diffusion of cross-cultural women's organisations and networks promoting local social cohesion and sustainable peace. For example, the Peace Agenda of Women, consisting of 23 women-led CSOs, agreed to make peaceful and safe public spaces their common interest, setting aside cultural differences

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101 KII. Civil society. January 2024.

102 KII. Government. January 2024.

103 Thailand Office of the National Security Council. (2019) The National Security Policy Plan. (2019-2022). Available at: [link](#)

104 Ibid.

105 See UN Women, Women, Peace and Security, n.d.. Available at: [link](#).

and existing prejudice between ethnic and religious groups.<sup>106</sup> Furthermore, the relative peace achieved during the COVID-19 pandemic is also an outcome of women's vital role in conflict prevention.<sup>107</sup> Women peacebuilders adapted their activities to public health promotion and distribution of humanitarian aid through their cross-cultural and religious networks to promote stability and cohesion in the pandemic response. Such approaches can be adopted in other countries in Southeast Asia to promote women's empowerment through peacebuilding training and economic initiatives that benefit their communities. Through these initiatives, women can gain knowledge and the confidence to use that knowledge in peacebuilding, thus transforming their roles from those of vulnerable victims to agents of change who can reduce risks within their communities.

## EMERGING GOOD PRACTICES

Creating/strengthening gender-sensitive frameworks for disaster and climate change preparedness, addressing cybersecurity and increasing the number of women working in the security sector are areas of emerging good practices in gender-responsive crisis prevention.

### *Gender-sensitive disaster and climate change preparedness*

The report State of Gender Equality and Climate Change in ASEAN provides advice to Member States on how to integrate gender considerations into their nationally determined contributions (their detailed plans on reducing greenhouse gas emissions to reduce climate change).<sup>108</sup> Important progress has been made in disaster risk reduction (DRR) including gender vulnerability assessments, the collection of gender-disaggregated data, and gender-sensitive communication about disaster preparedness.<sup>109</sup> For example, a review of Typhoon Ketsana, which affected the southern provinces of Lao PDR in September 2009, revealed the disaster's disproportionate impact on women and girls, and the failure of emergency response teams to meet their needs. As a result, the government invested significant resources to develop a holistic prevention and risk reduction approach to its emergency preparedness plans, institutional framework and DRR governance. All DRR stakeholders in Lao PDR began to appreciate the value of inclusive and gender-responsive approaches.<sup>110</sup>

ASEAN has coordinating mechanisms in place, including the ASEAN Agreement on Disaster Management and Emergency Response (AADMER) Work Programme 2021-2025, which incorporates gender and social inclusion as a cross-cutting issue, along with the ASEAN Coordinating Centre on Humanitarian Assistance on Disaster Management (AHA Centre). ASEAN has also developed the Regional Framework on Protection, Gender, and Inclusion in Disaster Management 2021-2025. These policies are aligned with the Relief and Recovery Pillar of ASEAN's RPA WPS. There have been practical strides in implementing these policies

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106 See Suwardi, A.C. (2023). Women's Movement Towards Building Sustainable Peace in Cross-Cultural Society: The Case of Peace Agenda of Women in the Deep South of Thailand. In: Sharifi, A., Simangan, D., Kaneko, S. (eds) Integrated Approaches to Peace and Sustainability . World Sustainability Series. Springer, Singapore. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-19-7295-9\\_10](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-19-7295-9_10); UN Women. (2023). "Women, Peace and Security in Thailand: Country Brief." Available at: [link](#).

107 See Amporn Marddent and Vithaya Arporn (2021) "Or Sor Mor" and "Ai Khai" *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 43, 1: 24-30.

108 ASEAN & UN Women. (2022). State of Gender Equality and Climate Change in ASEAN. p. li. Available at: [link](#).

109 ASEAN. (2021). ASEAN State of Climate Change Report. p. 53. Available at: [link](#).

110 D. Vivona and M. Suvavong. (2021) "Strengthening Disaster Response and Resilience in Lao PDR - A Decade of Learning Since Typhoon Ketsana." *J. Disaster Res.* 16, 2: 234-240. Available at: [link](#).

to successfully mitigate the impact of disasters, such as in Cambodia with the Renewable Energy Programme, which actively engages with and promotes women-led energy enterprises by implementing “the smoke-free village” approach and also trains women as champions for gender-transformative DRR.<sup>111</sup> However, more inclusive consultation with diverse groups, including diverse women, is needed to ensure that policies are adequately implemented and operationalised, particularly at the country level.<sup>112</sup>

An example of a regional infrastructure that has adopted a coordinated approach to climate change is the Mekong River Commission (MRC). Its members are Cambodia, Lao PDR, Thailand and Vietnam, with dialogue partners including Myanmar and People’s Republic of China. This intergovernmental organisation, tasked with managing the shared water resources and promoting sustainable development in the Mekong River basin, has recognised the threat of climate change. In response, it has developed the Adaptation Strategy and Action Plan to strengthen coordination, enhance resilience, reduce risks and protect ecosystems and livelihoods.<sup>113</sup> In 2020, MRC, which has a memorandum of understanding with ASEAN,<sup>114</sup> published its Gender Action Plan, which was integrated in the MRC Strategic Plan 2021-2025. The Plan aims to incorporate a gender perspective into climate change adaptation activities within the Mekong River basin, ensuring that both men and women benefit equally and that gender-specific vulnerabilities are addressed. Significant work, especially in agriculture – where most women in ASEAN work – is still needed to fully integrate gender-responsiveness into climate change management.<sup>115</sup>

### *Women’s Participation in the Security Sector*

Increasing the number of women professionals in the security sector is an institutional mechanism for gender responsiveness in crisis prevention, especially transnational crime. The proportion of women police officers in ASEAN law enforcement agencies ranges from just 6 per cent in Indonesia to 20 per cent in Lao PDR, the latter having a 10 per cent quota for annual female recruitment.<sup>116</sup> Governments have made some progress in expanding careers for women in policing, maritime security, cybersecurity, immigration and border control, as well as in peacekeeping. This is an area that can be further supported. Women security

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111 See Gracia Paramitha, Denni Rajagukguk and Revy Marlina (2024) “The Complexities of SDGs Goal 5 and 13 in ASEAN Region: A Comparative Study between Balinese and Cambodian Women Campaign on Climate Action.” *Technium Social Sciences Journal*, Vol. 56: DOI: <https://doi.org/10.47577/tssj.v56i1.10858>.

112 ASEAN has recently released a report assessing their capacity on Multi-Hazard End-to-End Early Warning Systems for Natural Disasters, which found that there was a lack of systematic engagement with both rural and urban populations resulting in limited knowledge of the specific needs of different groups, including women and children, people with disabilities, marginalised communities and older peoples. See ASEAN Secretariat (2024). *Strengthening ASEAN Multi-Hazard End to End Early Warning Systems for Natural Disasters: an assessment of current capacity*, p. 27.

113 Centre for Non-Traditional Security Studies. (2023). *Climate Change and its Impact on Peace and Security in Southeast Asia*. available at: [link](#).

114 ASEAN Secretariat (2015). *Memorandum of Understanding Between the Mekong River Commission Secretariat and the ASEAN Secretariat*. Available at: [link](#).

115 Yi-Chen Han, J. Pross, C. Agarwal, R. & Raluca Torre A. (2022). *State of Gender Equality and Climate Change in ASEAN*. *UN Women and Stockholm Environmental Institute. (SEI)*. Available at: [link](#).

116 United Nations Office for Drugs and Crime (UNODC) et al, 2020. *Women in Law Enforcement in ASEAN Region*; see also ASEAN and UN Women, *ASEAN Gender Outlook 2021*, An additional piece of evidence for consideration can be drawn from the 2021 ASEAN and UN Women, *ASEAN Gender Outlook*, note 4, which notes that: 29% of ASEAN women peacekeepers are deployed to work with individual police 21% are deployed as mission experts and only 5% are deployed as troops.

professionals may see through a different lens than male security professionals, enabling them to more accurately anticipate security threats in unusual settings, such as female radicalization to violent extremism. They may also interpret and respond to threats in a way that deescalates them. A diverse and inclusive professional security sector can ensure the security of the whole of the community during and after crises.

Some ASEAN Member States are committed to expanding women's participation in the security sector. Cambodia, for example, has committed a target to deploy more than 20 per cent female peacekeepers.<sup>117</sup> Policing is a typical pathway to peacekeeping roles, so gender equality in policing should also be encouraged to enhance domestic and regional crisis responses.<sup>118</sup> Women in the security sector enhance gender-responsive and inclusive protection. In addition, WPS capacity-building and ongoing training is essential so that all security sector professionals are responsive to gender inequalities and differences that may mean security threats present differently or that there are alternative approaches to delivering protection.

*Inclusion of gender issues and/or women's participation can build gender responsiveness in cybersecurity* to improve the management or prevention of crises. As discussed earlier, the underrepresentation of women in cybersecurity may exacerbate security threats because of the different insights and lenses women may use, considering a wider range of scenarios and attack vectors. Integrating more women into cybersecurity is crucial to avoid reinforcing gender biases and neglecting potential threats. To address cyber threats, Singapore's government has launched the Cybersecurity Strategy (2021), which supports youth, women, and mid-career professionals to pursue cybersecurity careers. Recognising that women are underrepresented in the sector, and that the sector itself faces a talent shortage, encouraging greater women's participation is helping to meet the growing demand for cybersecurity professionals. The SG Cyber Women strategy specifically targets young girls to join cybersecurity education programmes.<sup>119</sup>

Data shows that women and men experience cyber attacks, and their impacts, differently due to their gender roles.<sup>120</sup> Current policies that seek to "combat online security threats often sideline gender perspectives." They may address the aggressor and defence of the state but not respond to individual (gendered) vulnerabilities. It is therefore vital to ensure that government strategies consider gender as a relevant factor to strengthen cybersecurity.<sup>121</sup>

ASEAN Member States have evidenced the potential for gender-responsiveness in cybersecurity. The Philippines, for example, has expanded the definition of GBV to include cyberspaces, as part of its 'Safe Spaces Act' (2019), while Singapore has included sexual harassment occurring online in its Protection from Harassment Act (2014).<sup>122</sup> Cambodian NGOs are promoting women's participation in the digital sector, recognising the gendered

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117 Royal Cambodian Armed Forces. (2022). National Defence Policy. Available at: [link](#).

118 UNDP (2020). Women and Peacekeeping in ASEAN Countries. Available at: [link](#).

119 Cyber Security Agency of Singapore. (2022). SG Cyber Women. Available at: [link](#).

120 Hacıyakupoglu, G., & Wong, Y. (2021). Gender, Security and Digital Space: Issues, Policies, and the Way Forward. S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies. (RSIS) at Nanyang Technological University. (NTU). Available at: [link](#).

121 KIIs. Academic. February 2024.

122 Sey, A. (2022). Gender Security and Safety in the ASEAN Digital Economy. Economic Research Institute for ASEAN and East Asia. (46). p. 13. Available at: [link](#).

impacts of digital security threats and crimes, as well as supporting vulnerable women, including young women and women from indigenous communities.<sup>123</sup> They have developed cybersecurity and virtual self-defence training to promote the digital resilience of women and girls.

Cases of cyber GBV are rising within and across countries worldwide.<sup>124</sup> Online attacks targeting female political candidates and spouses of political candidates have also occurred in several ASEAN states.<sup>125</sup> Cybersecurity frameworks and initiatives need to consider gendered online threats, including the targeting of politically-active women such as political candidates, in their cybersecurity strategies responses – not merely within policies to address GBV.

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123 KII. Civil Society. January 2024.

124 Khairina, N. Hata, A. and Dini, I. (2023). Cyber Gender-Based Violence among High School Students in Indonesia. *World Bank*, p. 6. Available at: [link](#).

125 For example, in the case of Indonesia see Azizah, N. and Cakra Ningrat R.S. (2023). Report on Various Online Attacks on Vulnerable Groups in Social Media Platforms During the 2014-2019 Elections in Indonesia. *Southeast Asia Freedom of Expression Network (SAFEnet)*, pp. 33-34. Available at: [link](#).

# STRATEGIC ENTRY POINTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This section provides policy and programmatic recommendations to strengthen coordination, effectiveness and gender responsiveness to enhance existing mechanisms and build more sustainable crisis prevention, resolution and recovery at ASEAN regional, national and local levels. Building on the strategic entry points and noted gaps in the assessment of the gender-responsiveness of existing crisis prevention mechanisms, recommendations for ASEAN sectoral bodies, Member States, CSOs and dialogue partners are suggested.

Gender-sensitive analysis of security challenges is vital for informing effective, gender-responsive crisis prevention. However, the localised evidence bases to inform crisis prevention and empower its practitioners need to be built. There is an opportunity to bolster localised evidence-building by linking peace practitioners with universities, research institutes/academies and national militaries and security academies with research programmes focusing on peace and security within and across ASEAN Member States. Partnering with universities and other research actors presents an opportunity to enhance data collection efforts across Member States on both traditional and non-traditional security issues, prioritising sex-disaggregated data and addressing the following key knowledge gaps. The lack of adequate evidence to inform decision-making and resource allocation for WPS interventions makes it almost impossible to address the gender-specific needs of men and women in conflict prevention, security and peacebuilding.

A key opportunity for advancing the WPS agenda in ASEAN lies in institutionalising multi-stakeholder collaboration among government mechanisms, civil society and women's organisations on localised security challenges. Allocating sufficient resources for WPS interventions at the national and local levels, and monitoring these allocations, can address one of the major challenges impeding the implementation of the WPS agenda globally.<sup>126</sup> Whilst a conducive policy environment is in place to promote greater participation of women in conflict/crisis prevention, the research highlighted gaps between policies and implementation and the need for coordination mechanisms, capacity-building and additional financial and human resources. To bridge these gaps, the report makes 10 main recommendations, starting with establishing a regional conflict and crisis prevention mechanism building on current mechanisms that address different security challenges in order to better integrate policy discussions and guide current and future practice.

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126 The UN Security Council Resolution 2242 (2015) and 2017 Annual Report of the UN Secretary-General on Women, Peace and Security agenda to the General Assembly calls for increased funding for Gender Equality and WPS programming.

## COORDINATION MECHANISMS

**1. Advance the establishment of a gender-responsive regional conflict and crisis prevention mechanism, building on the ASEAN Agreement on Disaster Management and Emergency Response, the AHA Centre, the post-2025 ASEAN Political Security Strategic Plan, ASEAN-IPR and the ASEAN Women for Peace Registry, the ASEAN RPA WPS and/or ASEAN Member States' NAPs on WPS.**

- Support the regional mechanism's mandate by broadening networks of communities of practice. Increase technical capacity, expand the ASEAN Women for Peace Registry under ASEAN-IPR to include experts specialised in conflict and peace mediation, and facilitate 'lessons learned' dialogues with civil society practitioners, academics and technical experts who specialise in gender-responsive approaches to the various security challenges in Southeast Asia and other regions.
- Provide inter-agency coordination at the national level, bringing together local actors and peace infrastructure under a common framework linked to localisation of the ASEAN RPA WPS. A diverse range of civil society and women's organisations could be engaged to ensure comprehensive representation and effective collaboration.
- Ensure national frameworks can respond to dynamic conflict/crisis contexts. Consult with and seek input from women-led or women's civil society organisations to help further localise the gender-responsive provisions of NAPs on WPS, on P/CVE and/or disaster preparedness and climate change.
- Encourage women's participation in decision-making processes and in national-level mechanisms related to peace and security. Amplify the voices of female parliamentarians (via women's parliamentary caucuses) enabling them to champion gender-responsive legislative reforms and policy frameworks. Provide greater support to subnational structures and increase incentives to ensure gender-sensitive decision-making, planning and programming at local levels.

## DATA AND EVIDENCE

**1. Promote gender-sensitive data collection and analysis to enhance regional conflict and crisis prevention and resilience.**

- Consolidate the gender perspectives applied to non-traditional security issues in an ASEAN-wide WPS approach. Integrate this approach into capacity-building and training. For example, an ASEAN handbook on gender perspectives on crisis prevention could analyse the linkages between gender and climate insecurity and gender and cybersecurity, drawing on Member State examples. This handbook could be used to integrate the gender perspective into ASEAN sectoral work plans.
- Document the local-level peace infrastructure that women have built. This research could explore how women have been able to use community spaces for sharing common issues and challenges as well as to promote resilience against security challenges. It could collect data insights and knowledge on the informal channels that civil society and women's organisations use in peace mediation and facilitation, including their contribution to track 1.0 and 1.5 peace negotiations.

- Collect relevant insights and knowledge for conflict/crisis prevention from women’s and men’s experiences of frontline crisis response and recovery roles in the health, social protection and care sectors at national and local levels. Participation in crisis recovery is integral to crisis prevention and vice versa, given compounding crises and their recurrence.

**2. Create conflict and crisis prevention gender-sensitive indicators for different localised contexts in Southeast Asia** to support the implementation of the ASEAN RPA WPS, the AADMER, the post-2025 ASEAN Political Security Strategic Plan and/or ASEAN Member States’ NAPs on WPS. To develop these indicators:

- Promote further data collection among ASEAN Member States for gender-sensitive indicators of peace resilience. These indicators could encompass protective/risk factors and be disaggregated by sex, age, disability and other intersectional categories where possible. These local and national indicators can be incorporated into existing and future EWER systems to enhance resilience in the face of security challenges.
- Support women and CSOs as local information and data gatherers of the everyday crisis warning signs, including climate security risks, in developing gender-sensitive indicators via ASEAN-IPR. While women-led early warning systems have been implemented in some Member States, ASEAN lacks a cohesive women-led EWER system that tracks different security risks together.
- Implement NAPs on WPS through data collection and analysis to examine how gender is relevant to the broad spectrum of security challenges, including climate change, transnational crime and digital security.
- Produce an annual **ASEAN Women, Peace and Security Outlook** that analyses and updates the gender-sensitive early warning indicators for different local and national contexts across the region. This would be a vital knowledge product that could inspire similar ‘Outlooks’ at national and local levels.

## **POLICY AND IMPLEMENTATION**

**1. Build on the ASEAN Regional Framework on Protection, Gender and Inclusion to support the implementation of gender-responsive DRR and disaster management, recognising the importance of greater inclusion of sex and age disaggregation in disaster management and emergency response to ensure safety for all.**

- Enhance DRR and climate response frameworks: Establish mechanisms that ensure sex-and-age disaggregated data in DRR efforts, address the unique needs of women in logistics and aid provision, and tailor risk communication strategies to address gender-specific vulnerabilities.

- Ensure cross-cutting implementation: Integrate gender and social inclusion throughout disaster management and response as well as prevention and mitigation, building on the progress made in the AADMER on the principle of gender and social inclusion,<sup>127</sup> and establish a regional mechanism to consult with CSOs, women's organizations and diverse groups on disaster management and preparedness.

**2. Extend lessons learned from disaster preparedness to climate-related security risks:** Build on disaster resilience to address specific security risks in climate-prone areas, reinforcing ASEAN's WPS framework and integrating these lessons into the regional RPA WPS.

**3. Promote gender-responsive approaches in cybersecurity by integrating gender considerations in the ASEAN Cybersecurity Cooperation Strategy and in national cybersecurity strategies:** ASEAN Member States could assess and address the gendered nature of cybersecurity risks and vulnerabilities in their national cybersecurity strategies and frameworks. This includes the identification of gender-based risks, such as online GBV, harassment and privacy violations, and ensuring that women's specific needs are addressed.

- Increase women's participation in cybersecurity policy development: Encourage and support the active participation of women in the development of cybersecurity policies, strategies and initiatives at national and regional levels. This should include promoting women's roles in decision-making positions within cybersecurity governance bodies and as experts in the field.
- Support gender-focused cybersecurity education and training: Provide opportunities for women to participate in cybersecurity education, training, and capacity-building programmes. These could aim to increase the number of women in the cybersecurity workforce and equip them with the skills needed to contribute to both policy development and technical solutions in cybersecurity.
- Raise awareness of gender-based cybersecurity risks: Develop campaigns and programmes to raise awareness about the specific cybersecurity risks faced by women, such as online abuse, stalking, and trafficking, and the need for gender-sensitive cyber protection measures.

## CAPACITY-BUILDING

**1. Capacity-building and training:** Prioritise upskilling for security sector and peace-making professionals to be gender-responsive to different regional threat scenarios and their prevention in order to support their roles in addressing the security of the whole of the community.

**2. Communication and education:** Promote the impact of women leaders in crisis prevention and peace infrastructure and the benefit of their leadership to communities.

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<sup>127</sup> The ASEAN Regional Framework Protection, Gender and Inclusion (ARF-PGI) advocates for greater inclusion of sex and age disaggregation in disaster management and emergency response. Available at: [link](#).

- Highlight promising examples of women's leadership and participation in peace infrastructure, for example, in line with the ASEAN Handbook on Promising Practices on Deradicalisation.
- Tailoring communications to raise awareness and engagement with men on the roles women can play in peace infrastructure in their community may help to challenge and change limiting beliefs among women and men. Consider the 'peace village' model for addressing this challenge. It encourages women's participation in the prevention of violent extremism, building their confidence and efficacy with men's understanding and approval and a clear purpose of benefiting communities.

## FINANCIAL AND HUMAN RESOURCES

### 1. Increase the number of women professionals in the security sector.

- Conduct comprehensive gender assessments in law enforcement institutions to identify the specific barriers women face in accessing these institutions, both as clients and as employees. The assessment could also examine challenges related to career advancement and progression within the professional hierarchy.
  - » Develop and implement gender-responsive strategies and policies within the security sector to mainstream gender equality. These policies aim to enhance the recruitment, retention and career advancement of women within law enforcement institutions. Additionally, gender could be integrated into the core functions, services and operational actions of these institutions to promote a more inclusive and responsive security sector;
  - » Implement targeted recruitment and retention strategies: ASEAN Member States could create specific recruitment and training programmes aimed at increasing the number of women in the security sector, including national militaries, police forces and other peacekeeping and conflict prevention units;
  - » Ensure gender-responsive professional development: Provide training programmes that equip women security professionals with the necessary skills and knowledge to engage in leadership roles. These programmes could focus on gender-sensitive crisis prevention, peacekeeping, and conflict resolution;
  - » Create mentorship opportunities: Develop mentorship and peer-support programmes for women in security-related careers to foster retention, professional development and leadership growth within the sector;
  - » Promote gender balance in decision-making roles: Advocate for gender parity in leadership positions within security sector institutions to ensure women have a voice in shaping security policies, including those related to crisis prevention and recovery.

**2. Allocate financial and human resources for the implementation of conflict and crisis prevention policies** by leveraging gender-responsive budgeting approaches and tools and innovative financing. This aligns with Output 6.1. of the ASEAN RPA WPS, which encourages the use of gender-responsive budgeting and innovative financing models as tools to mobilize financial resources for WPS.

- ASEAN Member States could prioritize the allocation of both financial and human resources to effectively implement policies promoting conflict and crisis prevention, particularly through the NAP WPS. The consistent underfunding of the WPS agenda has been a major barrier to its successful implementation globally, as identified in UN Security Council Resolution 2242 (2015) and the 2017 Report on WPS by the UN Secretary-General to the General Assembly. Financial resources are essential for fulfilling WPS commitments and should allocate sufficient funds and personnel for the sustained implementation of the NAP WPS, ensuring gender equality and security priorities are met;
- Strengthen the monitoring and tracking mechanism for NAP WPS resources. To improve accountability and transparency on the implementation of the WPS agenda, Member States could establish and strengthen monitoring frameworks for NAP WPS, including a tracking mechanism that captures data on the resources allocated to WPS. This should address the current lack of reliable data on financial resources allocated to WPS activities in the ASEAN region. Effective tracking will provide the evidence necessary to assess the achievement of NAP WPS objectives, helping decision-makers evaluate the impact of investments and reallocate resources as needed to achieve the desired outcomes.

