



CLOSING THE GAP

Empowerment and Inclusion in Asia and the Pacific



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FOREWORD



Ensuring all human beings are equal is a central ambition of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It is predicated on ending all forms of discrimination. Yet the systemic failure to address the root causes of exclusion or empower people to fulfill their potential is jeopardizing our progress towards sustainable development in Asia and the Pacific.

Many economies in our region have experienced a spectacular rise in the average standard of living in recent years. Yet these economic gains mask the widening divide between 'haves' and 'have nots'. Advantaged groups have gained access to opportunities at a higher rate than disadvantaged ones. This has increased inequality, although both groups are wealthier. An adjustment in development strategies is needed, which led ESCAP member States to request this 2019 theme study *"Closing the Gap: Empowerment and Inclusion in Asia and the Pacific"* for the 75th session of their annual Commission.

The analysis of this publication focuses on the following broad areas.

First, it considers the evolution of gaps between disadvantaged and advantaged groups in three key areas of socioeconomic development: education (measured by secondary education completion); decent work (measured by full-time employment); and income (measured by annualized, real household income). Second, it examines the progress of vulnerable groups in selected countries towards completing secondary education. Third, it explores strategies and policy options to support socioeconomic empowerment and provides examples of effective measures taken in the region.

This ESCAP publication shows disadvantaged groups have benefited from economic growth and societal progress in several countries. Secondary education completion rates for rural residents are now on par with urban dwellers in these countries. Increasingly, women's completion rates have caught up with those of men. Yet, income gaps between the top 60 and the bottom 40 per cent of the income spectrum, as well as between rural and urban households, continue to remain stubbornly high. This is irrespective of progress in levels of secondary school education completion or full-time employment. Persons with disabilities have been least empowered and remain among the most vulnerable.

Transformation in our societies is now the only available option. This publication discusses relevant public policy initiatives from selected countries. It concludes that allowing stakeholders to participate in policy formulation is both a tool to improve development outcomes and a means for empowerment. The publication also argues that enhanced public investment in social protection, education and health care, as well as improvement of rural infrastructure, are essential to reduce all forms of inequality.

I hope this publication will provide new insights to policymakers by identifying options to empower people and ensure inclusiveness and equality in Asia and the Pacific.

May 2019

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'A. S. Alisjahbana'.

Armida Salsiah Alisjahbana

Under-Secretary-General and Executive Secretary, United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific

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The publication was edited by Anoushka Ali and the graphic design and layout were developed by Daniel Feary.

ACRONYMS



ADB	Asian Development Bank
BAU	business as usual
Bottom 40	Bottom 40 per cent of households in wealth distribution
CRPD	Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
DHS	Demographic and Health Surveys
D-index	dissimilarity index
ESCAP	Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GNI	Gross National Income
GRB	Gender Responsive Budgeting
ILO	International Labour Organization
MICS	Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PH-OGP	Philippine Open Government Partnership
PP	percentage points
PPP	purchasing power parity
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SED-TVET	Sustainable Economic Development through Technical and Vocational Education and Training
Top 60	Top 60 per cent of households in wealth distribution
UDHR	United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights
UIS	UNESCO Institute for Statistics
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

EXPLANATORY NOTES

ESCAP regions

East and North-East Asia (ENEA): China; Democratic People's Republic of Korea; Hong Kong, China; Japan; Macao, China; Mongolia; and the Republic of Korea

North and Central Asia (NCA): Armenia; Azerbaijan; Georgia; Kazakhstan; Kyrgyzstan; Russian Federation; Tajikistan; Turkmenistan; Uzbekistan

Pacific: American Samoa; Australia; Cook Islands; Fiji; French Polynesia; Guam; Kiribati; Marshall Islands; Micronesia (Federated States of); Nauru; New Caledonia; New Zealand; Niue; Northern Mariana Islands; Palau; Papua New Guinea; Samoa; Solomon Islands; Tonga; Tuvalu; Vanuatu

South-East Asia (SEA): Brunei Darussalam; Cambodia; Indonesia; Lao People's Democratic Republic; Malaysia; Myanmar; Philippines; Singapore; Thailand; Timor-Leste; Viet Nam

South and South-West Asia (SSWA): Afghanistan; Bangladesh; Bhutan; India; Iran (Islamic Republic of); Maldives; Nepal; Pakistan; Sri Lanka; Turkey

COUNTRY ABBREVIATIONS



AFG	Afghanistan	MYS	Malaysia
ARM	Armenia	MDV	Maldives
AUS	Australia	MNG	Mongolia
AZE	Azerbaijan	MMR	Myanmar
BGD	Bangladesh	NPL	Nepal
BTN	Bhutan	NCL	New Caledonia
BRN	Brunei Darussalam	NZL	New Zealand
KHM	Cambodia	PAK	Pakistan
CHN	China	PNG	Papua New Guinea
FJI	Fiji	PHL	Philippines
PYF	French Polynesia	RUS	Russian Federation
GEO	Georgia	WSM	Samoa
GUM	Guam	SGP	Singapore
HKG	Hong Kong, China	SLB	Solomon Islands
IND	India	LKA	Sri Lanka
IDN	Indonesia	TJK	Tajikistan
IRN	Iran, Islamic Republic of	THA	Thailand
JPN	Japan	TLS	Timor-Leste
KAZ	Kazakhstan	TON	Tonga
PRK	Korea, Democratic People's Republic of	TUR	Turkey
KOR	Korea, Republic of	TKM	Turkmenistan
KGZ	Kyrgyzstan	UZB	Uzbekistan
LAO	Lao People's Democratic Republic	VUT	Vanuatu
MAC	Macau, China	VNM	Viet Nam

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Equality requires that everyone be included in development and benefit from development outcomes. Inclusion is only effective, however, if people are empowered to take advantage of opportunities and reach their full potential.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is a call to leave no one behind, placing equality at the centre of national policymaking. The Sustainable Development Goals emphasize universality, so that all people have access to basic services and opportunities, irrespective of their background. Social and economic inclusion, as understood in this report, is the provision of services and opportunities to all members of society, irrespective of their age, gender, race, religion and ethnicity, but also location and class.

For inclusion to be effective and meaningful, however, people also need to have the freedom to make choices and take advantage of available opportunities. Empowerment is the ability to make strategic choices about one's life and future.¹ Empowerment requires an enabling environment for individuals and groups to voice their choices and act on their decisions. The 2030 Agenda also specifically recognizes the role of empowerment for achieving equality, particularly among disadvantaged groups and women.

The analysis in the report reviews trends and directions of the gaps between disadvantaged and advantaged groups, to assert whether disadvantaged groups have been effectively included in development. It focuses on three key areas of socioeconomic development:

education (measured by secondary education completion), decent work (measured by full-time employment) and income (measured by annualized, real household income).² These three indicators also reflect achievements in three of the six Sustainable Development Goals under review by the High-Level Political Forum in 2019 (Goal 4, Goal 8, Goal 10).³

The report finds that average achievements seen in education, employment and income reflect the role economic growth can play in helping people realize their potential. However, these achievements represent only that: an average. Beneath that average, there is a growing divide between those who have and have not. Advantaged groups have gained access to opportunities at higher rate than disadvantaged ones, leading to an increase in gaps, even when both groups are better off than before. Only few signs of underlying empowerment are noted, where disadvantaged groups have narrowed the gaps with the advantaged groups. Women, rural residents, younger people, persons with disabilities, or those above the age of 50 are the most disadvantaged.

These findings corroborate earlier findings of ESCAP research. Income inequality, for example, has been increasing in many Asia-Pacific countries, including in the region's most populous countries: China, India and Indonesia. Inequality of opportunity is also high, especially in educational attainment and in full-time employment, a proxy for decent work. Not surprisingly, this report finds a positive correlation between countries that have seen disadvantaged groups converge to

1 Naila Kabeer, "Resources, Agency, Achievements: Reflections on the Measurement of Women's Empowerment", in *Development and Change*, Vol. 30 (1999), pp. 435–465. Accessed on 16 February 2019 from <https://www.utsr.utoronto.ca/~kmacd/IDSC10/Readings/research%20design/empowerment.pdf>.

2 Because of the data limitations and the sample size restrictions, the analysis does not report on specific rates of individual groups.

3 Ruth Alsop and Nina Heinsohn, "Measuring Empowerment in Practice: Structuring Analysis and Framing Indicators", World Bank Policy Research Working Paper 3510 (Washington DC, World Bank, 2005).

advantaged ones, and countries that record lower inequality of opportunity in secondary education and in full-time employment, as measured by the dissimilarity index.

The report also tracks progress of the furthest behind: groups of people where intersections of disadvantage limit opportunities. Focusing on education, the report shows that four circumstances shape the groups of people who are least likely to finish secondary education, namely low household wealth, being a woman, rural residence and ethnic or minority status. Over time, gender and belonging to the bottom 40 of the national wealth distribution have increased in prominence.

Low levels of public investment in people in the region, particularly in education, health and social protection, exacerbate these gaps. Despite a modest increase in recent years, most countries in the Asia-Pacific region spend, on average, less than one third of the global average of 11.2 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP) on social protection. Expenditures on education and on health care are closer to, but still below, global averages. These findings do not bode well for the realization of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. To reverse these trends, policymakers must create enabling environments to empower the most disadvantaged groups and the furthest behind.

Key findings to drive policy

Finding 1: **Only few signs of underlying empowerment are noted**

Only one country, Kazakhstan, has seen two groups, rural residents and women, close the gaps with urban residents and men in both education and employment. While underlying empowerment of these groups may have played a role, Kazakhstan's rates of secondary education and full-time employment were

already high in 2006, suggesting that socioeconomic equality may take years to achieve.

In some countries, one or two disadvantaged groups, either rural dwellers, women or persons with disabilities, have seen the gaps to advantaged groups close in secondary education as well as in full-time employment. Most of these cases are found in North and Central Asian countries. In East and North-East Asia and in South-East Asia, cases of closing the gaps are less frequent. Similarly, in South and South-West Asia, trends are not consistent and do not paint a picture of empowerment.

Despite the progress in secondary education throughout the region, gaps between the furthest behind and the average person increased. In Indonesia and Thailand, the rate of secondary education completion among the furthest behind doubled between the mid-2000s and the mid-2010s. In Viet Nam it quadrupled, in India it increased 7 times and in Pakistan 24 times. Nevertheless, only three countries saw the furthest behind edging closer to the average secondary completion rate: India, Kazakhstan and Thailand.

Finding 2: **Income gaps remain worryingly large – and disconnected from other achievements**

Income gaps between the bottom 40 and the top 60 of the income distribution, as well as between rural and urban households, appear unbridgeable in most countries, irrespective of progress in education and full-time employment. Absolute income gaps remain stubbornly high or continue to increase, even in countries where incomes grew at a faster pace for rural residents and for those in the bottom 40.

Secondary education completion rates of rural residents in Afghanistan, Armenia, China, Kazakhstan and the Russian Federation have been catching up with those of urban residents.

Women have also seen convergence to male secondary education completion rates in most Central Asian countries and in Malaysia.

A disconnect between equality patterns in education and employment appears. For example, rural residents in Bangladesh, Bhutan and India have significantly closed employment gaps to their urban counterparts, despite lack of convergence in education. Women in Cambodia and Pakistan have also closed employment gaps compared to men, a development not seen in secondary education outcomes. These unexpected results hint that jobs may not require higher levels of education. This assumption is confirmed in Bangladesh and Bhutan, where full-time employment rates of low-educated workers converged to those of more educated ones.

Finding 3: To achieve equality for all, strong institutions and legal frameworks are more important than the country's level of economic development

Trends in empowerment and inclusion do not bode well for socioeconomic development in the region and may hamper efforts to achieve the 2030 Agenda. By 2030 only five countries are projected to close the gaps in secondary education.

A country's income level does not seem to determine its potential to achieve equality for all, if responsive institutions are in place, and if legislative frameworks are guided by strong political commitment and enforced.





CHAPTER 1

METHODOLOGY AND CONCEPTS OF INCLUSION AND EMPOWERMENT

The recent decades of development in Asia and the Pacific are often portrayed as a success story of inclusive development. In the context of economic growth, more than 80 per cent of the region's extreme poor have been lifted out of poverty since 1990, resulting in improved living standards for most people. The average improvements in income, but also in access to health care, education and other key services are undeniable.⁴ However, these achievements represent only that — an average.

Parallel to these trends are the increasing gaps between the rich and the poor. The region's income inequality has soared over the past two decades, to reach to 38.4 in the mid-2010s, as measured by the Gini coefficient.⁵ There is also a close link between income inequality and the distribution of opportunities and basic services. In many countries, basic services are not universally provided but rather a privilege for those who can afford them.

The dissimilarity index (D-index), a measure of inequality of opportunity within countries, shows that inequalities are highest in educational attainment and full-time employment.⁶ Social, economic and cultural reasons shape household choices in education. Lack of decent jobs and informality also drive inequality in the labour market. Currently, around one billion

4 ESCAP, *Social Outlook for Asia and the Pacific: Poorly Protected* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.19.II.F.2).

5 ESCAP, *Inequality in Asia and the Pacific in the era of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.18.II.F.13).

6 Ibid.



people work in hazardous and low-paid jobs with insecure employment contracts and little, if any, social protection.⁷ Women, rural residents, persons with disabilities, younger and mature workers are usually more disadvantaged. Across the region, there are also some groups who are “furthest behind”, almost always belonging to the poorest 40 per cent of the national wealth distribution. Along with being poorer, the furthest behind also tend to have a lower level of education, and often reside in a rural area. Depending on the country, gender, age and ethnicity also interact to create further disadvantages.⁸

These diverging trends of average prosperity running parallel to increasing inequality and the marginalization of large groups, point to a deficit of inclusion and empowerment throughout the region.

1.1 Inclusion and empowerment for equality

Equality is enshrined in the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). The right to equal access to social security (Article 21) and public services (Article 21.2); work and free choice of employment (Article 23); the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being (Article 25); and right to education (Article 26) are all considered inalienable.⁹

Seventy years after the adoption of the UDHR, the push for equality is far from over. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is a call to leave no one behind, placing equality at the centre of national policymaking. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) emphasize universality so that all people have

access to basic services and opportunities, irrespective of their age, gender, race, religion and ethnicity, but also location and class. With the imperative to validate achievements through data disaggregated by sex, location, disability and age, the 2030 Agenda is the contemporary manifesto for equality.

Equality requires that everyone be included in and benefit from development. The 2030 Agenda also specifically recognizes the role of empowerment for achieving equality, particularly among women and disadvantaged groups (SDGs 5 and 10). The Agenda therefore seeks to give voice to disadvantaged segments of the population. It recognizes citizen participation as a precondition for inclusiveness. It also sees inclusion and empowerment as preconditions for equality.

An inclusive society overrides differences in age, gender, race, religion and ethnicity, location and class. Social and economic inclusion also refers to the provision of services and opportunities to all members of society. System-level institutional reforms and policy changes contribute to building inclusive societies and spur equality. For inclusion to be effective and meaningful, however, people also need to have the freedom to make choices and take advantage of available opportunities.

In other words, while inclusion is the engine for equality, empowerment is the fuel that propels people to expand their capabilities. Empowerment is the ability to make strategic choices about one’s life and future.¹⁰

Inclusion and empowerment can lead to an equal society, provided that an enabling environment is in place. Through a participatory process, stakeholders belonging to governments, civil society, private sector and

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Available at: https://www.ohchr.org/EN/UDHR/Documents/UDHR_Translations/eng.pdf

¹⁰ Naila Kabeer, “Resources, Agency, Achievements: Reflections on the Measurement of Women’s Empowerment”, *Development and Change*, vol. 30, No. 3 (1999), pp. 435–465. Available at: <https://www.utsr.utoronto.ca/~kmacd/IDSC10/Readings/research%20design/empowerment.pdf> (accessed on 16 February 2019).

think tanks in the Asia-Pacific region met during the past year to describe what an enabling environment for inclusion and empowerment looks like.¹¹ They agreed on four broad elements: rights and justice, participation and voice, norms and institutions, and resources and capabilities.¹² While all four are essential, resources and capabilities are particularly relevant for empowerment.

For example, a policy may mandate the inclusion of a child with a disability in mainstream education, but without removing all barriers to access and attendance, the child will not be able to complete the education. Similarly, there could be anti-discrimination legislation in the labour market, preventing employers from discriminating based on sex, yet women might not be hired or paid an equal salary to men.

Adequate material, human and social resources, as well as agency – the ability to act on what a person values – are the essence of capabilities, the potential that people have for living the life they want.¹³ Individuals are therefore fully empowered when they have control over resources, the freedom to make effective choices, and the capacity to transform choices into desired actions.¹⁴

1.2 Unpacking inclusion and empowerment

Inclusion and empowerment are necessary steps in the push for equality. SDG Target 10.2 specifically refers to “empowerment and promotion of social, economic and political inclusion for all” as a means to reducing inequality.

Yet, for policymakers and development practitioners, the concepts of inclusion and empowerment often remain elusive. The complex, intangible and multi-faced nature of these concepts has motivated many academics and researchers, who have developed a multitude of methodological frameworks, to draw on specific sociocultural, political, and institutional contexts.¹⁵

Even if inclusion and empowerment are context specific, few simple assumptions can help disentangle the concepts, making them more concrete and measurable to help inform policymaking and monitor relevant SDGs. In reviewing progress towards equality, this report attempts to do just that: unpack inclusion and empowerment.

It makes a distinction between, on the one hand, processes that bring disadvantaged groups significantly closer to the average or to advantaged groups and, on the other hand, processes that are inclusive, but not sufficient to reduce the gaps and lead to equality (Figure 1.1). The report assumes that in cases where gaps have significantly closed in at least one development outcome, the disadvantaged groups have benefited from underlying empowerment. Similarly, where advantaged and disadvantaged groups have benefited from development gains at a similar rate (development has moved in parallel), the disadvantaged groups have been included. While any progress for disadvantaged groups is noteworthy, narrowing the gaps among population groups marks a clear movement towards equality.

11 As reported in *Accelerating progress: An empowered, inclusive and equal Asia and the Pacific*, the participatory process refers to consultations with more than 600 participants in a series of workshops held in Nadi, Ulaanbataar, Bangkok, New Delhi and Tbilisi, including government officials, representatives of civil society, business, think tanks and other stakeholders. See, ESCAP, ADB, UNDP, *Accelerating progress: An empowered, inclusive and equal Asia and the Pacific*. Bangkok, 2019.

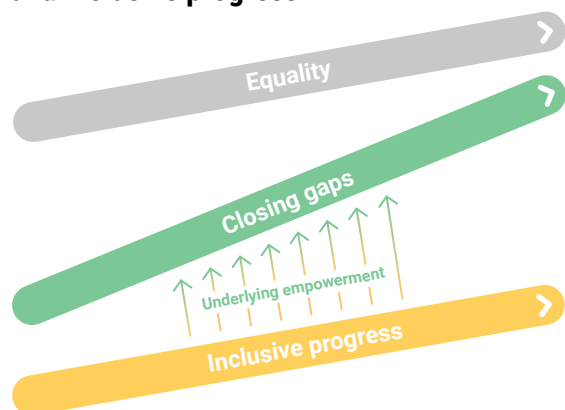
12 ESCAP, ADB, UNDP, *Accelerating progress: An empowered, inclusive and equal Asia and the Pacific*. Bangkok, 2019.

13 Amartya Sen, *Commodities and Capabilities* (New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1999).

14 Deepa Narayan, *Empowerment and Poverty Reduction: A Sourcebook* (Washington, D.C., World Bank, 2002).

15 Ibid.

Figure 1.1: **Equality through closing gaps and inclusive progress**



Note: Developed by ESCAP.

The analysis focuses on trends and directions of the gaps between disadvantaged and advantaged groups in three key areas of socioeconomic development: education (measured by secondary education completion); decent work (measured by full-time employment); and income (measured by annualized, real household income).¹⁶ These three indicators are selected, not only because they have been extensively used in literature to measure empowerment, in its various forms, but also because they reflect achievements in three of the six SDGs under review by the High-Level Political Forum in 2019 (Goal 4, Goal 8, Goal 10).¹⁷

These three indicators also embed elements of both resources and agency. Completion rates of secondary education convey information not only about access into secondary education – which would be conventionally measured through enrolment rates, but also about the commitment needed by individuals to complete education. Similarly, individuals

having a full-time job have not only accessed the labour market but have also chosen a specific type of employment.

1.3 Data, measurement and limitations

The core analysis of this report reviews trends of equality in education, decent work and income for six disadvantaged groups – women, rural residents, persons with disabilities, low-educated workers, younger and mature workers. Relying on data for 27 countries from the Gallup World Poll, Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS), and Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS) for the period 2009 to 2016, trends of equality, for example, are studied in completion of secondary education by comparing women with men, rural with urban residents, and persons with and without disability.¹⁸

Several trends are emerging from the data, however, the report only focuses on cases of convergence (1A), where disadvantaged groups have edged closer to advantaged groups, and of inclusion as a result of parallel upward development (2A) (Figure 1.2).

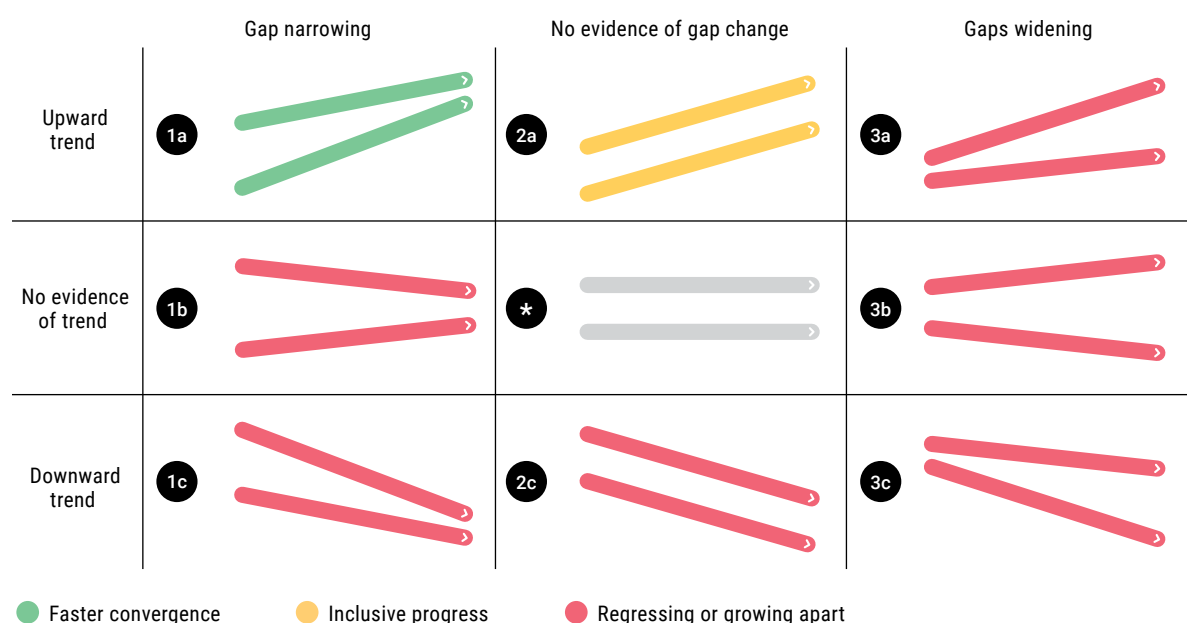
The presented estimates should be taken as an approximation of the direction of disparities between advantaged and disadvantaged groups, rather than a precise measure of the levels of education completion, full-time employment and income. The accuracy and precision of data is possibly affected by small sample sizes, as well as sampling and non-sampling errors.¹⁹

¹⁶ Though recognizing the significance of the political dimension of inclusion and empowerment – in particular voice, participation, knowledge, good governance, social mobilization and the ability to organize, all underpinned by human rights principles – this report takes a socioeconomic standpoint.

¹⁷ Ruth Alsop and Nina Heinsohn, *Measuring Empowerment in Practice: Structuring Analysis and Framing Indicators*, Policy Research Working Paper 3510 (Washington, D.C., World Bank, 2005).

¹⁸ For a brief discussion on the question used to estimate disability and possible limitations, please see Annex 1.

¹⁹ The accuracy and precision of data is affected by sampling and non-sampling errors. The sampling error is the difference between a sample average used to estimate a population parameter and the actual but unknown value of the parameter, occurring because of small sample size, or representativeness of the sample. Examples of non-sampling errors would be human errors, misunderstandings, or deliberate misreporting because of stigma or social pressure not to give an unpopular or socially undesirable answer.

Figure 1.2: **Possible scenarios of gaps between disadvantaged and advantaged groups**

Note: Developed by ESCAP. For details of each case, please see Annex 1.

Furthermore, all the cases where there was not enough statistical evidence to make an inference, either due to small sample size or large standard errors, are labelled as “no evidence”. Triangulation with the official SDG data on gender disaggregated statistics on education attainment and employment was also made to strengthen the findings.

The study also zooms in on population groups that are most likely to be the “furthest behind”, and who share several layers of disadvantage, such as being a woman and living in a rural area. Using data from 22 countries from Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) and Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS), the report looks at progress in education for the furthest behind. It does so by examining how their situation has improved between the early 2000s and mid-2010s, in relation to the average of the population and whether the composition of the furthest behind has changed over the same time period.

The study is organized as follows. Chapter 2 examines the extent to which gaps between key population groups have narrowed in the completion of secondary education. Chapter 3 repeats the analysis for full-time employment. Chapter 4 analyses how incomes of rural households and those in the bottom 40 of the national income distribution have developed vis-à-vis the urban and the average population, respectively. Chapter 5 examines the most vulnerable groups in each country, namely the “furthest behind”, with respect to their progress in completing secondary education. Chapter 6 explores strategies and policy options to socioeconomic empowerment and provides examples of effective measures taken by countries in the region. The final chapter summarizes and concludes the report.

Following the theme of the 2019 High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, “Empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality”, the report aims to inform discussions that will take place during the 75th Session of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific.



CHAPTER 2

ARE EDUCATION GAPS CLOSING FOR DISADVANTAGED GROUPS?

Across developing countries in the Asia-Pacific region, opportunities have sprouted for more people to go to school, but some population groups have benefited more than others. SDG 4 highlights the need to “ensure equity and inclusion in and through education and address all forms of exclusion and marginalization, disparity, vulnerability and inequality in education access, participation, retention and completion in learning outcomes”.²⁰

Countries in the Asia-Pacific region have registered positive progress with respect to education. The average gross secondary-school enrolment rate, in the region, reached 83 per cent in 2017.²¹ However, completion rates in secondary education fluctuate dramatically both across and within countries. Students who do not complete secondary education have lower chances of being employed and fewer opportunities to improve their lives.

This chapter tracks gaps in secondary education completion rates between those in rural and urban areas, between women and men, and between persons with and without disability.²² Disaggregation on the basis of disability is

20 UNESCO, “Education 2030: Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action for the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 4”, 2016. Available at: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000245656> (accessed on 26 June 2018).

21 Gross enrolment rate by level of education. Gross enrolment ratio, secondary, both sexes (%). UNESCO Institute for Statistics. Available at: <http://data.uis.unesco.org/>.

22 Recognizing that several other factors, such as income levels, education levels of parents or belonging to a minority, shape a child's chances of completing secondary education, this analysis only reviews gaps on the basis of gender, disability and location of residence, due to data limitations.

difficult, due to lack of adequate data. To address this gap, the analysis uses the proxy of “having a health problem”, as explained in Annex Table A2. The analysis focuses on completion rates for the 20–35 year age cohort, an age group that captures the outcomes of education-focused initiatives implemented since the 1990s. The results of these comparisons are then tested for significance to assess whether gaps between the two groups have closed, indicating underlying empowerment, following the definition described in Chapter 1.²³

2.1 Encouraging signs of increased equality in secondary education

Between 2009 and 2016, secondary education outcomes became more equal across the region. In almost one-third of the countries, at least one of the three disadvantaged groups saw gaps reducing in relation to their comparison group. However, only in Kazakhstan and the Russian Federation were gaps eliminated for all disadvantaged groups (Table 2.1). In these countries, women, rural residents, and persons with disabilities have converged towards their comparison group, with completion rates higher than 95 per cent in 2016.

The rural-urban divide has seen a significant reduction in five countries. Still, rural residents have lower rates of completion of a secondary education. The lack of adequate infrastructure, distance from school, and the need or availability of income generating opportunities often prevent rural learners from completing secondary education. Only in Armenia, Kazakhstan and the Russian Federation are rural and urban completion rates above 90 per cent (Figure 2.1). In Afghanistan and

Table 2.1: Trends of gaps in secondary education completion

	HAVE THE GAPS CHANGED IN TERMS OF...?		
	RESIDENCE (RURAL VS. URBAN)	GENDER (WOMEN VS. MEN)	DISABILITY STATUS (DISABILITY VS. NO DISABILITY)
Afghanistan			
Armenia			
Bangladesh			
China			
India			
Kazakhstan			
Malaysia	n/a		
Mongolia			
Myanmar			
Philippines			
Russian Federation			
Sri Lanka			
Tajikistan			
Thailand			
Turkey	n/a		
Turkmenistan			

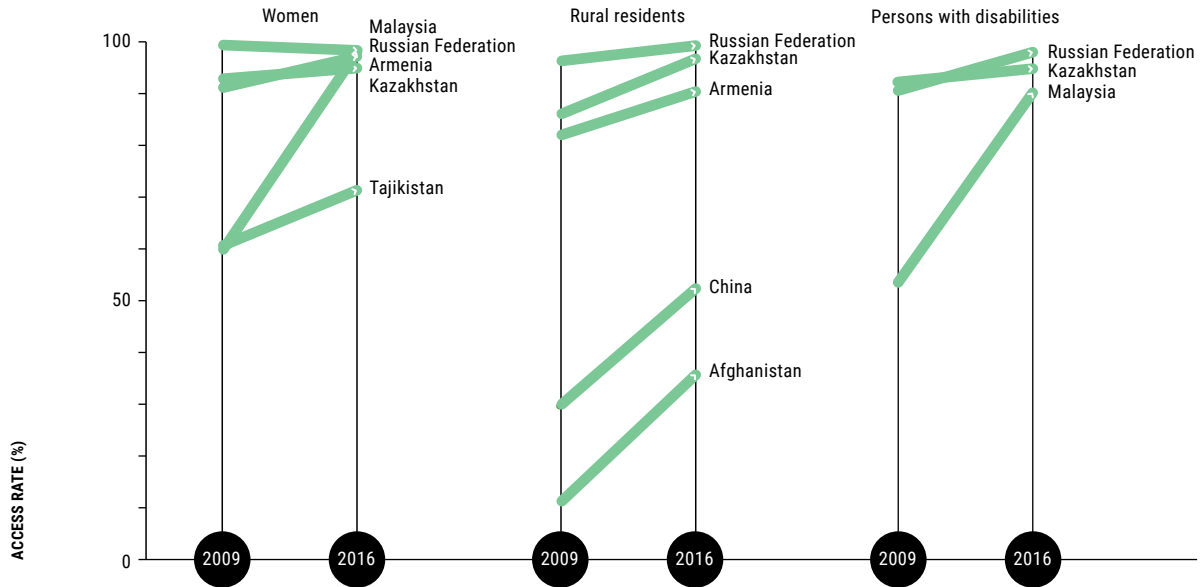
● Faster convergence
 ● Inclusive progress
 ● Regressing or growing apart
 ● Not enough evidence

Source: ESCAP analysis based on Gallup World Poll, 2006–2016.
 Note: For a reference to all trend scenarios please see Figure 1.2.
 Only countries with at least one case of inclusion or empowerment are shown. For detailed results please see Annex Table A4.

China, completion rates of rural residents have also converged to those of urban residents, but from lower levels.

For female learners, the most notable signs of progress come from Armenia, Kazakhstan, Malaysia, the Russian Federation and Tajikistan. In all these countries, except Tajikistan, completion rates are well above 90 per cent for both men and women. In Kazakhstan and the Russian Federation, completion rates for women are even slightly higher than those for men.

23 For a description of the methodology for testing the statistical significance of the gap of the two groups, please see Annex 1.

Figure 2.1: **Encouraging signs of gaps closing in secondary education completion**

Source: ESCAP calculations based on data from Gallup World Poll, 2009–2016.

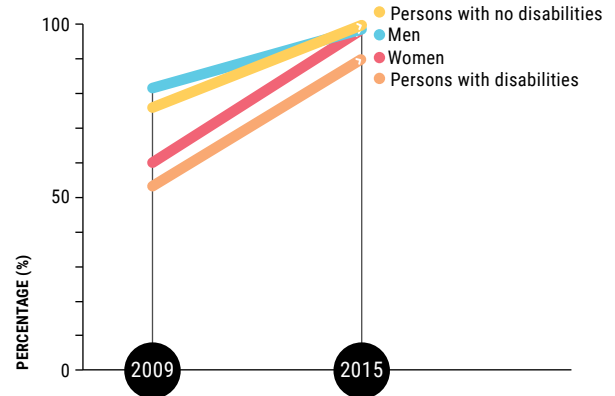
Note: Countries in which women, rural residents and persons with disabilities have been empowered in secondary education completion as measured by their increasing share and convergence towards more advantaged groups.

In Malaysia, the gender gap has been fully erased as a result of significant investments in public education, amounting to around 16 per cent of total government spending in the past decade (Figure 2.2).²⁴ These investments have also benefited other marginalized groups, such as persons with disabilities, who also report closing gaps in education completion. Kazakhstan has also invested in providing equal access to education services for all, updating school infrastructure and training highly-qualified staff to meet the needs of all students.²⁵

Across the region, however, persons with disabilities are more likely to experience exclusion and discrimination that prevent them from completing secondary education. They are also less likely to have narrowed the gaps with persons without disabilities in secondary education completion.

Figure 2.2: **Both women and persons with disabilities have closed the gaps in secondary education in Malaysia**

Malaysia: Percentage of population having access to education, 2009–2016



Source: ESCAP calculations based on data from Gallup World Poll, 2009–2015.

Note: The pink line indicates the progress of women in completion of secondary education as tracked against the blue one for men. The orange line indicates the progress of persons with disabilities in completion of secondary education as tracked against those without any disability.

²⁴ UNESCO and International Institute for Educational Planning, "Malaysia: The closing window of demographic opportunity: adapting the education system to support Malaysia's first nation agenda", (2018). Available at: http://www.iiep.unesco.org/sites/default/files/malaysia_synthesis.pdf

²⁵ 'State Program of Education Development in the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2011–2020', 7 December 2010. Available at: http://planipolis.iiep.unesco.org/sites/planipolis/files/ressources/kazakhstan_state_program-of-education-development-in-the-republic-of-kazakhstan_2011-2020.pdf (accessed on 6 February 2019).

2.2 Are disadvantaged groups benefiting from mainstream progress?

There are several examples of disadvantaged groups being included in mainstream progress in education. The gaps to comparison groups may not have closed, but these achievements are still noteworthy.

Completion rates in education, of rural residents, have steadily increased in several countries such as India, Mongolia, Myanmar, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Turkmenistan. Despite this progress, however, the gap with urban residents remains large. For example, in India, there is a gap of approximately 20 percentage points between completion rates of rural and urban residents.²⁶

In a third of all countries, including Bangladesh, China, India, Mongolia, Sri Lanka and Turkey, women have seen their secondary education completion rates increase alongside those of their male counterparts. Between 2009 and 2015, completion rates for women in Sri Lanka increased significantly. Innovative national educational programmes, such as the Open School Programme, possibly contributed to improving the quality of education.²⁷

In a handful of countries, women registered higher completion rates than men. Sprung from distinct socioeconomic and cultural factors, this “reversed” gender gap has persisted in Mongolia, a country with average completion rates above 70 per cent. In Kyrgyzstan, men and women have also recently converged to secondary education completion rates of around 87 per cent. In the Philippines and Viet Nam, where women used to register higher completion rates than men, this trend has now been reversed. In Myanmar, where average completion rates are generally lower, they have been consistently higher for women than for men.²⁸

Persons with disabilities have been less included in overall educational progress. This analysis finds positive progress only in Afghanistan, China and India. Due to small sample sizes, results are not conclusive for most of the other countries. Alternative data sources coupled with official statistics can contribute additional information. For example, according to official statistics for Mongolia, 80 per cent of persons with disabilities had access to secondary education in 2016, attributed to investments in school infrastructure, the recruitment of professionals who provide instruction as well as medical services, and to the modification of the curriculum to be disability inclusive.²⁹

²⁶ The scale of these gaps has been triangulated with data from DHS and MICS.

²⁷ UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, “Open School Programme, Sri Lanka”, 27 August 2015. Available at: <https://uil.unesco.org/case-study/effective-practices-database-litbase-0/open-school-programme-sri-lanka> (accessed on 25 February 2019).

²⁸ The levels of these gaps have been triangulated with data from DHS and MICS.

²⁹ Ministry of Labor and Social Protection, “Disability in Mongolia 2017: Facts and Figures”, (2017). Available at: <https://www.mlsp.gov.mn/uploads/news/files/2127ecb08d24cbce33fb2c4f8bf3511d37c17940.pdf> (accessed on 7 February 2019).

Several studies, however, indicate that students with disabilities are almost always worse-off when compared to their counterparts without disabilities.³⁰ They face several barriers, ranging from accessibility to the physical environment of schools, to inadequate instruction and curriculum.³¹ They are therefore less likely to attend school, more likely to drop out of school and have fewer years of education.³² Many still cannot access mainstream educational systems and are often directed to special schools, which may impact their future opportunities in the labour market.

Not surprisingly, countries that have seen more gaps closing for all disadvantaged groups in the past few years also record the lowest overall inequality in educational completion, as

measured by the dissimilarity index (D-index), a measure of inequality of opportunity.³³ For example, the D-index for education in Kazakhstan, the country with the most cases of closing gaps, is close to zero, the lowest level it can take.

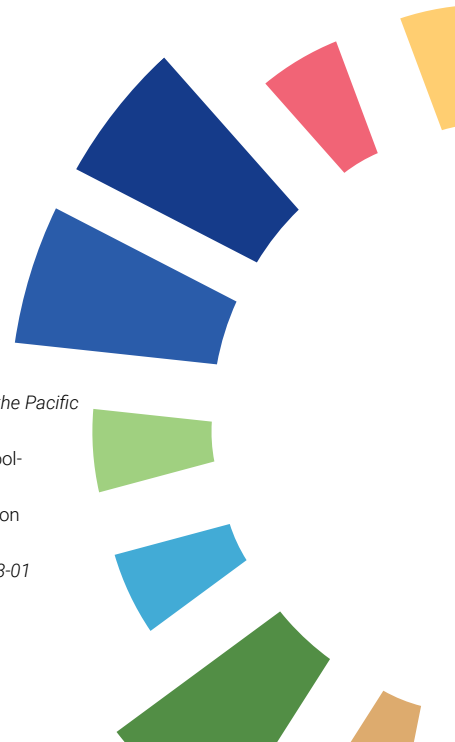
The following chapter focuses on access to full-time employment, which is the next stage of a life-cycle approach to socioeconomic inclusion and empowerment. Expanding the list of disadvantaged groups from three to six (adding youth and mature workers as well as those with low education achievements), Chapter 3 reviews whether the progress recorded in some countries in secondary education completion, has translated into similar achievements in full-time employment.

30 ESCAP, *Disability at a glance: Strengthening Employment Prospects for Persons with Disabilities in Asia and the Pacific* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.16.II.F.4).

31 Nidirect Government Services, "School Accessibility". Available at: <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/school-accessibility> (accessed on 15 January 2019).

32 UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS), *Education and Disability: Analysis of Data from 49 Countries*, Information Paper N. 49, 2018.

33 ESCAP, *Inequality of Opportunity in Asia and the Pacific: Education*, Social Development Policy Papers, #2018-01 (United Nations publication, ST/ESCAP/2817).





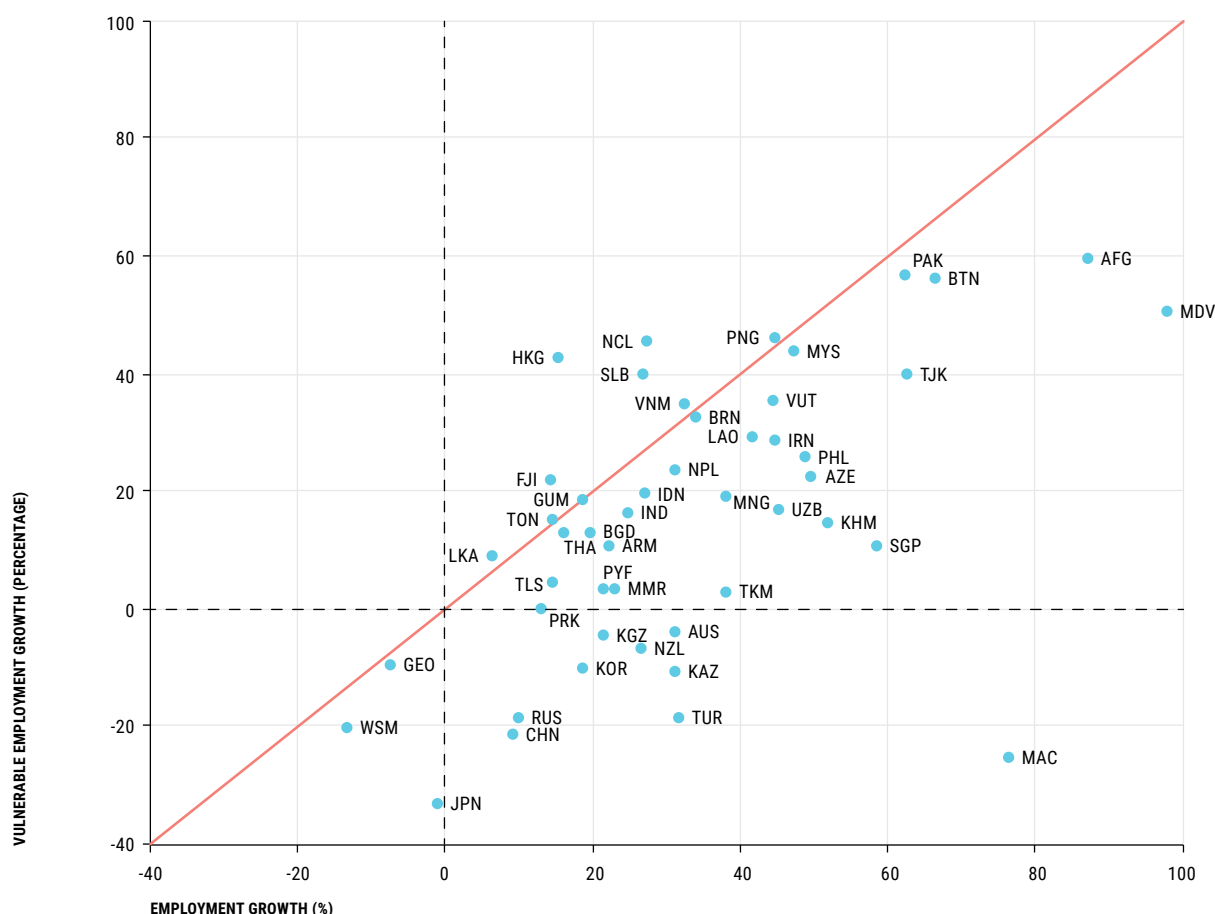
CHAPTER 3

ARE GAPS IN FULL-TIME EMPLOYMENT CLOSING FOR DISADVANTAGED GROUPS?

Currently, the Asia-Pacific region has the world's lowest unemployment rate at 4.1 per cent and the incidence of working poverty has been significantly reduced from almost two-thirds of the population in 1997, to less than one-quarter in 2017. Between 2007 and 2017, labour productivity also increased by an average of 5 per cent annually, which is more than double the global average.³⁴

Despite this progress, not enough decent job opportunities have been created (Figure 3.1). In countries above the diagonal line, vulnerable employment increased faster than overall employment. In countries below the diagonal line, but above the horizontal dotted line, overall employment increased faster than vulnerable employment. Such is the case with Afghanistan, Bhutan and Pakistan, for example, where overall employment increased by 60 to 80 per cent while vulnerable employment grew by over 50 per cent. Overall, there was still an increase in the number of vulnerable workers in most countries in the region. Only in a few countries, located

34 International Labour Organization, "Asia-Pacific Employment and Social Outlook 2018: Advancing decent work for sustainable development" (Geneva, 2018). Available at: https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/@asia/@ro-bangkok/@sro-bangkok/documents/publication/wcms_649885.pdf (accessed on 10 January 2019).

Figure 3.1: **Slow progress of decent job creation**

Source: ESCAP calculation based on ILO (2017) Key Indicators of the Labour Market (KILM), Ninth edition (9th edition). Available at: https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/-dgreports/-stat/documents/publication/wcms_498929.pdf

below the dotted line, did the number of vulnerable workers fall—as in China, the Russian Federation and some OECD member countries.

Decent work embodies fairly remunerated and productive work, security in the workplace and social protection for families and other rights at work, better prospects for personal development and social integration, as well as equality of opportunity and treatment for all women and men.³⁵

In the region, one in four workers (446 million) live in poverty and almost one in two (930 million) is in vulnerable employment, classified as own-account or unpaid contributing family workers.³⁶ Vulnerable employment mirrors informality, where workers do not benefit from legal or social protection. Women are particularly overrepresented in vulnerable employment. Youth, persons with disabilities and migrants, also face disadvantages when entering the labour force and are more likely to be in informal or vulnerable employment.

³⁵ International Labour Organization, "Decent Work". Available at: <https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/decent-work/lang-en/index.htm>.

³⁶ International Labour Organization, "Asia-Pacific Employment and Social Outlook 2018: Advancing decent work for sustainable development" (Geneva, 2018). Available at: https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/@asia/@ro-bangkok/@sro-bangkok/documents/publication/wcms_649885.pdf (accessed on 10 January 2019).

Throughout this chapter, the indicator “employed full-time for an employer” is used as a proxy for decent work.³⁷ Having a full-time job does not mean that the job is decent. However, having paid, full-time employment is an important factor in expanding a person’s ability to make choices. A regular income, in the form of wage employment outside the home, can bring many positive impacts at the individual and household level beyond money, such as reduction in domestic violence, awareness around voting, improved self-reported health status and life-satisfaction.³⁸

At the core of the following analysis are six disadvantaged population groups: women, rural residents, persons with disabilities, young and mature workers and low-educated workers, who disproportionately experience vulnerable employment and disadvantage in the labour force.³⁹ The analysis aims to identify underlying empowerment and inclusion of these groups, by assessing their rates of full-time employment compared to more advantaged ones.

3.1 Isolated cases of narrowing gaps

Gaps between disadvantaged and advantaged workers have closed in 11 of the 27 countries across Asia and the Pacific, but in most cases for only one or two of the six disadvantaged population groups (Table 3.1). Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan are the only two countries where half of the disadvantaged groups saw a significant reduction in the gaps.

Table 3.1: Trends of gaps in full-time employment

HAVE THE GAPS CHANGED IN TERMS OF...?	RESIDENCE (RURAL VS. URBAN)	GENDER (WOMEN VS. MEN)	DISABILITY STATUS (DISABILITY VS. NO DISABILITY)	EDUCATION (LOW VS. SECONDARY AND HIGHER)	AGE (YOUTH VS. 25–49)	AGE (25–49 VS. MATURE WORKERS)
Armenia						
Bangladesh						
Bhutan						
Cambodia						
China						
Georgia						
India						
Indonesia						
Kazakhstan						
Kyrgyzstan						
Malaysia	n/a					
Pakistan						
Philippines						
Russian Federation	n/a					
Sri Lanka						
Thailand						
Turkey	n/a					
Turkmenistan						
Uzbekistan						
Viet Nam						

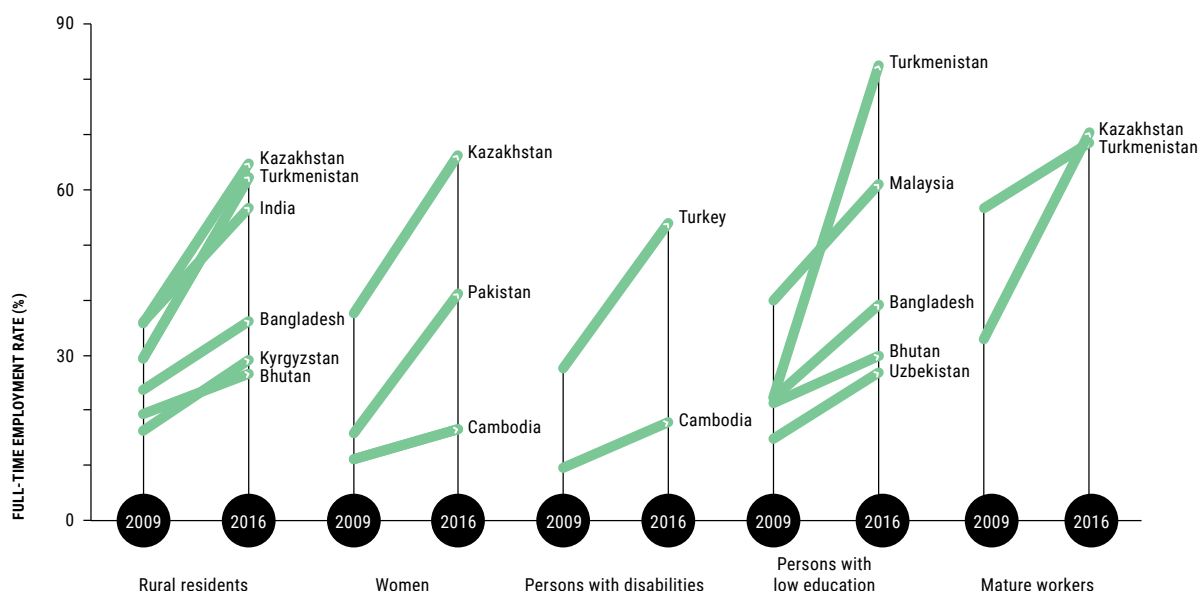
● Faster convergence
 ● Inclusive progress
 ● Regressing or growing apart
 ● Not enough evidence

Source: ESCAP elaboration based on Gallup World Poll, 2006–2016.
 Note: For a reference to all trend scenarios please see Figure 1.2. Only countries with at least one case of inclusion or empowerment are shown. For detailed results please see Annex Table A4.

37 The indicator represents a share of the labour force employed full-time for an employer. The measure has a strong positive correlation with GDP per capita, implying that people working full-time (at least 30 hours a week) for an employer are in more productive, higher quality jobs. The index also falls in line with employment classifications used by the International Labour Organization.

38 Naila Kabeer, “Economic Pathways to Women’s Empowerment and Active Citizenship: What Does the Evidence from Bangladesh Tell Us?” *The Journal of Development Studies*, vol. 53, No. 5 (2016), pp. 1–15. Available at: http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/68376/1/Kabeer_Economic_pathways_to_womens_empowerment.pdf (accessed on 16 February 2019).

39 Several other groups, such as migrant workers and ethnic minorities, are equally or at times even more disadvantaged in the labour market, but could not be included in the analysis due to data limitations.

Figure 3.2: **Few but encouraging signs of gaps closing in full-time employment**

Source: ESCAP calculations based on data from Gallup World Poll, 2009–2016.

Note: These are countries in which women, rural residents, persons with disabilities, persons with low education and mature workers have reduced the gaps in full-time employment to more advantaged groups, a proxy for underlying empowerment.

Low-educated and rural workers have benefited relatively more. Between 2009 and 2016, an impressive rise in full-time employment for low-educated workers occurred in Bangladesh, Bhutan, Malaysia, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan (Figure 3.2). In the case of Turkmenistan, among the many drivers of more equal labour market outcomes for low-educated workers is the Decent Work Country Programme, promoted by the ILO between 2010 and 2013.⁴⁰

Similarly, the gaps in full-time employment between rural and urban workers have reduced across six countries. The rural-urban divide in Bangladesh and Bhutan, for example, has shrunk by two-thirds. In Turkmenistan, the share of rural workers in full-time employment more than doubled over the past decade, converging to the share of their urban counterparts.

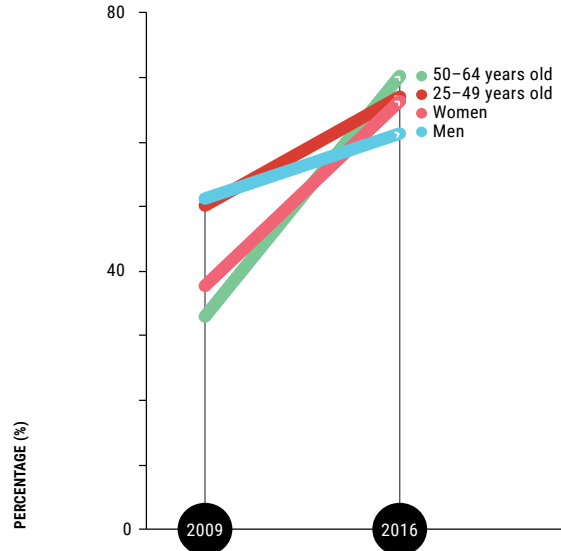
Unlike low-educated and rural workers, however, women and persons with disabilities have rarely seen gaps to their respective advantaged groups narrow. Cambodia, Kazakhstan and Pakistan are the only countries that have witnessed rates of women in full-time employment converging to those of men. Pakistan is a notable case of progress, as full-time employment rates for women have reached those of men, despite starting from a much lower level. In Kazakhstan, one of the two most successful countries in increasing equality among its disadvantaged population groups, the share of women in full-time employment even overtook those of men (Figure 3.3).

In Turkey, a positive outlier, the gap between persons with and without disabilities have closed. This development can be linked to the Government's introduction of a disability

40 International Labour Organization, "Project Brief: From the Crisis towards Decent and Safe Jobs". Available at: https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---europe/---ro-geneva/---sro-moscow/documents/publication/wcms_306623.pdf

Figure 3.3: In Kazakhstan, women and mature workers are overtaking men and prime-aged workers

Kazakhstan: Percentage of labour force having access to full-time employment, 2009–2016



Source: ESCAP calculations based on data from Gallup World Poll, 2009–2016.

Note: The pink line tracks women's progress in full-time employment against that of men. The green line tracks the progress of people aged 50 to 64, in full-time employment, against those aged 25 to 49.

law, in 2005, which prohibits discrimination of persons with disabilities in education and employment.⁴¹ Furthermore, mandatory minimum quotas of persons with disabilities in the workplace have been introduced with fines for businesses unable to meet them.⁴²

In most countries in the region, age-based inequalities persist. Youth and mature workers have not reduced their gaps to prime-aged workers (the advantaged group). While youth have not seen any convergence in full-time employment, mature workers edged towards prime-aged workers only in Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan. In fact, mature workers in

Kazakhstan are now employed in full-time jobs to a higher extent than prime-aged workers, a possible result of the country's rapid economic growth, fuelled by the commodities boom in the 2000s.

Overall, low-educated and rural workers have reported higher equality in full-time employment. Yet, these unexpected results hint that existing jobs may not require higher levels of education. Convergence to equality in secondary education, which emerged in several cases in Afghanistan, Armenia, China, Kazakhstan, Malaysia, Tajikistan, have not yet translated into equality in employment, except for rural residents and women in Kazakhstan..

3.2 More groups benefiting from mainstream progress

While equality in full-time employment seems hard to achieve, inclusion of disadvantaged groups is a common pattern. Sixteen out of the 27 countries saw at least one of the six disadvantaged groups progress along with advantaged groups, leaving the gap unchanged over time. Armenia, Georgia, Indonesia, Kyrgyzstan, Philippines, and Thailand recorded inclusion for most disadvantaged population groups.

In 10 out of 27 countries, low-educated workers saw their rates of full-time employment grow alongside their more educated counterparts, doubling in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan and quadrupling in Georgia. The same pattern of inclusion took place in China, India, Indonesia, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Viet Nam, where all workers, independent of education level, reported higher full-time employment rates.

41 "Turkey, Law No. 5378 of 2005 on Disabled People and on making amendments in some laws and decree laws" (7 July 2005). Available at: <https://www.refworld.org/docid/4c445e652.html> (accessed on 15 January 2019).

42 Turkey, Turkish Labor Law No. 4857. Available at: <http://turkishlaborlaw.com/turkish-labor-law-no-4857/19-4857-labor-law-english-by-article> (accessed on 7 February 2019).

Higher rates of full-time employment were also observed among rural workers, although gaps with urban workers remained. For example, in China, almost one-third of the rural population is now employed full-time. However, employment rates of the urban population also increased, leaving the final gaps unchanged. Similarly, in Armenia, Georgia, Indonesia, Philippines, Sri Lanka and Thailand rural workers have been included, yet still have lower rates of full-time employment than urban workers.

Women in Armenia, Georgia, Malaysia, the Russian Federation, Thailand, Turkmenistan and Viet Nam also saw increased rates of full-time employment. As in other cases, progress was not adequate to reduce the gap between men and women. In Thailand, only one in six women had a full-time job in 2009, compared to one in three women seven years later – the same share that men had in 2009.

Full-time employment for persons with disabilities increased slightly in Georgia, India, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Philippines and the Russian Federation, but again, not enough to narrow the gaps to those without disabilities. The challenges that persons with disabilities face in the labour market also interact with other circumstances such as being a woman, living in a rural area, or coming from a poorer household.⁴³ As a result, progress has not been enough to catch up with the employment rates of persons without disabilities.

Prime-aged workers still represent the advantaged groups in the labour market across Asia and the Pacific. Armenia, China, Kyrgyzstan and Philippines are the only countries where inclusion has been noted for both young and mature workers. However, these disadvantaged groups still report lower rates of full-time employment, indicating a greater need to eliminate age barriers in the labour market. In the Philippines, for example, less than 20 per cent of mature workers have full-time jobs. Despite existing anti-age discrimination policies, tax incentives and further investments in training may be needed.⁴⁴

Youth are also overrepresented among those without full-time jobs, and there are at least four unemployed youth for every unemployed adult in the region.⁴⁵ However, younger workers are not always worse off. In the Philippines, the share of youth in full-time employment is higher than for the prime-aged. Programmes such as “JobStart” and the Public Employment Service Office have helped to offer career counselling services, seminars, and other trainings with the goal of guaranteeing a smooth school-to-work transition, as well as ensuring that the skills of the youth match those demanded by the labour market.⁴⁶

43 ESCAP, *Inequality of Opportunity in Asia and the Pacific: Decent Work*, Social Development Policy Papers, #2018-02 (United Nations publication, ST/ESCAP/2822).

44 Republic of Philippines, Department of Labour and Employment, “Implementing Rules and Regulations of Republic ACT No. 10911 Otherwise Known as the ‘Anti-Age Discrimination in Employment Act’”, Department order No 170 (2 February 2017). Available at: https://www.dole.gov.ph/files/DO%20170-17%20Implementing%20Rules%20and%20Regulations%20of%20the%20RA%20no_%2010911%20otherwise%20known%20as%20the%20ANTI-AGE%20DISCRIMINATION%20IN%20EMPLOYMENT%20ACT.pdf (accessed on 8 February 2019).

45 International Labour Organization, “Global Employment Trends for Youth 2017: Paths to a better working future”, (20 November 2017). Available at: https://www.ilo.org/global/publications/books/global-employment-trends/WCMS_598669/lang-en/index.htm

46 Republic of Philippines, Department of Labor and Employment. Available at: <https://www.dole.gov.ph/public-employment-services-pes-contents/> (accessed on 7 February 2019).

It is clear that while most countries have included at least some disadvantaged groups in the overall progress towards full-time employment, it has rarely translated into narrowing the gaps between disadvantaged and advantaged groups. A person's level of education, residence, gender, age and disability status still has a significant impact on their chances of attaining a full-time job. With low-educated and rural workers closing most gaps in full-time employment, together


with a mismatch between equality trends in secondary education and in employment, questions remain about the types of full-time jobs available. More work opportunities for low-skilled workers signal a positive development, but only if these jobs are decent. The next chapter links these trends to developments in household incomes. Has economic growth in recent years trickled down to disadvantaged groups, particularly rural and poorer populations?





CHAPTER 4

ARE INCOMES AMONG THE POOREST 40 PER CENT AND RURAL RESIDENTS INCREASING ENOUGH?



Rapid economic growth and the corresponding increase in incomes, in Asia and the Pacific, has brought an improvement in average living standards. At the same time, the region's population-weighted income inequality, measured by the Gini coefficient, has increased by over 5 percentage points in the past 20 years.⁴⁷ While average living standards have increased in the region, many have not benefited from this overall development and income levels have remained low.

Previous chapters emphasized the key role that education and decent job opportunities play in building equal societies. Education and decent work are also essential for securing a steady and reliable income. Income inequality therefore feeds on the persisting gaps in education and in work opportunities.

SDG 10 highlights the need to reduce inequalities within and among countries. In particular, SDG Target 10.1 emphasizes the need to “progressively achieve and sustain

47 The region's Gini coefficient has been calculated as the weighted average of the Gini coefficients of the countries in the region using population weights. See ESCAP, *Inequality in Asia and the Pacific in the era of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.18.II.F.13).

income growth of the bottom 40 per cent of the population at a rate higher than the national average”, while Target 10.2 outlines the need to “empower and promote the social, economic and political inclusion of all, irrespective of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or other status”.

In line with previous chapters, this chapter examines if progress towards completion rates in education, as well as full-time employment, have translated in increased average incomes for two particular groups in Asia and the Pacific. It tracks income growth over time, to compare: 1) whether gaps of households in the bottom 40 per cent of each national income distribution have reduced when compared to top 60 per cent, and 2) whether gaps have reduced between rural and urban areas.

The indicator “per capita annual income in international dollars” is used to evaluate the gaps. The annual household income in international dollars is divided by the total number of individuals living in the household.⁴⁸ Furthermore, quantities are expressed in international dollars to account for different exchange rates and commodity prices throughout the region.⁴⁹

4.1 The growth rate of disadvantaged groups has increased

Rural incomes are normally lower than urban ones. The gap is usually attributed to the urban wage premium, associated with higher costs of living but also higher productivity in urban areas. The size and direction of this premium depends on a range of macroeconomic factors but also on the types of jobs available. Over the past 10 years, available data indicate that the income of rural households has increased in all countries except in Bhutan and in India.

In almost half of the countries, these growth rates were also higher than those of urban households.

Table 4.1: Trends of gaps in real household income

HAVE THE GAPS CHANGED IN TERMS OF...?	RESIDENCE (RURAL VS. URBAN)	INCOME (BOTTOM 40 VS. TOP 60)
Afghanistan		
Armenia		
Georgia		
Indonesia		
Kyrgyzstan		
Myanmar		
Pakistan		
Philippines		
Sri Lanka		
Uzbekistan		
Viet Nam		

● Faster convergence ● Inclusive progress
● Regressing or growing apart ● Not enough evidence

Note: For a reference to all trend scenarios please see Figure 1.2. Only countries with at least one case of inclusion or empowerment are shown. For detailed results please see Annex Table A4.

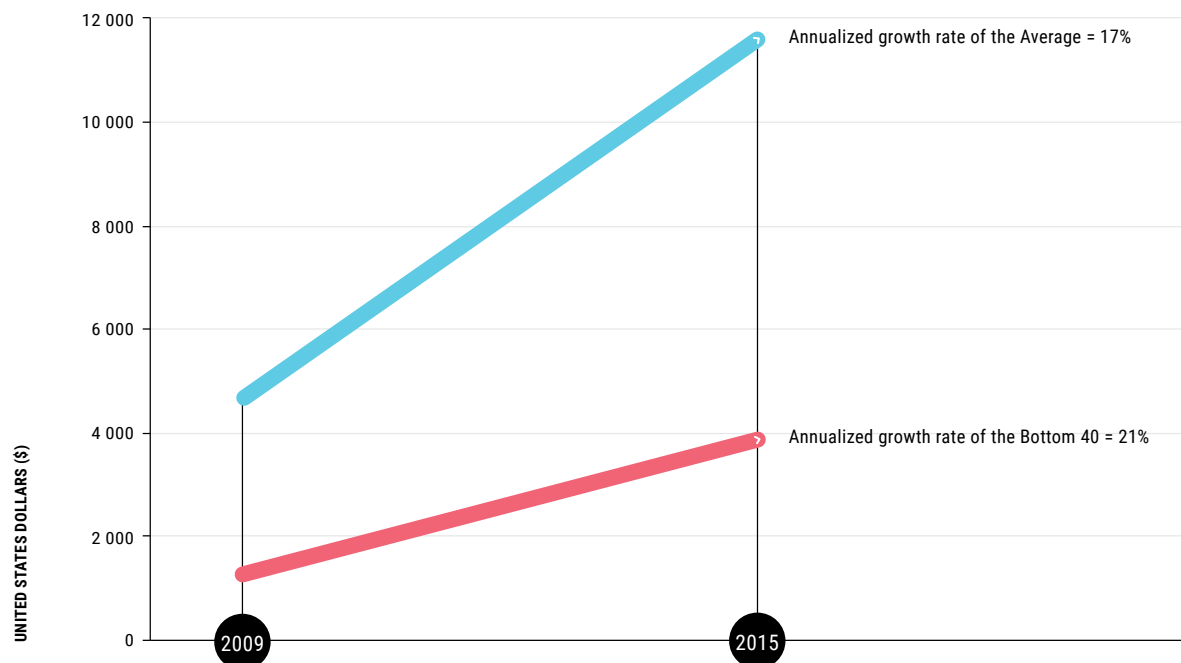
Despite these seemingly positive developments for rural residents, there has not been a single case of closing gaps. In the best of cases, gaps remained unchanged. In 11 countries, rural households were part of overall growth and their incomes increased proportionally to their urban counterparts. Some countries fared even better. In Georgia, the average income of rural households almost doubled, while incomes for urban households increased by 50 per cent. In absolute terms, however, the average rural household continued to earn about \$1,500 less per year compared with the average urban household. Uzbekistan reported the smallest rural-urban income gap in 2016, which may be a result of the Uzbekistan State Programme on Rural Development and Well-being, a 2009 initiative dedicated to generating

⁴⁸ Because income data are household-based, they do not allow for gender or age disaggregation within the household.

⁴⁹ International dollars allow a common currency adjusted to reflect different Purchasing Power Parities (PPP).

Figure 4.1: **The bottom 40 continues to fall behind despite their higher income growth**

Malaysia: Household income per capita for the Bottom 40 and Average households, 2009–2015



Source: ESCAP calculations based on data from Gallup World Poll, 2009–2016.

employment opportunities in rural areas.⁵⁰ In the worst cases, the absolute income levels of rural households continued to fall behind.

Similar trends are seen in households belonging to the bottom 40 per cent of the population, where incomes grew in all countries except Afghanistan. Furthermore, in more than half of the countries incomes of the bottom 40 per cent of the population grew at a higher rate when compared to the overall population, thereby reducing relative gaps in line with SDG Target 10.1. However, in absolute terms, those in the bottom 40 per cent continued falling behind in the overwhelming number of countries. Only in Pakistan did the gaps to the advantaged income group remain constant (Table 4.1). Although the income of the bottom 40 per cent of the population can never be the same as the average, a reduction

in absolute gaps should be feasible. Unless a spectacular increase in the incomes of the poor becomes an option, absolute gaps will continue to rise or will take a very long time to start closing.

Malaysia has come as close to convergence as any other country in the sample. The average income of the bottom 40 more than tripled between 2009 and 2015 while it doubled for the overall population (Figure 4.1). The increase was partly driven by the minimum wage legislation introduced in 2012.⁵¹ Despite being on track in achieving SDG 10.1, with income growth rates of the bottom 40 per cent of the population being higher than the national average, absolute gaps widened further because of the much higher initial average income of the overall population.

50 Hasanov Shavkat and Sanaev Golib, "Non-farm employment trends and policy in rural areas of Samarkand region (Uzbekistan)", Institute of Agricultural Development in Transition Economies, 2018. Available at: <https://ageconsearch.umn.edu/record/279145>

51 World Bank, "Poverty and Shared Prosperity: Piecing Together the Poverty Puzzle", Washington, D.C., 2018.

This chapter has shown that although many countries have reduced relative income gaps in line with Target 10.1 and 10.2, no country saw convergence between rural and urban households, or between households at the bottom 40 per cent of the population and the top 60 per cent of the population. For rural households, absolute income disparities remain stubbornly high even though completion rates in secondary education and full-time employment have increased in the region. Although some income gaps are justifiable, the existing income disparities between rural and urban households seem unbridgeable.

Income growth rates continue to diverge between the bottom 40 and top 60 per cent of the population. These results poke holes in the assumptions about underlying empowerment that may have contributed to closing gaps in education and particularly in full-time employment. They also paint a bleak picture for the future: it will take years and significant political will to help close the gaps.

If women, rural residents, persons with disabilities, younger and mature workers are barely included in progress, and only experience glimpses of underlying empowerment, what happens when these characteristics interact, creating further levels of disadvantage? The next chapter zooms in on those furthest behind.





Box 4.1 Are incomes of women catching up?

Data at the household level are insufficient for the analysis of income gaps between, for example, men and women. A comparative review of a different dataset on estimated earned income of women and men obtained from the World Economic Forum's annual "Global Gender Gap Report" indicates that out of the 27 countries analysed in this report, only Georgia, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Malaysia, the Philippines and Thailand have recorded converging ratios between female and male incomes over the period 2008 to 2018.^a In Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bhutan, India, Islamic Republic of Iran, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Tajikistan, the gender gap increased further, while it remained the same in the other countries.^b

Although women's completion of secondary education has increased in the region, it has not translated into higher labour force participation rates. Exclusion from the labour market, together with persisting occupational segregation, are key obstacles to closing the income gaps. Moreover, deeply ingrained social norms that limit women's mobility and choices, often compounded by restrictive national legislation, have contributed to inhibiting women's access to paid employment.^{c,d}

- a The gender-income gap is analysed based on data from the World Economic Forum, "The Global Gender Gap Report" for the years 2008, 2013, 2017, as the data used earlier for analysing the progress in closing the rural-urban income divide, and whether the bottom 40 is catching up, is collected at the household level.
- b A complete set of data was not available for Afghanistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan in the Global Gender Gap Reports.
- c UN Women, "Facts and Figures: Economic Empowerment", New York, July 2018. Available at: <http://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/economic-empowerment/facts-and-figures> (accessed on 29 January 2019).
- d Esteban Ortiz-Ospina and Max Roser, "Economic Inequality by Gender", Our World In Data, 2019. Available at: <https://ourworldindata.org/economic-inequality-by-gender> (accessed on 29 January 2019).



CHAPTER 5

MULTIPLE DISADVANTAGES CREATE DEEPER EXCLUSION: THE CASE OF EDUCATION

When the group characteristics that marginalize population groups intersect, further layers of disadvantage are added. For example, women, who generally complete secondary education at lower rates than men, are at a further disadvantage if they also live in rural areas. This disadvantage continues to deepen when they belong to a household from the bottom 40 of the wealth distribution. In all countries, the combination of shared circumstances traps a usually smaller group as the “furthest behind”. In Cambodia, for example, although rural households had a secondary completion rate of 10 per cent in 2014, those among the bottom 40 were further marginalized with completion rates of only 3 per cent. Among them, women living in rural households among the bottom 40 were the furthest behind group, with only 1.7 per cent having completed secondary education (Figure 5.1).

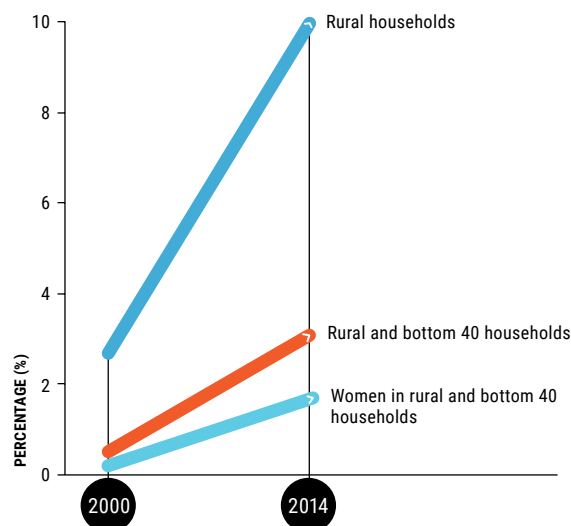
Fewer in numbers, less visible and already underrepresented in economic, social and political life, members of these “furthest behind” groups have multiple obstacles to overcome before they can access services and take advantage of available opportunities. Reaching these groups requires knowledge about their shared circumstances and characteristics.

Given the pivotal role of education, particularly secondary education, as both an indicator of and a precondition for empowerment later in life, this chapter reviews progress over time of those



Figure 5.1 Different layers of disadvantage further marginalize those most vulnerable groups

Cambodia: Secondary education completion, 2000–2014



Source: ESCAP calculations based on DHS surveys for Cambodia in 2000 and 2014.

furthest behind in completing their secondary education. It builds on previous ESCAP research and methodologies for identifying these groups.⁵²

This chapter presents the analysis of the furthest behind for countries in the region, comparing two points in time – early-2000s and mid-2010s. Using data from Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) and Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS), two distinct angles are taken. First, the analysis identifies the groups that are the furthest behind at the time of the earliest survey and tracks them over the following 15 years. The purpose is to examine whether the completion rates of secondary education of those initially in the groups furthest behind, have improved and converged to their country's average rates. Second, the analysis reflects on the composition of these

furthest behind groups focusing on their characteristics of disadvantage, and how that has changed over time.

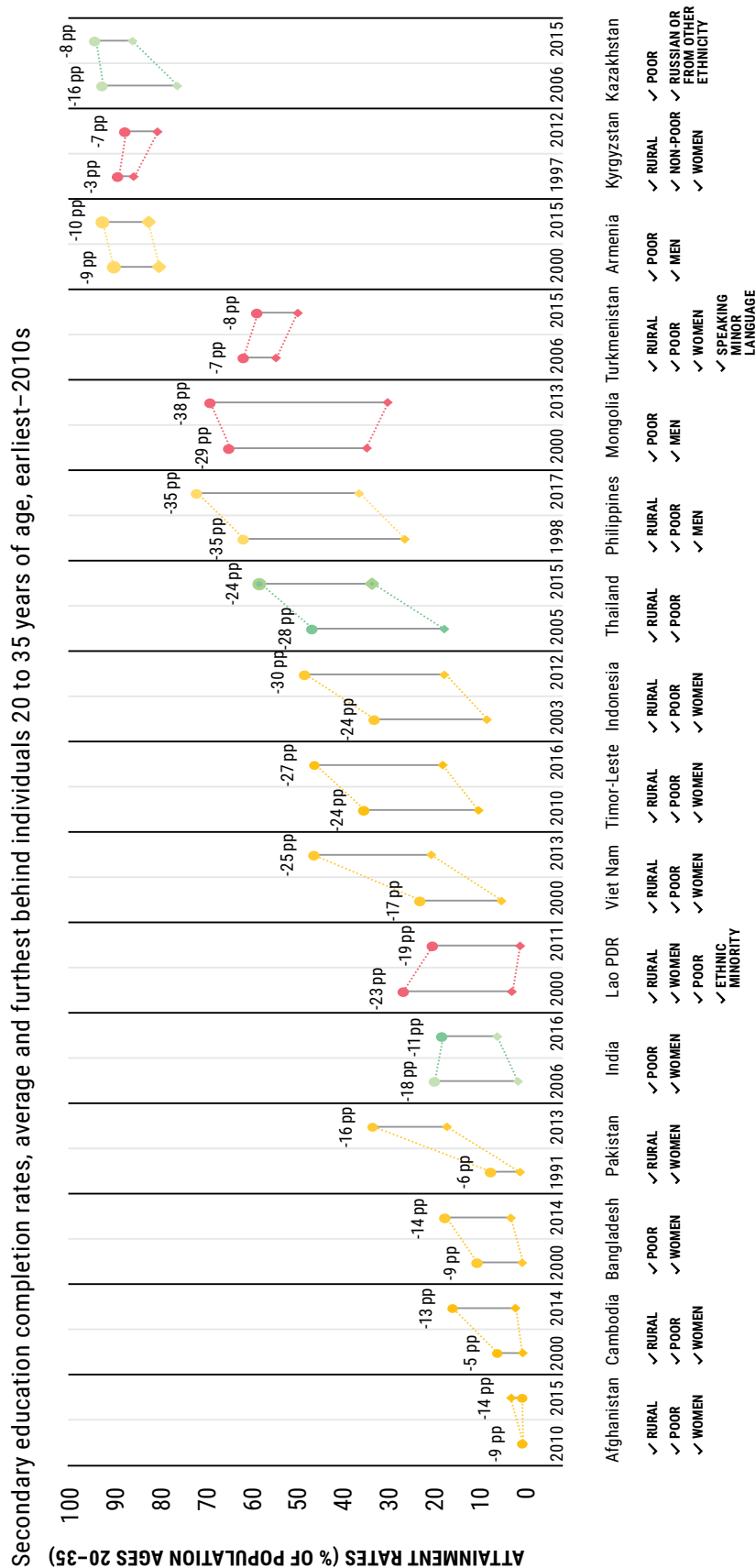
5.1. Better off, but far behind

In most countries, the groups that are the furthest behind have registered substantial improvements in completion rates for secondary education. Tracking these groups over time has shown clear signs of progress. For example, in Indonesia and Thailand the rate of secondary education completion doubled in 10 years. In Viet Nam it increased four-fold, in India it increased 7 times and 24 times in Pakistan. In Pakistan, in 1991, almost no rural women in the 20–35 age group had completed their secondary education. By 2013, the rate had increased to 17 per cent or almost one in six. These improvements often reflect the overall progress of the countries' population at large.

Closing the gaps to the average, however, is a higher bar to reach. It requires that the groups left furthest behind be empowered to advance faster than the overall average of the population. This type of convergence has taken place only in India, Kazakhstan and Thailand (countries shown in green in Figure 5.2). Gaps have fallen by around 8 percentage points in India and Kazakhstan and 4 percentage points in Thailand. In the remaining countries (shown in yellow), the gap to the average has either remained the same, or the furthest behind have benefited less than the average population. Countries in red have seen a fall in completion rates among the furthest behind, mostly following average reductions seen in the general population.

⁵² For details on methodology see: ESCAP, *Inequality of Opportunity in Asia and the Pacific: Education*, Social Development Policy Papers, #2018-01 (United Nations publication, ST/ESCAP/2817). Analysis on the furthest behind in other opportunities, namely full-time employment, clean energy, child nutrition and water and sanitation, is available here: ESCAP, "Poverty and Inequality Resources". Available at: <https://www.unescap.org/our-work/social-development/poverty-and-inequality/resources>

Figure 5.2 The furthest behind are falling behind in completing secondary education



Source: ESCAP calculations based on latest DHS and MICS surveys.

Note 1: Green denotes countries in which the access rate of the groups furthest behind has started to converge towards the average access rate.

Red denotes countries in which the access rate of the groups furthest behind has dropped.

Yellow denotes countries where gaps in access rates between the groups furthest behind and the average population have remained constant or have increased.

5.2. What circumstances constitute disadvantage?

Ensuring inclusion and empowerment of the groups left furthest behind hinges on understanding their identity. This identity may have changed in a few countries, since the early 2000s and new circumstances have shaped disadvantage in the mid-2010s. This section focuses on five circumstances, which, in different combinations, restrict the furthest behind groups from completing secondary education, namely, wealth, gender, place of residence, ethnic or minority status, religion or caste.

The number of circumstances, and the extent to which they prevent equal access to opportunities for the furthest behind groups varies by country. There also exist many other circumstances not addressed in the analysis, due to lack of available data. For example, parental education, health limitations or disability, and availability of gender-sensitive facilities at the school, such as separate toilets for boys and girls, may influence completion of a secondary education. The available information, however, still points to important barriers, often common across countries, which need to be removed.

Between the earlier (early 2000s) and later (mid-2010s) surveys, in half of the 16 countries analysed, the groups furthest behind have changed and a new furthest behind group has formed. In the other half of the countries, they have stayed the same.

Considering the occurrence of each layer of disadvantage in the earlier and the later surveys, it emerges that the relevance of most of the circumstances characterizing the furthest behind groups persist over time (Table 5.1).

Across surveys and over time, the most recurrent disadvantage is belonging to the bottom 40 per cent of the national wealth






distribution. This association is not surprising; bottom 40 learners experience higher drop-out rates, especially in secondary education, when income-generating opportunities may become available and the relative investment in education does not seem worthwhile in the short-term. For this economic group, the responsibility of taking care of younger siblings or ageing family members may also be a reason for higher drop-out rates, especially among girls. Indeed, in two-thirds of the countries, these furthest behind groups consisted of females. Socially determined roles continue to influence women's participation in education.

Gender (being a woman in almost all cases) has also remained equally significant over time. For most countries, if the furthest behind group consisted of women in the early 2000s, such is still the case in the mid-2010s. This applies, for example, to Afghanistan, Cambodia and Timor-Leste where women, living in the rural areas and belonging to the bottom 40 of the wealth distribution have kept reporting the lowest completion rates. The same holds for men in Armenia, Mongolia and the Philippines. The persistent importance of gender for the furthest behind groups indicates that the cultural, institutional and social context has not changed sufficiently to erase gender divides in education completion over the past decade in Asia-Pacific countries.

The impact of the rural-urban divide is diminishing. Living in rural areas no longer characterizes the furthest behind groups in a number of countries, including Pakistan, the Philippines, Thailand, Turkmenistan and Viet Nam. In others, however, such as Afghanistan, Cambodia, Indonesia, Kyrgyzstan, Lao People's Democratic Republic, and Timor-Leste, living in rural areas still impacts the completion of secondary education.

The importance of ethnicity and language as a barrier to completing secondary education among the layers of disadvantage has become less prominent. Belonging to ethnic

Table 5.1 **The circumstances that matter the most**

CIRCUMSTANCE	EARLIER SURVEY		LATER SURVEY	
	NUMBER OF COUNTRIES	COUNTRIES	NUMBER OF COUNTRIES	COUNTRIES
 Bottom 40	15	Afghanistan Armenia Bangladesh Cambodia India Indonesia Kazakhstan Lao PDR Mongolia Pakistan Philippines Thailand Timor-Leste Turkmenistan Viet Nam	15	Afghanistan Armenia Bangladesh Cambodia India Indonesia Kazakhstan Lao PDR Mongolia Pakistan Philippines Thailand Timor-Leste Turkmenistan Viet Nam
 Women	11	Afghanistan Bangladesh Cambodia India Indonesia Kyrgyzstan Lao PDR Pakistan Timor-Leste Turkmenistan Viet Nam	10	Afghanistan Bangladesh Cambodia India Indonesia Kyrgyzstan Lao PDR Pakistan Timor-Leste Turkmenistan
 Rural	11	Afghanistan Cambodia Indonesia Kyrgyzstan Lao PDR Pakistan Philippines Thailand Timor-Leste Turkmenistan Viet Nam	7	Afghanistan Cambodia Indonesia Kyrgyzstan Lao PDR Mongolia Timor-Leste
 Men	3	Armenia Mongolia Philippines	4	Armenia Mongolia Philippines Thailand
 Ethnic minority, language, religion and caste	3	Kazakhstan Lao PDR Turkmenistan	3	Kazakhstan Indonesia Viet Nam

Source: ESCAP calculations based on data from latest DHS and MICS surveys.

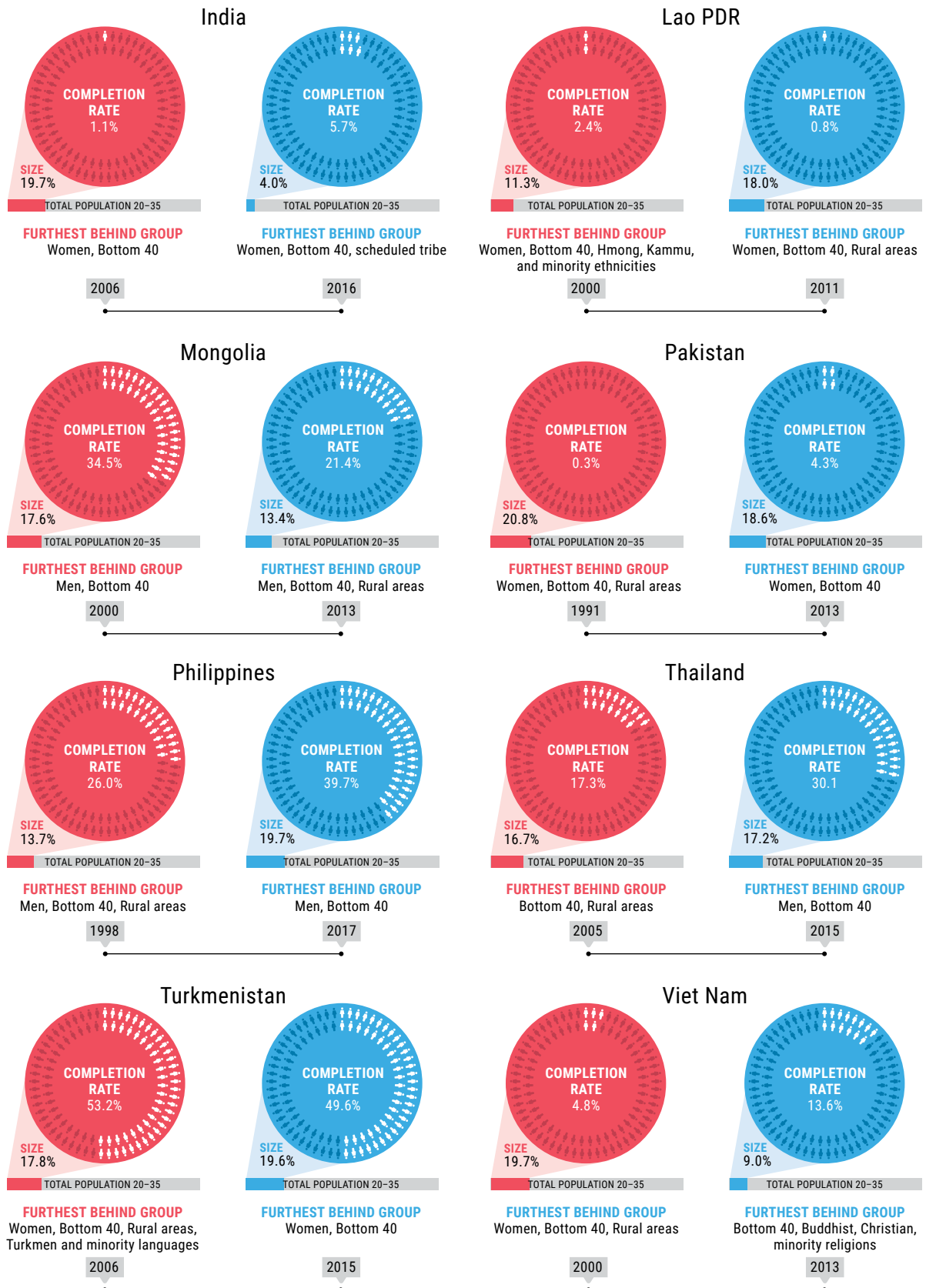
minorities or minor language-speaking groups seems not to influence outcomes in Lao People's Democratic Republic and Turkmenistan. Education policies protecting against discrimination have contributed to the inclusion of all in education. Ethnicity continues to matter marginally in Kazakhstan where, in 2015, the bottom 40 ethnic Russian households had a completion rate of only 86 per cent, compared with almost 94 per cent among the population at large. This is a relatively small difference, for an otherwise above average achieving country. ESCAP research has previously argued that the impact of ethnicity is more pronounced in higher education.⁵³ On the other hand, religion and caste have started to characterize the furthest behind groups, in the later surveys, in India and Viet Nam.

5.3. A new wave of furthest behind groups

As implied above, the intersections of disadvantage have changed in some countries, leading to the formation of a new furthest behind group. In most of these countries, the change was due to the decreasing importance of rural residence as a factor for disadvantage. Pakistan, Philippines, Thailand, Turkmenistan and Viet Nam illustrate this point (Figure 5.3).

For example, in Pakistan, women living in rural areas from bottom 40 households, were the furthest behind group in the earlier surveys. Less than 1 per cent completed secondary education. In the Philippines, the furthest behind group consisted of men living in rural

⁵³ ESCAP, *Inequality of Opportunity in Asia and the Pacific: Education*, Social Development Policy Papers, #2018-01 (United Nations publication, ST/ESCAP/2817).

Figure 5.3 **The new furthest behind**

areas from bottom 40 households, who had a completion rate of 26 per cent. In Thailand, only 17 per cent of the furthest behind group were rural residents in the bottom 40, who completed secondary education.

In contrast, in the latest survey, the furthest behind in Pakistan are women from bottom 40 households, of which 4.3 per cent completed their secondary education. In the Philippines and Thailand, the group is composed of men from bottom 40 households, for whom the completion rate is 40 per cent and 30 per cent respectively. In these countries, living in a rural area is not as critical a factor for disadvantage as it used to be.

In Viet Nam, the composition of the furthest behind group has changed completely. Whereas the group consisted of women living in rural areas, in households belonging to the bottom 40, now the furthest behind are people in the bottom 40 who are either Buddhist, Christian or from another minority religion. While the completion rate of secondary education, among the furthest behind, has increased from 5 to 14 per cent, it is still one third of the national average.

In Mongolia, rural residence has instead become a new factor shaping those that are the furthest behind. In the early 2000s, men in bottom 40 households were the furthest behind group with a completion rate of 34 per cent. Rural residence appeared as a critical circumstance characterizing this group in the latest survey, with men in bottom 40 households living in rural areas and having an access rate of 21 per cent.

The furthest behind group also changed in India and Lao People's Democratic Republic. In India, women from households in the bottom 40 of the wealth distribution had a completion rate of 1 per cent in 2006. At the later survey, scheduled caste and scheduled tribe added a layer of disadvantage to the furthest behind, while the completion rate grew to 6 per cent. While this progress reflects higher average

access, there is an increasing gap between those furthest behind and the rest of the population.

In Lao People's Democratic Republic, the furthest behind continue to be women, in the bottom 40, living in rural areas. While in 2000, the furthest behind also belonged to an ethnic minority, such as the Hmong or Kammu, this no longer characterizes those with the lowest completion rate. At the same time, completion rates dropped from an already very low 2.4 per cent to only 0.8 per cent of rural women in bottom 40 households completing their secondary education.

Indeed, more country-based research is needed to understand the shared common circumstances shaping secondary education completion, as well as to promote effective policymaking with the goal to reduce the barriers to equality for those furthest behind.

In Afghanistan, Armenia, Bangladesh, Cambodia, Indonesia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Timor-Leste, the furthest behind groups have remained the same since the 2000s. In all of these countries, with the exception of Kyrgyzstan, belonging to a household in the bottom 40 of the wealth distribution, is a key commonality amongst the furthest behind. Being a woman and living in a rural area are other common traits amongst the furthest behind groups.

This chapter has shown that the furthest behind groups in most countries tend to complete secondary education to a much greater extent than was the case 15 years ago. However, in only three of these countries have the furthest behind narrowed the gap with the population at large. The next chapter draws on the findings from all earlier chapters, it discusses the type of policies that have been successful in empowering disadvantaged groups in Asia and the Pacific, and highlights additional policies may be needed for further promoting inclusion and empowerment in the region.



CHAPTER 6

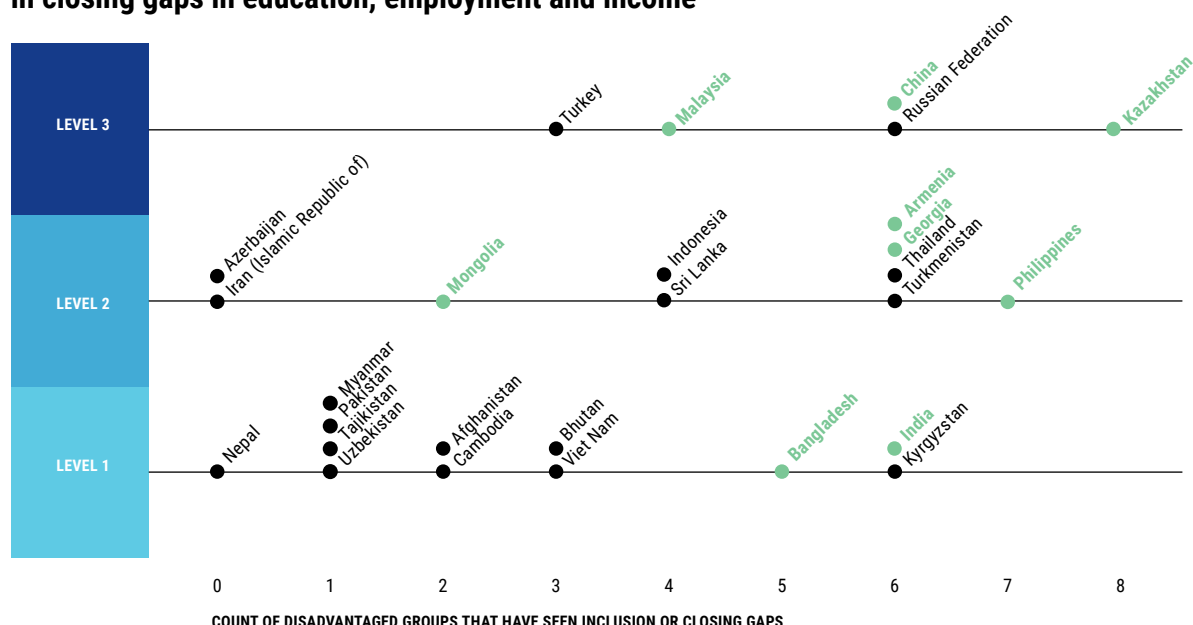
PROGRESS FOR ALL: POLICIES FOR INCLUSION AND EMPOWERMENT

Earlier chapters have highlighted how disadvantaged groups in some countries have been included in overall development (inclusion), but also pointed toward examples where their progress has exceeded that of the advantaged groups, thereby narrowing existing gaps (underlying empowerment). This progress was not always linked to the level of economic development in countries. In fact, countries that narrowed or closed the gaps in education or employment can be found across the ESCAP income classification spectrum, ranging from upper-middle income (China, Kazakhstan, Malaysia) to lower-middle income (Armenia, Georgia, Mongolia and the Philippines) to low income countries (Bangladesh and India) (Figure 6.1).

While economic development may influence public investment in education and employment, the progress registered in lower-middle and low-income countries appears to be related more to the enabling environment that governments put in place. The 2019 ESCAP, UNDP and ADB report entitled “Accelerating progress: An empowered, inclusive and equal Asia and the Pacific” has argued that enabling environments for inclusion and empowerment can be grouped into the following four broad areas: (1) human rights frameworks, (2) norms and institutions, (3) participation and voice, and (4) resources and agency.



Figure 6.1. **Country income level does not determine how successful a country is in closing gaps in education, employment and income**



Source: ESCAP calculations based on data from Gallup World Poll, 2009–2016.

Note 1: Income levels correspond to ESCAP countries' GNI levels. Level 1 includes countries in the first (lowest) quartile in terms of GNI; Level 2 includes countries below the second quartile (but above the first quartile) in terms of GNI; Level 3 includes countries below the third (but above the second) quartile in terms of GNI. ESCAP, Statistical Database. Available at: http://data.unescap.org/escap_stat/#methodDefinition

Note 2: In green colour are the two best performing countries from four out of five ESCAP subregions, which are also further analyzed in this chapter. Three are selected from North and Central Asia because Georgia and Armenia both had the same number of cases. From South-East Asia, Malaysia is selected for analysis because it had four cases of significantly closing gaps (indicating underlying empowerment), compared to none in Indonesia and Thailand, which only had cases of inclusion in development. Data from the Pacific were not available.

Enabling environments are important in supporting the achievement of equitable development outcomes. Their relevance becomes particularly important in lower-middle and low-income countries, where policymaking plays a major role in securing advancement of marginalized groups.

This chapter discusses public initiatives that have proven successful in both extending opportunities to disadvantaged groups (inclusion) and in creating enabling environments for their empowerment. The analysis mostly focuses on the two best performing countries from each subregion (also shaded in green in Figure 6.1). The chapter zooms in on selected policies and frameworks that may have contributed to this relatively better performance. While the focus is on resources and agency, other elements of an enabling environment are also briefly discussed.

6.1 Human Rights Frameworks are critical...

Discrimination based on sex, age, disability status, religion, race, ethnic or social origin, continues to be an obstacle for an inclusive society that empowers its people. This is particularly challenging for those furthest behind who often face multiple forms of discrimination.

Anti-discrimination legislation is a very important tool for ensuring that marginalized groups are protected and can obtain redress if their human rights are not upheld. Laws that affirm equality amongst all social groups, without discrimination based on gender, ability or other conditions, also send a clear message to society that discriminatory practices are not acceptable. Such laws also serve as a

strong vehicle for eliminating stereotyping and negative cultural practices. SDG Target 16.b accordingly focuses on the promotion and enforcement of non-discriminatory laws and policies.

Most of the best performing countries have ratified and incorporated the major UN Human Rights Conventions, as well as the ILO Fundamental Conventions, into their domestic laws. Bangladesh and the Philippines, respectively a low-income and a lower-middle income country, have ratified most international human rights instruments. The significant progress achieved in the inclusion of disadvantaged groups, under both education and employment, in both countries has been supported by the robust legal foundation provided by their national human rights and anti-discrimination laws.

In 2009, the Philippines adopted the “Magna Carta of Women”, a comprehensive human rights law that seeks to eliminate discrimination through the protection and promotion of the rights of Filipino women.⁵⁴ The Commission on Human Rights ensures the promotion and protection of human rights for women, and the Commission on Audit conducts an annual audit on the use of government offices for their gender and development budgets.⁵⁵

6.2 ...but need to be supported by norms and institutions

Normative frameworks, which articulate the principles of equality in access to basic services and economic opportunity, also explain progress

achieved by many of the best performing countries.⁵⁶ When legal norms are implemented and monitored through dedicated institutions, their impact is sustained and amplified.

The comprehensive legal framework on gender equality, in the Philippines, has been enforced through the appointment of the Commission on Women directly under the Office of the President since 1975. Kazakhstan has adopted a gender equality strategy which covers several domains of empowerment and includes indicators for monitoring progress since 2005. Kazakhstan is also one of the few countries analysed where the gender wage gap contracted during this period, and the female labour force participation rate increased from 70 per cent in 1991 to 75 per cent in 2013.⁵⁷

For persons with disabilities, several countries have adopted laws but evidence of concrete initiatives and adequate resource allocation is scant. Malaysia, for example, managed to close the gap in completion of secondary education between children with and without disabilities by implementing the “Education Rules” on special education. A dedicated department, within the Ministry of Education, has overseen special schools and inclusive programmes since 1995. In China, progress in secondary education completion among persons with disabilities has been supported by the “Compulsory Education Development Memorandum”, which outlines a roadmap for achieving equitable basic education by 2020, and establishes an inspection programme to evaluate progress in each province.

When compared with the results of other groups, however, persons with disabilities face the strongest discrimination and stigma.

54 Jonathan Woetzel and others, *The power of parity: Advancing women's equality in Asia Pacific* (McKinsey Global Institute, April 2018).

55 Republic of the Philippines, Philippines Statistics Authority, “Q & A: Magna Carta of Women (Republic Act No. 9710)”, 15 March 2010. Available at: <https://psa.gov.ph/content/q-magna-carta-women-republic-act-no-9710>

56 While the ESCAP, ADB, UNDP (2019) report on *Accelerating progress: An empowered, inclusive and equal Asia and the Pacific* refers to sociocultural norms as informal rules, practices and shared expectations, this section focuses on normative frameworks (laws) and institutions.

57 ADB, “Country Partnership Strategy: Kazakhstan 2012-2016”. Available at: <https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/linked-documents/cps-kaz-2012-2016-ga.pdf>

Legislation alone might not be sufficient to overcome deeply-ingrained societal beliefs, if not supported by decisive political impetus for the promotion of inclusive social norms.

6.3 Participation and voice as a means for empowerment

Research shows that it is difficult to successfully change legal and political institutions by simply replicating an initiative from one context to another. Reforms are more likely to have the desired impact when they are rooted in local knowledge and adapted to the culture, social norms and the every-day experience of the local community.⁵⁸ Participation in policymaking is therefore an important tool for governments to effectively address the real barriers faced by disadvantaged groups and to ensure support and scalability for proposed solutions. Participation, in this sense, is both a tool to improve development outcomes and a means for empowerment.

Several targets of SDG 16, at times referred to as an enabler goal, link directly to factors that are key to empowerment. SDG Target 16.7 aims to ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels.

Target 16.10 focuses on strengthening the public's access to information and protection of fundamental freedoms.

The participation of citizens in decision-making processes is key to ensure responsiveness of public services to their needs, and can play a critical role in guiding allocations in resource-constrained contexts.⁵⁹ In low-income countries, where some of the disadvantaged groups were successful in narrowing development gaps in education or employment, such as in Bangladesh and India, vocal civil society played a crucial role. In these countries, civil society partnered with the government in delivery of public services to the most deprived communities, while also supporting the claims of disadvantaged groups for economic and social rights.^{60, 61}

The Citizen Participatory Audit in the Philippines, introduced in 2012, is another example of how participation can promote efficiency, effectiveness and accountability in public service delivery. The Citizen Participatory Audit engages civil society organizations and citizens in monitoring the Government's use of public resources. In recognition of its effectiveness in improving the quality and transparency of public services, it is now one of twelve commitments under the Philippine Open Government Partnership (PH-OGP) National Action Plan 2017–2019.^{62, 63, 64}

58 G. Roland, "Understanding institutional change: Fast-moving and slow-moving institutions", *Studies in Comparative International Development*, vol. 38, No. 4 (December 2004), pp 109–131.

59 Participation and voice are captured in the Policy Table in Annex 3 through the World Bank Governance Indicator of "Voice and Accountability". The highest scoring indicators for each country, such as governance effectiveness or political stability, are presented alongside to allow for a comparative assessment of the most relevant governance elements to determine progress in inclusion and empowerment during the period analysed.

60 Richa Singh, "Civil Society and Policymaking in India: In Search of Democratic Spaces" (Oxfam India, Centre for Democracy and Social Action, May 2014). Available at: <https://www.oxfamindia.org/sites/default/files/WP7-Civil-Scty-n-ploy-mkg-in-India.pdf>

61 The World Bank, "Bangladesh Development Policy Review, Impressive achievements but continuing challenges", (December 14, 2003). Available at: <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/BANGLADESHEXTN/Resources/Bangladesh+DPR-edited+final-Nov12-2003.pdf>

62 "Citizen Participatory Audit: An Approach for Accountability in the Philippines", International Conference on the Communities of Practice on Managing for Development Results Instruments for Effective Development (Seoul, Korea, 1 November – 3 November 2015, Seoul, Korea). Available at: [https://wpqr4.adb.org/LotusQuickr/cop-mfdr/PageLibrary482571AE005630C2.nsf/0/9B4859AD13D1C26348257F1800270FE2/\\$file/05%20Session%202_Asia_Vivien%2BRosa.pdf](https://wpqr4.adb.org/LotusQuickr/cop-mfdr/PageLibrary482571AE005630C2.nsf/0/9B4859AD13D1C26348257F1800270FE2/$file/05%20Session%202_Asia_Vivien%2BRosa.pdf)

63 Republic of Philippines, Commission on Audit, "Participatory Audit Enters Second Phase", 22 January 2015. Available at: <https://www.coa.gov.ph/index.php/2013-06-19-13-07-50/news-releases/154-participatory-audit-enters-second-phase>

64 "Philippine Open Government Partnership National Action Plan 2017-2019: Co-Creating Governance Outcomes with the Filipino People", 30 June 2017. Available at: https://www.opengovpartnership.org/sites/default/files/Philippines_%20Action-Plan_2017-2019_updated.pdf (accessed on 18 February 2019).

6.4 Increasing resources and agency

The enabling environment described above, consisting of human rights legislation, norms and institutions, and active participation in policymaking, is complemented by a fourth element: resources and agency. As explained in Chapter 1, policies that enhance the availability and quality of education and employment opportunities (resource-side policies), and those focusing on the decision-making capacity of specific disadvantaged groups (agency-side policies) are particularly relevant for this analysis.

6.4.1 Resources: effective sectoral policies

Inclusive education policies

The economic ascent of many high-income Asia-Pacific countries, including the Republic of Korea and Singapore, has in part been attributed to the critical role of education in accumulating human capital. Whilst their education systems displayed significant differences, these countries all invested heavily in education and today remain among the world's top performers.^{65, 66}

Malaysia's success in closing the gaps in secondary education for women and for persons with disabilities is emulating this experience. Public investment combined with focused political will turned education to a key instrument

in the country's modernization. Malaysia invests relatively more than other countries in the region on education, having spent 16 per cent of total government budget in the education sector since the early 2000s.⁶⁷ Education policies, such as the Education Development Plan 2001-2010 and the current Vision 2020, have given particular attention to the inclusion of disadvantaged groups. The Government has enhanced access to schools in rural areas through infrastructure improvement. It has also introduced complementary nutrition and health programmes, as well as initiatives focused on children with disabilities.⁶⁸

Among other good performers, most have accompanied higher spending with policies to secure equitable allocations and affordable access to education.⁶⁹ Several countries have introduced tuition-free schooling and reduced indirect costs such as transportation, school materials and uniforms. In Bangladesh, where the secondary completion rate of girls has overtaken that of boys, success has been attributed to the Secondary Female School Stipend Assistance Program for rural girls.⁷⁰ The programme comprises tuition waivers, stipends for girls enrolled in secondary education, as well as the provision of clean drinking water in schools and separate toilets for girls and boys. While the programme has been credited with reducing child marriages and retaining girls in secondary education, reaching the poorest households remains a challenge.^{71, 72, 73}

65 Jandhyala B. G. Tilak, "Building Human Capital in East Asia: What Others Can Learn", The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development/ The World Bank, 2002. Available at: <https://siteresources.worldbank.org/WBI/Resources/wbi37166.pdf> (accessed on 17 January 2019).

66 Paul Morris, "Asia's Four Little Tigers: A comparison of the role of education in their development", *Comparative Education*, vol. 32, No. 1, (1996).

67 UNESCO and International Institute for Educational Planning, "Malaysia: The closing window of demographic opportunity: adapting the education system to support Malaysia's first nation agenda", (2018). Available at: http://www.iiep.unesco.org/sites/default/files/malaysia_synthesis.pdf

68 Ibid.

69 Santosh Mehrotra, "Education for All: Policy Lessons from High-Achieving Countries", *International Review of Education*, vol. 44, No. 5-6, (September 1998), pp. 461–484.

70 Gallup World Poll data shows that the completion of secondary education for girls increased from 52 per cent in 2009 to 64 per cent in 2016, while for boys the rate increased from 54 to 55 per cent.

71 World Bank, "Education Global Practice: Smarter Education Systems for Brighter Futures, Snapshot: Reaching Girls, Transforming Lives", 2016. Available at: <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/212341467999691082/pdf/98450-REVISED-PUBLIC-WB-EGP-Reaching-Girls-040816-final6-web.pdf>

72 United Nations Girls Education Initiative, "Cash Transfer Programs for Gender Equality in Girls' Secondary Education", Discussion Paper, April 2014. Available at: <http://www.ungei.org/2014-04-GPE-UNGEI-Cash-Transfer-Programs-Girls.pdf>

73 Jennifer L. Solotaro and Rohini Prabha Pande, "Violence against Women and Girls: Lessons from South Asia", South Asia Development Forum, Washington D.C., World Bank, 16 September 2014.

Facilitating school-to-work transition is important, both to retain children in school and to ensure that education translates into employment. Some countries have mainstreamed youth employment in their overall labour market policies. Others, such as the Philippines, have developed specific national action plans.⁷⁴ Skills that children acquire in secondary education must be relevant and match modern labour market demands. Greater coordination between employers and educators is needed to shift the focus on technical and vocational education and training, as well as on soft skills, including communication, problem-solving and teamwork.⁷⁵

Inclusive labour market policies

Despite some improvements in the quality of education and school-to-work transition, labour market gains remain fragile as they have not been accompanied by the adoption and enforcement of decent work standards.⁷⁶ Those few countries that have managed to close, or even reduce, gaps in access to full-time work among disadvantaged population groups, have often used dedicated labour market interventions. For instance, job-search assistance, further training, traineeships and direct job creation can also facilitate the transition to decent work.⁷⁷

With most of the region's labour force in informal work, most workers do not benefit from international labour standards, including social protection.⁷⁸ A medium-term objective for many countries is, therefore,

Box 6.1: Migrant children face barriers in accessing education

Migrants rarely enjoy the same access to education, labour standards, social protection or health care as nationals, leaving them vulnerable to abuse and exploitation. Many are excluded from accessing quality education mainly due to their legal status. National legislation in many countries requires nationality and/or residency documentation as a condition for enrolment and attendance, and even when national policies appear to be inclusive, legal provisions are often misinterpreted by school authorities.^a The requirements of birth registration or national certification to access schooling have indeed been highlighted as highly discriminatory by United Nations Human Rights bodies.

Coherent education and residency policies, as well as targeted measures such as language support programmes, the adaptation of learning materials and the provision of adequate human, logistical and financial resources necessary for the special needs of migrant children are therefore important to facilitate empowerment of migrant children in order to fulfil their right to education.

a UNESCO, "Global Education Monitoring Report 2019: Migration, Displacement and Education – Building Bridges, not Walls" (Paris, 2018).

74 ILO, Asian Decent Work Decade Resource Kit: The Youth Employment Challenge (Bangkok, 2011). Available at: https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---asia/---ro-bangkok/documents/publication/wcms_098144.pdf (accessed on 7 February 2019).

75 Theo Sparreboom and Anita Staneva, "Is education the solution to decent work for youth in developing economies? Identifying qualifications mismatch from 28 school-to-work transition surveys", *Work4Youth Publication Series*, No. 23 (International Labour Organization, Geneva, December 2014).

76 International Labour Organization, "Asia-Pacific Employment and Social Outlook 2018: Advancing decent work for sustainable development" (Geneva, 2018). Available at: https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/@asia/@ro-bangkok/@sro-bangkok/documents/publication/wcms_649885.pdf (accessed on 10 January 2019).

77 ESCAP, *Inequality of Opportunity in Asia and the Pacific: Decent Work*, Social Development Policy Papers, #2018-02 (United Nations publication, ST/ESCAP/2822).

78 ESCAP, *Inequality of Opportunity in Asia and the Pacific: Decent Work*, Social Development Policy Papers, #2018-02 (United Nations publication, ST/ESCAP/2822).

to progressively transition the large share of informal workers into formal, preferably green, decent jobs.

Kazakhstan stands out as the only country to have closed gaps in access to full-time employment for both women and rural residents. Between 2006 and 2016, Kazakhstan created about 1.1 million new jobs in a labour force of 9 million people.⁷⁹ The largest job-creating sectors were public services such as education and health, along with construction, trade and transport. Kazakhstan also adopted the Gender Equality Strategy 2006–2016, the 2009 Law on “State Guarantees of Equal Rights and Equal opportunities of Men and Women”, and the “State Programme on Developing Rural Areas of the Republic of Kazakhstan 2004–2010”.

Promoting lifelong learning is vital in enabling workers to keep up with technological changes. It is also increasingly important in the context of the rapidly changing world of work. Kazakhstan, one of only two countries indicating significant convergence in access to full-employment for workers aged over 50, has adopted several policies to encourage firms to invest in the skills of older workers, such as tax allowances and tax credits to deduct the training costs of workers.⁸⁰

Tackling income inequality through social protection and taxation

Gaps in income are amongst the most difficult to narrow and, belonging to the bottom 40, is also a persistent commonality amongst the furthest behind. Direct income support provided through social protection schemes can therefore be critical. Social protection safeguards individuals and households from various risks along the life course, including health problems and unemployment. It also enables the poor to invest in education, learn new skills and invest in productive assets.^{81, 82}

Public investment in social protection, education and health care, as well as in the improvement of rural infrastructure mark decisive steps in closing the gaps between population groups. With developing countries in the region only spending 3.7 per cent of GDP in social protection – a third of the global average of 11.2 per cent – there is great scope to invest more.⁸³ Countries that have been most successful have generally also invested more in services that reach all factions of society. Previous ESCAP research has shown that higher spending on social protection, education and health can lift over 330 million people out of moderate poverty and 50 million people out of extreme poverty by 2030.⁸⁴

79 World Bank, “A new growth model for building a secure middle class: Kazakhstan Systematic Country Diagnostic”, April 2018. Available at: <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/664531525455037169/pdf/KAZ-SCD-April-2018-FINAL-eng-with-IDU-05012018.pdf>

80 OECD iLibrary, “Building Inclusive Labour Markets in Kazakhstan: A Focus on Youth, Older workers and People with Disabilities” (Paris, OECD Publishing, 13 July 2017). Available at: <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/docserver/9789264273023-7-en.pdf?expires=1550747032&id=id&accname=ocid195767&checksum=2430F1CB1DD3908B5852EF7946873394>

81 Stephen Devereux and Rachel Sabates-Wheeler, “Transformative Social Protection”, Institute of Development Studies, Working Paper 232 (October 2004).

82 Michael Samson, “How are countries using social protection to benefit the poor?” in *Development Cooperation Report 2013 Ending Poverty*, (Paris, OECD Publishing, 2013), chapter 6.

83 ESCAP, *Social Outlook for Asia and the Pacific: Poorly Protected* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.19.II.F.2), pp. 19, 28. When including Australia, Japan, New Zealand and the Republic of Korea, the regional average increases to 6.6 per cent.

84 ESCAP, *Social Outlook for Asia and the Pacific: Poorly Protected* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.19.II.F.2).

An effective tax system also enhances public revenues and facilitates increasing investments in essential services, such as health care, education and social protection. Reforming tax structures to reallocate resources and reduce their adverse effects on the poor, through progressive taxes on personal income, property and wealth, is essential for preventing excessive concentration of wealth and power in the hands of a few, and for ensuring greater equality of opportunity within and across generations.⁸⁵

6.4.2 Policies for increasing agency among disadvantaged groups

Choices made by disadvantaged households and the barriers they face must be better understood in order to design effective policies that complement overarching and sectoral policies. These barriers vary across countries, but also within countries.

Including and empowering rural residents

Reaching rural populations requires a combination of sectoral initiatives and policies with a focus on rural and remote areas. China successfully increased the rates of completion of secondary education in rural areas from 30 per cent in 2009 to 52 per cent in 2016, by improving infrastructure for rural schools and attracting more teachers to rural areas. Hard infrastructure was complemented by other programmes and incentives, such as better remuneration and benefits, and a long-distance education programme for rural schools.⁸⁶

With a largely rural and nomadic population, Mongolia has also undertaken intensive reform efforts for empowering rural children to complete secondary education. For example, the Government has provided boarding schools, dormitories and scholarships to students from marginalized groups. An additional allowance to teachers in rural areas has also aimed to attract and retain teachers in rural areas.⁸⁷ As poverty remains the predominant reason for school drop-outs for boys in rural areas, the Child Money Programme may also have played a significantly positive role in keeping more children in school.⁸⁸ The Social Protection Programme was introduced in 2005 and, in 2010, became a universal cash benefit for all children up to the age of 18. The completion for secondary education in rural areas increased from 59 per cent in 2010 to 79 per cent in 2016, moving closer to the rates of urban areas.

Efforts to boost employment in rural areas are often an integral part of agricultural and rural reforms. Policies to promote geographical connectivity can serve as a tool to empower the access of rural populations to full-time employment. Improving infrastructure, including transport connections and removing bottlenecks from labour mobility can create opportunities for income-generating activities and such infrastructure development could also attract new businesses to rural areas.⁸⁹

As an illustration, the rural population in China has seen its income double, as the Government has rolled out ambitious measures to invest in agricultural technology and upgrade power grids in rural areas thereby attracting more private capital into rural areas. It has provided subsidies for farmers, enhanced financial

85 ESCAP, *Inequality in Asia and the Pacific in the era of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.18.II.F.13).

86 OECD, "Education in China: A Snapshot" (2016). Available at: <https://www.oecd.org/china/Education-in-China-a-snapshot.pdf> (accessed on 5 February 2019).

87 United Nations Economic and Social Council, "Fourth National Report of Mongolia on Implementation of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights" (E/C.12/MNG/4) (June 2015).

88 United Nations Human Rights Council, "Universal Periodic Review – Mongolia" (A/HRC/WG.6/9/MNG/1) (2010). Available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/UPR/PAGES/MNIndex.aspx>

89 United Nations Development Programme, "Humanity Divided: Confronting Inequality in Developing Countries" (New York, 2013).

services, boosted the development of the processing industry for agricultural products and promoted agritourism, together with the introduction of policies to help farmers start businesses.⁹⁰ While these efforts have had a positive impact on rural incomes in China, however, urban incomes have grown even more.

Policies for women's socioeconomic empowerment

Gender mainstreaming is an important strategy to ensure gender-inclusive policymaking. Examples include laws and policies against discrimination, community-awareness programmes for behavioural change, measures to provide safe environments and financial incentives. Gender Responsive Budgeting (GRB) is another effective instrument. GRB entails the analysis of the gender-differentiated impact of budgets and the adjustment of decision-making and priorities in accordance with the different needs of women and men. The Philippines has adopted gender mainstreaming and GRB as strategies to implement its Magna Carta of Women.

A gender-inclusive secondary education requires holistic policy responses that address a spectrum of issues, ranging from

discriminatory sociocultural norms to creating a safe, girl-friendly physical environment. Through mass awareness campaigns against sexual harassment in secondary educational institutions, the MEJNIN programme, implemented by the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee, has helped to reduce the incidence of sexual harassment by almost half in 400 schools across thirteen districts.⁹¹

Family leave policies and legal provisions to prevent discrimination against women at the workplace, help retain women in the labour market, particularly after maternity. Though the Asia-Pacific region lags behind in the provision of gender-responsive social protection, some good practices exist, such as Viet Nam's maternity benefits, breastfeeding policies and provision for paternity leave.⁹² Similarly, NGO Mobile Creches in India have helped to extend childcare facilities to migrant women working in urban areas, as well as slum-dwelling communities.⁹³

Unpaid work, such as child care, also impacts the ways in which women allocate their time and the types of jobs they can take. Evidence from Indonesia indicates that an additional public preschool per 1,000 children could increase the employment of women with age-eligible children by 13.3 per cent.^{94, 95}

90 People's Republic of China, The State Council, "New measures to increase rural incomes", 6 December 2016. Available at: http://english.gov.cn/policies/latest_releases/2016/12/06/content_281475509459966.htm (accessed on 8 February 2019).

91 Fathema Z. K. S. Khan, "Impact Evaluation of MEJNIN: A Project of combating sexual harassment against girl students in public places", BRAC Research and Evaluation Division, Research Report No. 54 (May 2018). Available at: <http://research.brac.net/new/component/k2/impact-evaluation-of-mejnin-meyeder-jonnyo-nirapod-nagorikotto-a-project-on-combating-sexual-harassment-against-girl-students-in-public-places>

92 Emma Samman and others, "Women's work: Mothers, children and the global childcare crisis", Overseas Development Institute (March 2016). Available at: <https://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/odi-assets/publications-opinion-files/10333.pdf>

93 Ibid.

94 Daniel Z. Halim and others, "Preschool availability and female labor force participation: Evidence from Indonesia", World Bank (Washington, D.C., 2017). Available at: <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/104221518802443897/Preschool-availability-and-female-labor-force-participation-evidence-from-Indonesia>

95 Hillary C. Johnson, "Why care about unpaid care work in East Asia?", World Bank, 20 June 2018. Available at: <http://blogs.worldbank.org/eastasiapacific/why-care-about-unpaid-care-work-east-asia>

To enhance women's economic participation, policies need to focus on reducing the burden of unpaid work, through a coordinated approach between social protection, public services and infrastructure. India and the Philippines are moving toward that direction. India has begun providing access to childcare.⁹⁶ The Philippines has also made efforts to increase the participation of fathers in family and parenting duties.⁹⁷

Inclusive disability policies

The inclusion of persons with disabilities across all domains of socioeconomic development is key to the achievement of inclusive societies and sustainable economic growth. Nonetheless, the 690 million persons with disabilities living in Asia and the Pacific still face significant barriers in the access to primary and secondary education. As a result, persons with disabilities are two to six times less likely to be employed, on average.⁹⁸

As for other disadvantaged groups, the rights of persons with disabilities need to be grounded in national legislation and supported by policies that remove barriers. Attitudinal barriers are particularly difficult to address; they often have very negative impacts and discourage persons with disabilities from school or participation in the workforce.

All countries that show indications of empowering persons with disabilities in education or employment, such as Kazakhstan, Malaysia, the Russian Federation and Turkey, have comprehensive legislation that prohibits

discrimination of persons with disabilities. Turkey, for example, has adopted the Turkish Disability Act since 2005. The Act contains a clear anti-discrimination provision, as well as provisions mostly reflecting the Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD).⁹⁹ They also often have sector-specific legislation. More recently, Turkey has also taken steps to apply affirmative actions to create equal and safer work conditions for persons with disabilities.¹⁰⁰ Turkey is the only country that has narrowed the gaps between workers with and those without disabilities.

Ensuring accessible environments is also essential. Often accessibility focuses on the built environment and on removing barriers for persons with mobility impairments. Equally important, however, is addressing information accessibility so that, for example, a blind student can access textbooks or deaf students can benefit from sign language interpretation or other resources.

To empower children with disabilities to complete secondary education, most Governments in the region need to first ensure that children with disabilities receive early intervention services and then are enabled to complete primary school. In 2013, at least one third of children with disabilities did not receive any early intervention services and children with disabilities globally had a drop-out rate of 53 per cent between primary and secondary education.¹⁰¹ School infrastructure, curricula, pedagogy, teaching and learning materials need to be adapted to the needs of learners with various disabilities.

96 Emma Samman and others, "Women's work: Mothers, children and the global childcare crisis", Overseas Development Institute (March 2016). Available at: <https://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/odi-assets/publications-opinion-files/10333.pdf>

97 Ibid.

98 ESCAP, *Building Disability-Inclusive Societies in Asia and the Pacific: Assessing Progress of the Incheon Strategy* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.18.II.F.4).

99 Bekir Fatih Merali, and H. Rutherford Turnbull, "Comparison of Turkish Disability Policy, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and the core concept of U.S. Disability policy", *European Journal of Disability Research*, vol. 10, No. 3 (March 2016). Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/298432891_Comparison_of_Turkish_Disability_Policy_the_United_Nations_Convention_on_the_Rights_of_Persons_with_Disabilities_and_the_core_concepts_of_US_disability_policy

100 Turkish Laborlaw, "Working Conditions of Persons with Disabilities", 22 December 2015. Available at: <https://turkishlaborlaw.com/news/business-in-turkey/349-working-conditions-of-persons-with-disabilities>

101 United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), "The State of the World's Children 2013: Children with Disabilities" (New York, May 2013).

This chapter has discussed relevant public policy initiatives from selected countries in the region. The relative contribution of each of these policies to boosting inclusion and empowerment is difficult to assess. Still, these policies send much needed signals of political will and commitment to individuals, households, groups and communities. Throughout the region, there are examples of governments and civil society working together to improve opportunities for disadvantaged groups and move towards equality.

These efforts, however, often take years, if not decades, to root in. Disadvantaged groups cannot afford to miss the opportunities that socioeconomic growth avails to the more advantaged segments of the Asia-Pacific community. The next chapter summarizes the findings of this report and highlights the countries and subregions that are closer to the goal of equality.

Box 6.2: Inclusion and empowerment of persons with disabilities in the Pacific

Disability inclusion has increasingly received attention in the Pacific, with most Pacific Islands Forum countries having ratified or acceded to the CRPD.^a Building on the momentum of the Incheon Strategy,^b countries in the Pacific have adopted their own Pacific Regional Framework for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities from 2016 to 2025, to support national government actions on inclusive development for the rights of persons with disabilities.^c

Persons with disabilities remain amongst the most marginalized groups in the Pacific and the data on the barriers they face are scarce. Against this background, Fiji, Kiribati, Niue, Palau, Samoa and Tonga have all included the Washington Group Short Set of Questions on Disability^d in their latest census round, in an effort to increase reliable information to enhance effective policymaking.

Various initiatives have also been taken to support persons with disabilities, such as Community-Based Rehabilitation programs to connect persons with disabilities to livelihood and Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) programs in Fiji, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu; and the introduction of social protection benefits for adults or children with disabilities in Fiji, Nauru, Tonga and Tuvalu.

However, few countries have undertaken a comprehensive reform of policy and services and have not allocated adequate budget resources to ensure that persons with disabilities can participate on an equal level. Fiji and Marshall Islands are the only two countries to have adopted comprehensive disability rights laws by translating most CRPD provisions into their national legislations.

- a "Pacific Disability Forum SDG-CRPD, Monitoring Report 2018: From Recognition to Realization of Rights: Furthering Effective Partnerships for an Inclusive Pacific 2030". Available at: http://www.pacificdisability.org/What-We-Do/Research/FINAL_SDG-Report_Exec-Summary_2018.aspx
- b The 'Incheon Strategy to "Make the Right Real" for Persons with Disabilities in Asia and the Pacific', was adopted by Governments in Asia and the Pacific in 2012. It builds upon the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities comprises 10 specific time-bound development goals, 27 targets and 62 indicators. See ESCAP, *Incheon Strategy to "Make the Right Real" for Persons with Disabilities in Asia and the Pacific* (United Nations publication, ST/ESCAP/2648). Available at: <https://www.unescap.org/resources/incheon-strategy-%E2%80%9Cmake-right-real%E2%80%9Dpersons-disabilities-asia-and-pacific>
- c "Pacific Regional Framework for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2016-2025". Available at: <https://www.forumsec.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/PFRPD.pdf>
- d The Washington Group (WG) Short Set is a set of questions designed to identify (in a census or survey format) people with a disability. "The Washington Group Short Set of Questions on Disability". Available at: <http://www.washingtongroup-disability.com/washington-group-question-sets/short-set-of-disability-questions/>



CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSIONS: WAITING IN VAIN, OR ON TRACK?

This report has found that, in most countries, development gains seen for the overall population have often not reached disadvantaged groups. The main reason is the lack of underlying empowerment. Development gaps to more advantaged groups therefore remain large and are, in many countries, even increasing, particularly in relation to household income. To a varying degree, disadvantaged groups have, however, been included in overall socioeconomic progress. Taking a bird's eye view at trends in equality, inclusion and empowerment across the four subregions, for which data are available, some broad patterns are discernible.

7.1 Subregional patterns of inclusion and underlying empowerment

Examples where gaps between disadvantaged and advantaged groups have reduced are found in North and Central Asian countries (Figure 7.1). In many of these countries, the levels of achievement for most groups were already high in 2006 and these trends have continued. Often, progress in inclusion and convergence has come about through enabling environments (see Chapter 6).

In East and North-East Asia and in South-East Asia, narrowing gaps are less common. Gaps in completion of secondary education, for example, have narrowed for rural residents

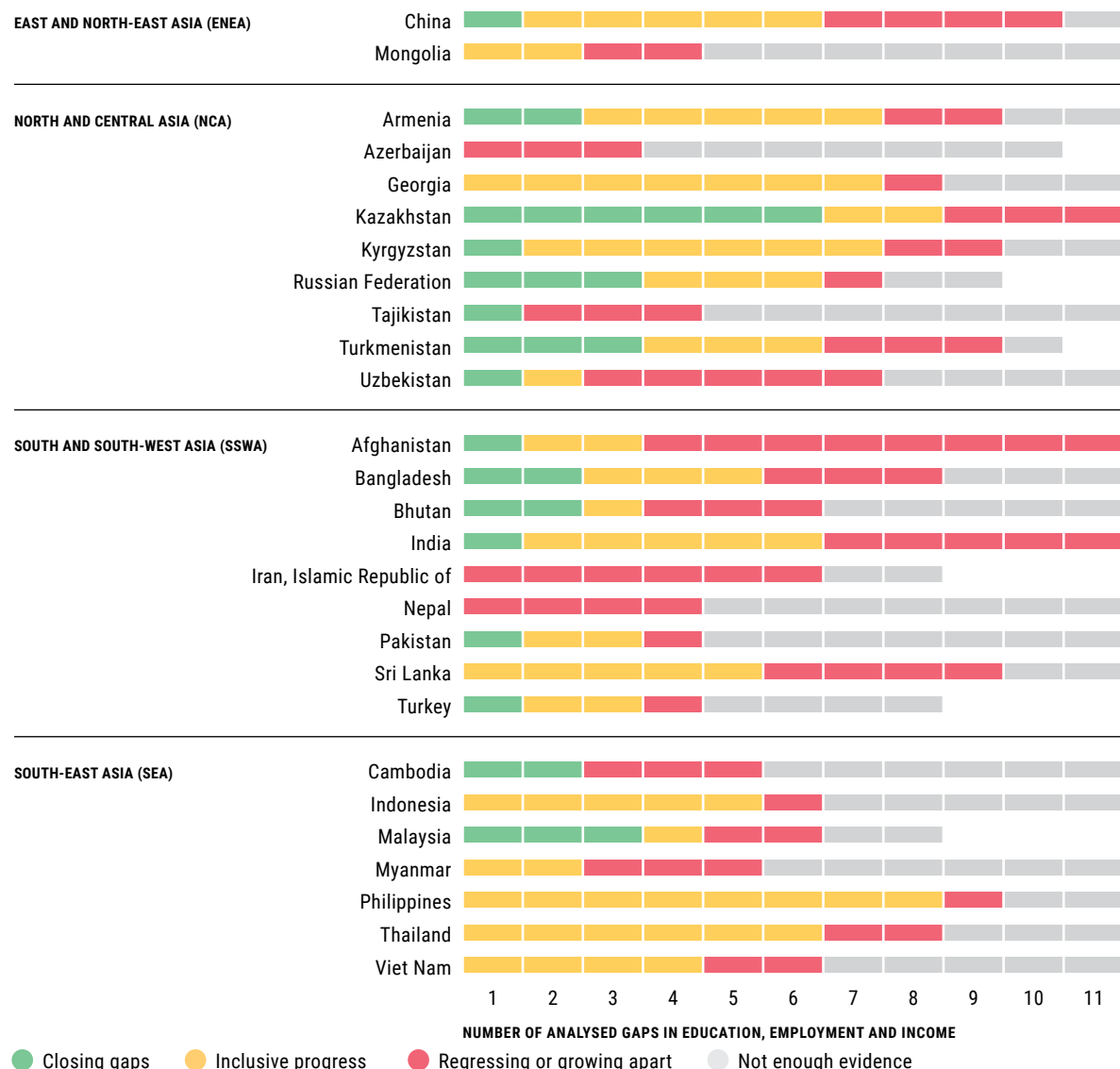


in China and for women and persons with disabilities in Malaysia. There are, however, numerous examples of disadvantaged groups being included in overall progress.

In South and South-West Asia, a different pattern emerges; employment gaps have reduced more frequently than those in

education. For example, in Bangladesh, Bhutan and India, rural residents have significantly reduced the gaps to their urban counterparts. In Pakistan, women have also narrowed gaps to men, a development not seen in secondary education outcomes. These unexpected results hint at relatively low availability of decent jobs.

Figure 7.1 Progress towards equality for disadvantaged groups in Asia-Pacific subregions is off track



Source: ESCAP calculations based on *Gallup World Poll*.

Note: This figure presents the number of cases where women, rural residents, persons with disabilities, persons with low education, young workers (15–24 age group) and mature workers (50+ years age group) are: (1) converging to their comparison groups; (2) included in progress; or (3) growing further apart or regressing as compared to the advantaged comparison groups, in three indicators: secondary education completion, full-time employment and income.

7.2 Rural dwellers more likely to catch up than women and persons with disabilities

Among the three main disadvantaged groups considered in the report, persons with disabilities have experienced the lowest progress (Figure 7.2). Women have seen more convergence to men in secondary education and full-time employment outcomes, but there have also been numerous cases of regression, or of a widening gap. The vulnerability of these two groups, women and persons with disabilities, is often linked to deeply ingrained social and cultural norms.

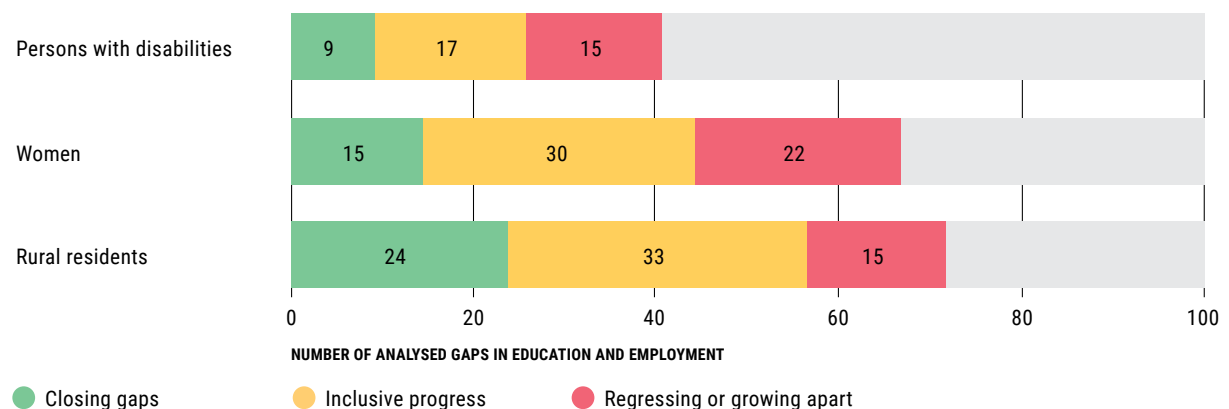
Rural dwellers, on the other hand, have registered the fastest rate of convergence during the past decade, with almost 60 per cent experiencing either inclusion or underlying signs of empowerment. Improvements in rural areas are generally more likely to come about through supply-side interventions, requiring fewer changes in social norms and institutions.

7.3 A bleak outlook for closing education gaps by 2030

Looking ahead, these trends do not bode well for socioeconomic development in the region. On the contrary, they reveal some of the obstacles for achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (Figure 7.3). For example, in 2016, the gap in secondary education completion had closed in only three out of 16 countries (Kazakhstan, Malaysia and the Russian Federation). By 2030, in a business-as-usual (BAU) scenario, only two more countries (China and India) are projected to achieve equality between those living in rural and urban areas, between women and men, and between those with and without disabilities.

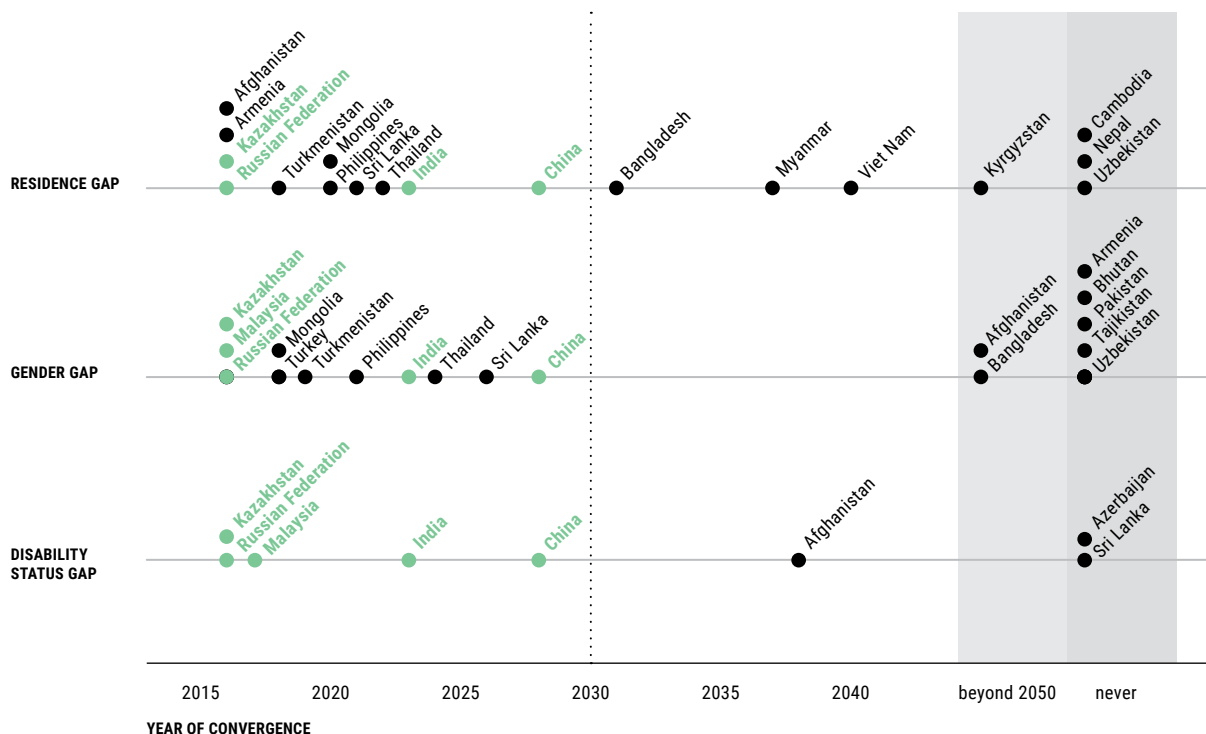
Even in countries where gaps are expected to close, they may only do so at levels insufficient to reach related SDGs. For example, SDG 4.1, states that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes. Unless secondary education completion accelerates for all, some countries, including Bhutan, Cambodia,

Figure 7.2 **Progress towards equality is slow, but particularly for persons with disabilities**



Source: ESCAP calculations based on Gallup World Poll.

Note: This figure presents the share of cases where persons with disabilities, women and rural residents, are: (1) converging to their comparison groups; (2) included in progress; or (3) growing further apart or regressing as compared to the advantaged comparison groups, in three indicators: secondary education completion, full-time employment and income.

Figure 7.3 **Under BAU, only five countries will reach equality in education by 2030**

Source: ESCAP calculations based on data from Gallup World Poll, 2009–2016.

Note: Years represent the year either when a) two groups converge or b) both groups reach 90 per cent. Forecasting is done using linear regression for cases with upward trends (1A, 2A, and 3A as described in Figure 1.2).

Georgia, Nepal and Uzbekistan will not see any group, advantaged or disadvantaged, reach universal completion.

The findings in this report confirm that the level of income of a country does not determine its potential to achieve equality for all, if strong institutions and legislative frameworks are in place. For example, enforced comprehensive, non-discriminatory legal and policy frameworks, guided by strong political commitment and public investment can unlock the potential of marginalized and excluded population groups.

For marginalized populations in most other countries, time is running out and the commitments of the 2030 Agenda increasingly seem like an unattainable dream. In the vie for equality, disadvantaged groups, including women, rural residents, persons with disabilities, migrants, youth and other groups, need to be empowered to exercise their choices. They also need more from their governments. Commitment to the 2030 Agenda is one thing; fostering an enabling environment for participation, inclusion and empowerment is another.

ANNEX 1

DATA

The analysis in Chapters 2, 3, 4 and 5 uses Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS), Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS), and the Gallup World Poll.

Data are available for 33 ESCAP member States. The Gallup dataset was used because of comparability across countries and the extensive questions on education, employment, and household income, disaggregated by sub-population groups. However, most of the questions of interest are available only from 2009, reducing the time period of analysis to seven years. Information in Chapters 2, 3 and 4 was triangulated with official statistics and cross-checked with data in DHS and MICS.

High-income economies of Australia, Japan, New Zealand, Republic of Korea and Singapore are not analysed. Furthermore, data for Lao People's Democratic Republic are only available for the years 2012 and 2013, deeming it too short for any meaningful inference.

The list of the remaining 27 countries used, and survey years is shown in Table A1.

Table A1: **Countries and survey years**

COUNTRY	SURVEY YEARS, EARLIEST AND LATEST			
	GALLUP		DHS/MICS	
Afghanistan	2009	2016	2010	2015
Armenia	2009	2016	2000	2016
Azerbaijan	2011	2016	n/a	n/a
Bangladesh	2009	2016	2000	2014
Bhutan	2013	2015	n/a	2010
Cambodia	2010	2016	2000	2014
China	2009	2016	n/a	n/a
Georgia	2009	2016	n/a	n/a
India	2009	2016	2006	2016
Indonesia	2009	2016	2003	2012
Iran, Islamic Republic of	2011	2016	n/a	n/a
Kazakhstan	2009	2016	2006	2015
Kyrgyzstan	2009	2016	1997	2012
Malaysia	2009	2015	n/a	n/a
Mongolia	2010	2016	2000	2013
Myanmar	2012	2016	2000	2016
Nepal	2009	2016	n/a	2016
Pakistan	2009	2016	1991	2013
Philippines	2009	2016	1998	2013
Russian Federation	2009	2016	n/a	n/a
Sri Lanka	2009	2015	n/a	n/a
Tajikistan	2009	2016	n/a	2012
Thailand	2009	2016	2005	2012
Turkey	2009	2016	n/a	n/a
Turkmenistan	2009	2016	2006	2015
Uzbekistan	2009	2016	n/a	n/a
Viet Nam	2009	2016	2000	2013

All samples are probability based and assumed to be nationally representative of the resident adult population. The coverage area is the entire country including rural areas, and the sampling frame represents the entire civilian population aged 15 and older. Data weighting is used to ensure samples are nationally representative for each country. The statistical analysis is subject to both sampling and non-sampling errors in the data.

Table A2: **Variables and questions used**

VARIABLE	CODE	QUESTIONS/REMARKS
Education Attainment	WP3117	What is your highest completed level of education? 1) Completed elementary education or less (up to 8 years of basic education), 2) Secondary – 3 year Tertiary (9–15 years of education), 3) Completed four years of education beyond 'high school' and/or received a 4-year college degree.
Employed Full Time for an Employer (workforce)	EMP_FTEMP	The Gallup Employed Full Time for an Employer Index measures the percentage of the workforce that is employed full time for an employer. A respondent is classified as 1) Employed for an employer, if he or she "works at least 30 hours per week for an employer". Other possible answers are 2) Employed full time for self, 3) Employed part time, do not want to work full time, 4) Employed part time, want to work full time, 5) Unemployed, 6) Out of workforce.
Per Capita Annual Income in International Dollars	INCOME_4	"What is your total monthly household income in (country), before taxes? Please include income from wages and salaries, remittances from family members living elsewhere, farming, and all other sources". Local income is annualized, divided by household size, and converted to International Dollars using the World Bank's individual consumption PPP conversion factor, making income estimates comparable across all countries.
Residence	WP7572	Respondent lives in 1) Urban area, 2) Rural area
Gender	WP1219	1) Male 2) Female
Health problems	WP23	Do you have any health problems that prevent you from doing any of the things people your age normally can do? 1) Yes, 2) No
Age	WP1220	Please tell me your age.

*Residence and gender are coded directly, not asked.

**The data on Bottom 40 is derived from the income variable.

*** Each question includes additional options of "Don't know" and "Refuse to answer".

*** Those who answer Yes to the Health Problems question (WP23) are assumed to have a form of disability for the purpose of this analysis.

As this question is not fully aligned with the functioning definition provided through the Washington Group questions, the analysis only aims to provide indications of the direction of progress for persons with disabilities – and not to replace official data or the Washington Group questions for identifying disability. In the absence of better data to use for disaggregation, the question WP23 is a reasonable fit. As a confirmation, an average of around 20 per cent reply positively to this question in most countries – a reasonable approximation of the higher end of disability prevalence rates in the region's countries that follow the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF) definition. 'The Incheon Strategy to Make the Right Real for Persons with Disabilities in Asia and the Pacific' also outlines a set of indicators that need to be collected, to monitor progress in the inclusion of persons with disabilities.

****Large-scale comparisons of country-level Gallup measures of employment to population and unemployment rates with the ILO equivalents show high, though imperfect, correlations. These are generally within five points, which is close to the margin of error for most country-level Gallup surveys in most years. Differing definitions of "working age," what exactly constitutes "unemployment" and particular exclusions (e.g., whether to include active-duty military, urban/rural coverage or migrant labour) are contributing factors. For more information, please see Annex 1 in: ILO (2017) *Towards a better future for women and work: Voices of women and men*.

ANNEX 2

METHODOLOGY

The analysis focuses on differences among group means, over time, in three key areas of socioeconomic development: education (measured by secondary education completion), decent work (measured by a proportion of respondents in the labour force who are in full-time employment) and income (measured by annualized, real household income). These three indicators are selected because they have been extensively used in literature to measure empowerment in its various forms, but also because they reflect achievements in three of the six Sustainable Development Goals under review by the High-Level Political Forum in 2019 (Goal 4, Goal 8, Goal 10).

A collection of statistical models, called ANOVA, analyse variations between groups to test the hypothesis of whether there is statistical significance of difference of group means, assuming that the standard error within all groups is the same. When there are two groups, two-sided t-test for two groups with the same standard error is the simplest ANOVA model. In our case, we have four groups, which are defined by combinations of two variables: social/demographic variable, and time variable. An ANOVA model is devised to test the difference between group means, while the t-tests on the coefficients of the variable allow us to see if exactly where the difference occurs.

Since we are interested in the differences between groups, differences between time periods, and differences in gaps over time, we test different slopes and intercepts with an extended model where the outcome variables (education, employment and income) are regressed on population groups of interest, time of the survey and the interaction term of the two.

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 x_1 + \beta_2 x_2 + \beta_3 x_1 x_2 + e$$

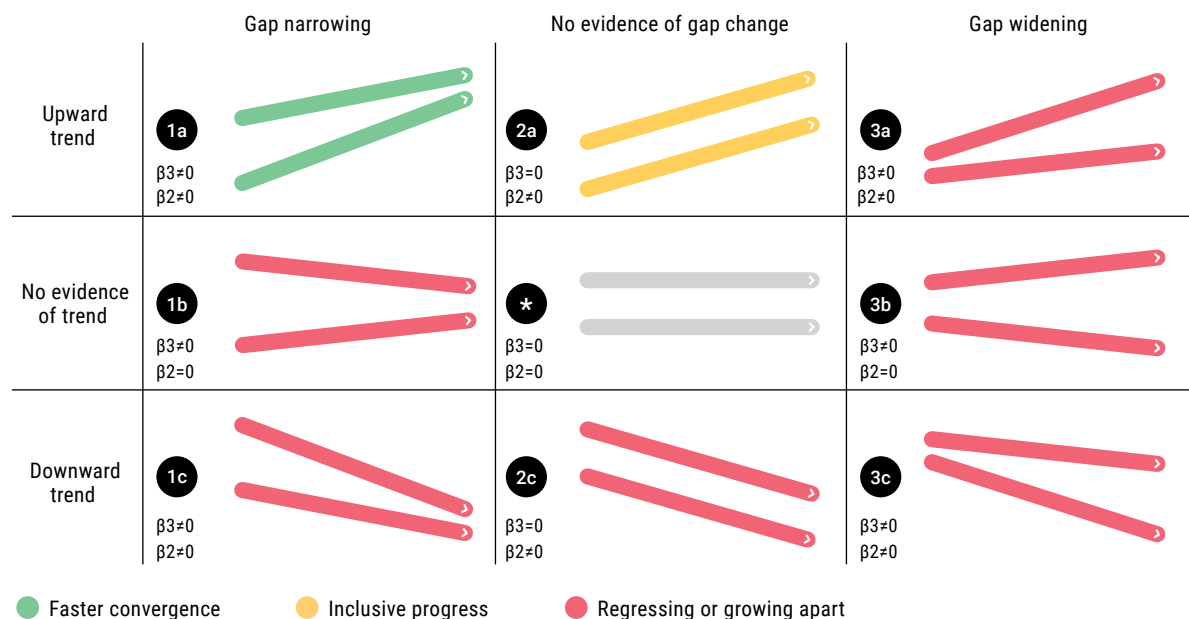
By regressing the outcome variable Y (education, full-time employment and per capita household income) on the population groups x1 (by residence, gender, disability status, education levels, age group), the version of the survey x2 (t0 and t1), and the interaction term (x1 and x2), the following questions can be answered:

- 1) Is the difference in per capita household income between urban and rural residents statistically significant regardless of time, i.e., keeping time constant? (β_1)
- 2) Is the difference in per capita household income between respondents in the second time period (t1) and respondents in the first time period (t0) statistically significant, regardless of the social/demographic group? (β_2)
- 3) Is the difference between urban-rural income gap in the second period and urban-rural income gap in the first period statistically significant? (β_3)

Using signs and significance levels of regression coefficients regarding gaps and trends over time, all possible outcomes are presented in Figure A1. The report makes the assumption that in cases where the gaps have significantly narrowed in development outcomes and the disadvantaged groups have seen an upward trend, they are considered to have benefited from underlying

empowerment (Case 1A). Similarly, where advantaged and disadvantaged groups have benefited from development gains at a similar rate (development has moved in parallel), the disadvantaged groups have been included in the progress (Case 2A). In all other cases, the gaps either widened or one of the population groups experienced regressing trend, and were therefore not analysed.

Figure A1: **Possible scenarios of gaps between disadvantaged and advantaged groups**



Source: Developed by ESCAP

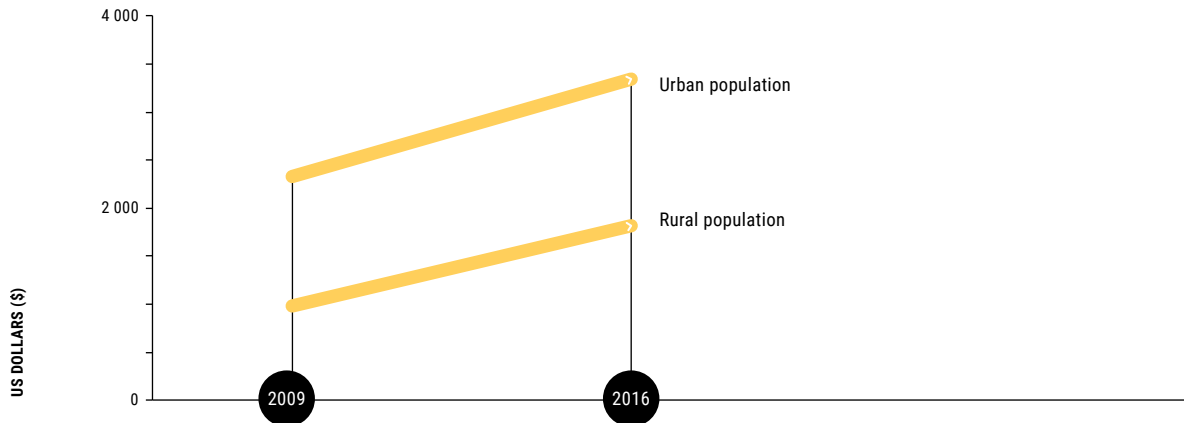
Using Georgia as an example, it can be seen that the difference in per capita household income between urban and rural residents is statistically significant (β_1), the difference in per capita household income between respondents in the two time periods is positive and statistically significant (β_2), but that there is not enough evidence to support the hypothesis of changes in gaps between the income levels of urban and rural respondents over time at the 5% significance level (β_3) (Table A3). This would therefore be an example of inclusive progress (Case 2A), where both groups have experienced increases in income levels, with the gap between them remaining unchanged.

Table A3: **Regression output results – Household Per Capita Income in Georgia 2009–2016**

	ESTIMATE	STANDARD ERROR	T VALUE	P-VALUE (> T)
(Intercept)	2339.2189	106.1271	22.0417	0.0000
(β_1) Residence: Rural	-1362.5636	148.0225	-9.2051	0.0000
(β_2) Version: t1	1006.3591	146.1081	6.8878	0.0000
(β_3) Version: t1 x Residence: Rural	-161.1527	209.6788	-0.7686	0.4422

Figure A2: **Per Capita Annual Household Income in Georgia 2009–2016**

Georgia: Average household income per capita for rural and urban households, 2009–2016



Source: Gallup World Poll 2006–2016.

Conducting this analysis for all 27 available countries in the Asia-Pacific region, for three development outcomes of education, full-time employment and income, and seven pairs of population groups, yields 284 specific cases presented in the Table A4 below.

Table A4: **Results of analysis of gaps between groups**

	EDUCATION BY:			EMPLOYMENT BY:						INCOME BY:		EMPOWERED	INCLUDED	SUM
	RESIDENCE	SEX	HEALTH	RESIDENCE	SEX	HEALTH	EDUCATION	AGE 15–24 / 25–49	AGE 25–49/50+	RESIDENCE	B40 VS. TOP60			
Afghanistan	1A	3A	2A	2C	3C	1C	3C	1C	2C	2A	3A	1	2	3
Armenia	1A	1A	*	2A	2A	*	3C	2A	2A	2A	3A	2	5	7
Azerbaijan	*	*	3B	/	*	*	*	*	*	3A	3A	0	0	0
Bangladesh	2A	2A	*	1A	1C	*	1A	*	2A	3A	3A	2	3	5
Bhutan	*	1B	*	1A	*	*	1A	*	2A	3B	3A	2	1	3
Cambodia	2C	*	*	*	1A	1A	*	*	*	3A	3A	2	0	2
China	1A	2A	2A	2A	3A	*	2A	3B	2A	3A	3A	1	5	6
Georgia	*	*	*	2A	2A	2A	2A	2A	2A	2A	3A	0	7	7
India	2A	2A	2A	1A	3A	3A	2A	3B	2A	2C	1C	1	5	6
Indonesia	*	*	*	2A	*	2A	2A	2A	*	2A	3A	0	5	5
Iran (Islamic Republic of)	/	*	*	/	1C	3C	2C	3C	3C	/	3A	0	0	0
Kazakhstan	1A	1A	1A	1A	1A	2A	2A	3B	1A	3A	3A	6	2	8
Kyrgyzstan	3B	*	*	1A	2A	2A	2A	2A	2A	2A	3A	1	6	7
Malaysia	/	1A	1A	/	3B	*	1A	*	2A	/	3A	3	1	4
Mongolia	2A	2A	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	3A	3A	0	2	2
Myanmar	2A	*	*	*	*	3A	*	1B	*	2A	3A	0	2	2
Nepal	3C	*	*	*	3C	*	*	*	*	3A	3A	0	0	0
Pakistan	*	3B	*	*	1A	*	*	*	*	2A	2A	1	2	3
Philippines	2A	2A	*	2A	*	2A	2A	2A	2A	2A	3A	0	8	8
Russian Federation	1A	1A	1A	/	2A	2A	*	*	2A	/	3A	3	3	6
Sri Lanka	2A	2A	3B	2A	*	*	2A	3B	3A	2A	3A	0	5	5
Tajikistan	*	1A	*	*	*	*	3B	*	*	3A	3A	1	0	1
Thailand	2A	2A	*	2A	2A	3B	2A	*	2A	*	3A	0	6	6
Turkey	/	2A	*	/	*	1A	*	*	2A	/	3A	1	2	3
Turkmenistan	2A	2A	*	1A	2A	3A	1A	3A	1A	/	3A	3	3	6
Uzbekistan	3A	3B	*	1B	3B	*	1A	*	*	2A	3A	1	1	2
Viet Nam	3B	*	*	*	2A	*	2A	*	2A	2A	3A	0	4	4

Source: ESCAP elaboration based on Gallup World Poll data, 2006–2016.

*There is not enough statistical evidence

/ Data not available

ANNEX 3

POLICY TABLE

Policy summary of each subregion's best performers in inclusion and convergence towards equality

SUBREGION	COUNTRY	HUMAN RIGHTS FRAMEWORKS		NORMS AND INSTITUTIONS	
		MAJOR UN HUMAN RIGHTS CONVENTIONS RATIFIED ¹	ILO FUNDAMENTAL CONVENTIONS ²	GENDER ³ GENDER GAP INDEX (GLOBAL RANKING)	DISABILITY
SOUTH-EAST ASIA (SEA)	Philippines	7 out of 7	8 out of 8	0.790 (10)	Republic Act No. 7277 (Magna Carta for Persons with Disabilities) (1991, amended as R.A. 9442); Proclamation No. 688 Declaring the National Decade for Persons with Disabilities, 2013-2022 (2013)
	Malaysia	3 out of 7	6 out of 8	0.670 (104)	Persons with Disabilities Act (2008); Persons with Disabilities Policy and Action Plan, 2015-2022 (2015)
NORTH AND CENTRAL ASIA (NCA)	Armenia	6 out of 7	8 out of 8	0.677 (97)	Law on the Rights, Protection and Social Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities (2012); Law on Mainstream Education (2014)
	Georgia	6 out of 7	8 out of 8	0.679 (94)	"Law on Social Protection of Persons with Disabilities (1995); Social Integration Policy on Persons with Disabilities(2008)"
	Kazakhstan	6 out of 7	8 out of 8	0.713 (52)	"Law on Social Protection of Persons with Disabilities (2006); National Action Plan for Persons With Disabilities, 2012-2018 (2012)"
EAST AND NORTH-EAST ASIA (ENEA)	Mongolia	6 out of 7	8 out of 8	0.713 (53)	Law on the social protection of persons with disabilities (1995); Implementation plan of UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2013-2016 (2013)
	China	5 out of 7	4 out of 8	0.674 (100)	Law on the Protection of Persons with Disabilities (1990); Regulations on the Employment of Persons with Disabilities (2007); Outline of the Work for Persons with Disabilities during the 12th Five-year Development Program Period, 2011-2015 (2011)
SOUTH AND SOUTH-WEST ASIA (SSWA)	India	6 out of 7	6 out of 8	0.669 (108)	Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation) Act (1995); National Policy on Education, 1986 (NPE, 1986); Programme of Action (1992) (inclusive education)
	Bangladesh	7 out of 7	7 out of 8	0.719 (47)	Rights and Protection of Persons with Disabilities Act (2013)

Source: Developed by ESCAP.

Notes:

1 The major United Nations conventions on Human Rights are:

Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD), Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of, Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families, International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), and International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR).

Available at: <http://indicators.ohchr.org/>

2 The International Labour Organization (ILO) Fundamental Conventions are: C029 – Forced Labour Convention, 1930 (No. 29), C087 – Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise Convention, 1948 (No. 87), C098 – Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining Convention, 1949 (No. 98), C100 – Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951 (No. 100), C105 – Abolition of Forced Labour Convention, 1957 (No. 105), C111 – Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958 (No. 111), C138 – Minimum Age Convention, 1973 (No. 138, and C182 – Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No. 182). ILO, Ratification by Convention. Available at: <https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=1000:12001::NO::>

SUBREGION	COUNTRY	PARTICIPATION, VOICE AND ACCOUNTABILITY		RESOURCE AND CAPABILITIES		
		HIGHEST SCORE VOICE AND ACCOUNTABILITY (2007/2012) ⁴	"OTHER GOVERNANCE INDICATORS (HIGHEST SCORE) (2007/2012)"	"EDUCATION (% GDP) ⁵ "	"SOCIAL PROTECTION (% GDP) ⁶ "	"FLAGSHIP POLICIES (EMPLOYMENT, EDUCATION, SOCIAL PROTECTION)"
SOUTH-EAST ASIA (SEA)	Philippines	48/100 (2012)	"Government Effectiveness 59/100 (2012)"	2.7	0.8	2013 Basic Education Act; 2011 Basic Education Facilities Fund and the School Building Program; 4Ps Cash Transfer Programme (2008).
	Malaysia	36/100 (2012)	"Government Effectiveness 85/100 (2007)"	5.0	1.6	2001-2010 Education Blueprint; Education Development Master Plan (PIPP) 2006-2010 under the 9th Malaysia Plan (RMK9)
NORTH AND CENTRAL ASIA (NCA)	Armenia	30/100 (2012)	"Regulatory Quality 61/100 (2012)"	2.8	5.1	1999 Law on Education; 2003 National Curriculum Reform; Education Development State Programme for 2011-2015
	Georgia	50/100 (2012)	"Regulatory Quality 74/100 (2012)"	2.0	9.0	Skills4Jobs 2014
	Kazakhstan	15/100 (2012)	"Political Stability 69/100 (2012)"	2.8	3.9	Gender Equality Strategy 2006–2016; 2009 Law on State guarantees of Equal Rights and Equal Opportunities of Men and Women; State program on Developing Rural Areas of the republic of Kazakhstan 2004-2010
EAST AND NORTH-EAST ASIA (ENEA)	Mongolia	57/100 (2007)	"Political Stability 70/100 (2007)"	4.6	9.6	2007–2015 Mongolia Education Master Plan; 2005 Child Money Programme.
	China	5/100 (2007)	"Government Effectiveness 59/100 (2007)"	1.9	5.7	2006 Compulsory Education Law of People's Republic of China; 2011 Compulsory Education Development Memorandum; 2009 New Rural Pension Scheme.
SOUTH AND SOUTH-WEST ASIA (SSWA)	India	60/100 (2007)	"Voice and Accountability 60/100 (2007)"	3.8	1.3	2005 Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA); 2009 Indira Gandhi National Disability Pension; 2011 Deen Dayal Antyodaya Yojana – National Rural Development Mission .
	Bangladesh	35/100 (2012)	"Voice and Accountability 35/100 (2012)"	1.9	0.9	1994 Secondary Female School Stipend Assistance Program for rural girls; Rural Employment Opportunities for Public Assets (2007-2011); 2008 Employment Generation Programme for the Poorest.

3 Measured by the "Global Gender Gap Index". World Economic Forum (2017) "The Global Gender Gap Report 2017". Available at: http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2017.pdf

4 Measured by the "Worldwide Governance Indicators". World Bank Group (2017). The Worldwide Governance Indicators are: Voice and Accountability, Political Stability and Absence of Violence, Government Effectiveness, Regulatory Quality, Rule of Law and Control of Corruption. Available at: <http://info.worldbank.org/governance/wgi/#home>

5 Compared to the global average of 4.7 % of GDP. See, ESCAP, Social Outlook for Asia and the Pacific: Poorly Protected (United Nations Publication, Sales No. E.19.II.F.2). Available at: https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/publications/Social_Outlook.pdf

6 Compared to the global average of 11.2 % of GDP. ESCAP, Social Outlook for Asia and the Pacific: Poorly Protected (United Nations Publication, Sales No. E.19.II.F.2). Available at: https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/publications/Social_Outlook.pdf

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Equality lies at the heart of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its ambition to leave no one behind. This report gages recent progress towards equality in three key outcomes: education, full-time employment and income.

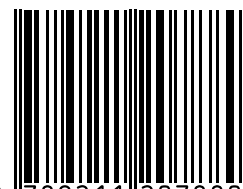
Covering the past 10 years, the report assesses whether women, rural populations, persons with disabilities and other disadvantaged groups have fallen further behind, been included in overall national development gains, or empowered to catch up with outcome levels of more privileged groups.

The report builds its narrative on quantifying progress in inclusion and empowerment by measuring how gaps between disadvantaged and advantaged groups have changed over time. It finds encouraging signs of empowerment in education, but such developments are often eclipsed by less widespread improvements in full-time employment. The picture that transpires is one where disadvantaged groups, in several countries, have benefited from broader economic growth and societal progress, while advantaged groups have been in the driver's seat.

With slow progress towards equality, the story of a dual speed region is more than anecdotal. Against this backdrop, the report calls for policymakers to act fast to reverse the discouraging trajectory for meeting the equality goals set out in the 2030 Agenda.



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