

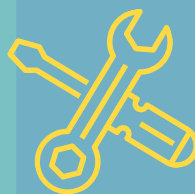
**GENDER EQUALITY AND RIGHTS**

# **GENDER MAINSTREAMING STRATEGY**

## **SOUTH ASIA**

**2018-2021**

UNICEF Regional Office for South Asia



unicef   
for every child



UNICEF is committed to promoting gender equality in South Asia by seeking to address discriminatory policies and services, socialization processes and norms that negatively define gendered roles and practices. UNICEF supports girls and boys from early childhood through adolescence to adopt and shape more equitable gender relations, opportunities, and social progress for every child.



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This document has been prepared by the UNICEF ROSA Gender Section under the overall leadership and guidance of Sheeba Harma, Regional Gender Adviser.

Acknowledging the contributions from Navanita Sinha, Gender Consultant towards framing the content, Rui Nomoto, Gender Officer for the content design and valuable inputs from Regional and Country office colleagues. For more information on UNICEF gender equality work in South Asia, please contact UNICEF ROSA Gender Section or access ROSA website: <https://www.unicef.org/rosa/what-we-do/gender-equality>.

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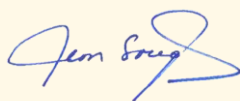
## FOREWORD

For UNICEF gender sensitivity has always been a core value across our programmes and operations. This dedicated Gender Mainstreaming Strategy for South Asia is a first of its kind for UNICEF in the region. This will guide our operations into the future and is in support of our Global Strategic Plan and Gender Action Plan 2018-2021.

In our collective efforts to provide a safe enabling, equitable and progressive environment for the growth of every child in South Asia, it is necessary to address gender as a key programming principle.

We must take a comprehensive approach which addresses the structural drivers as well as the complexity of gender inequalities, harmful practices and norms that prevent progress and growth across South Asia.

I am pleased to share this strategy and seek your active leadership and commitment towards the implementation of this strategy. Let us together put this into practice.



Jean Gough  
Regional Director  
UNICEF Regional Office for South Asia (ROSA)

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. INTRODUCTION	2
II. SETTING THE CONTEXT	3
• UNICEF’s Approach to Gender Equality	3
• The Conceptual Framework	5
III. REGIONAL STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES	7
• Status of Women and Girls in South Asia: An Overview	7
• Gender Priorities for UNICEF South Asia	10
(a) Integrating gender equality in all programme results	11
(b) Targeted gender priorities on empowering adolescent girls	15
(c) Institutional results on gender equality	18
IV. OPERATIONALIZING THE STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES	19
• Pathways for Operationalizing the Strategy	22
V. CONCLUSION	24
ENDNOTES	25
ANNEXES	
• Annex 1: ROSA Gender Action Plan 2018-2021	27
• Annex 2: Gender Statistics Across Headline Result Areas	31

# I. INTRODUCTION

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UNICEF's mission is to advocate for the protection of children's rights, to help meet their basic needs and to expand their opportunities to reach their full potential. UNICEF aims, through its country programmes, to promote the equal rights of girls and women and to support their full participation in the social, political and economic development of their communities. The [UNICEF Strategic Plan \(SP\) 2018-2021](#)<sup>1</sup> emphasizes gender equality and the empowerment of girls and women as a guiding principle; and commits to mainstreaming gender across the organization's work. The associated [Gender Action Plan \(GAP\) 2018-2021](#)<sup>2</sup>, underlines **gender as a key principle of programming** by elaborating the gendered dimensions of the programmatic results across the five goals of the SP, and outlining the steps to strengthen gender across change strategies and institutional systems and processes.

In line with the SP and [GAP 2018-2021](#)<sup>3</sup>, UNICEF South Asia's Gender Mainstreaming Strategy (2018-2021) aims to provide a road-map for achieving the gender equality results in the region as outlined in [the Regional Office Management Plan \(ROMP\) 2018-2021](#)<sup>4</sup>, as well as the country specific Country Programme Document (CPD) and its related Programme Strategy Notes (PSNs). The primary audience for this strategy is everyone working at the regional and country level whose roles require commitment and prioritization to improve gender outcomes in UNICEF programming. Implementation of this strategy will rely on the active involvement of staff across sectors and the accountability of senior management towards ensuring gender integration.

The Gender Mainstreaming Strategy 2018-2021 has the following objectives:

- 1** To strengthen integration of gender equality issues across UNICEF's programming areas (including in emergency and humanitarian crisis contexts) aimed at showcasing a critical mass of programming excellence at scale;
- 2** To enable and empower all staff and implementing partners to take on the responsibility to mainstream gender concerns in their work; and
- 3** To create an enabling environment for promoting gender equality.

The strategy is divided into three sections. **Section I** provides an overview of UNICEF's programming on gender equality. It also briefly maps the evolution of UNICEF's own approach to gender equality, and the lesson learnt thus far. **Section II** provides an overview of gender equality issues in South Asia, to set the context for the Strategic Objectives for Gender Equality programming in the region, in line with the SP, GAP and ROMP 2018-2021, while **Section III** lays out the roadmap and the operational strategies required to realize these commitments.

## II. SETTING THE CONTEXT

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### ● UNICEF's Approach to Gender Equality

UNICEF promotes equal outcomes for girls and boys in its policies, programmes, partnerships and advocacy efforts that contribute to poverty reduction and the achievement of the [Sustainable Development Goals \(SDGs\)](#).<sup>5</sup> Further, during emergency and humanitarian crisis, UNICEF strives to reach children and families in the hardest hit regions with lifesaving resources. This is ensured through result-oriented, effective, innovative and well-coordinated action that achieves the protection, survival and development of girls and boys on an equal basis. UNICEF recognizes that advancing gender equality and the rights of girls and women is essential to realizing the rights of all children. Children's rights and well-being often depend on women's rights and well-being, and childhood investments in gender equality contribute to lifelong positive outcomes for children and their communities.

UNICEF's work is grounded in the [Convention on the Rights of the Child \(CRC\)](#)<sup>6</sup>, the [Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women \(CEDAW\)](#)<sup>7</sup>, and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)<sup>8</sup>, and is anchored in the landmark Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPFA). The Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development with its overarching principles of 'leaving no one behind', and 'reaching the furthest behind' provides the normative template for UNICEF's Strategic Plan. In emergency and humanitarian crisis contexts, UNICEF's interventions are guided by International human rights and humanitarian law (as encapsulated in its Core Commitments for Children in Humanitarian Action). Drawing from these international covenants and frameworks, UNICEF's programming is built on principles of:

#### **Non-Discrimination**

UNICEF recognizes the human rights principle of non-discrimination as central to the consideration of gender equality. UNICEF is committed to practicing and promoting non-discrimination of all kinds, whether based on sex, age, religion, race, ethnicity, economic status, caste, citizenship, sexual identity, ability/disability and urban/rural locality.

#### **Equality**

UNICEF supports governments and partners to achieve gender equality by legislating equality of opportunity for girls and boys through normative and legal frameworks, and building on this, to ensure equality of outcome, through implementing and monitoring these frameworks meaningfully. Equality of opportunity is a necessary but not sufficient condition for the achievement of gender equality, which requires full attention to the prevention and ending of discrimination. Thus, the UNICEF goal of gender equality will be achieved by a focus on equality of outcome, or substantive equality, as elaborated in the CEDAW.

#### **Intersectionality**

UNICEF recognizes that no group of girls and boys, women or men is entirely homogenous. All include members of social sub-groups, defined by age, religion, race, ethnicity, economic status, caste, citizenship, sexual identity, ability/disability and urban/rural locality, and each sub-group may experience various forms of discrimination. Typically, however, girls experience lower status than boys within the same social sub-group, and there is resistance to changing this status. They therefore experience a double discrimination based on the sub-group(s) to which they belong and their sex. UNICEF is dedicated to working with partners at all levels to help end the intersecting discriminations that children face, and to redress the ways in which girls typically, and boys in some situations, experience discrimination on the grounds of their sex, in addition to other forms of discrimination they may experience.

The year 2010 was pivotal for gender mainstreaming in UNICEF, with the adoption of a [‘Policy on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Girls and Women’](#).<sup>9</sup> Following this a [Strategic Priority Action Plan for Gender Equality: 2010-2012 \(SPAP\)](#)<sup>10</sup>, was launched globally in June 2010, to operationalize the Gender Policy. Following the SPAP, the [first Gender Action Plan \(GAP\)](#)<sup>11</sup> for the period 2014-2017 was developed, outlining the strategies to promote gender equality across the organization’s work at the global, regional and country levels, in alignment with UNICEF’s Strategic Plan. The vision for the first phase of GAP was to establish a basic gender architecture of staffing and capacity, and define a set of priority programming results accompanied by strengthening of systems and resources for implementation and measurement. In some programmatic areas, field-based models of excellence took shape; in other areas, the understanding of gender dimensions became clearer, and successful programmatic responses were better documented and replicated. The second phase of the GAP (2018-2021) builds on successes and lessons learned, and specifies three areas for UNICEF’s work on gender equality: (1) integrating gender across the five Strategic Plan goal areas with focus on gender equality for girls and boys and in care and support for all children; (2) five targeted priorities for adolescent girls’ empowerment; and (3) strengthening the organization’s systems and accountabilities to make UNICEF a more effective and gender responsive organization. Some of the key lessons from the implementation of the previous GAP (2014-2017) are listed below.

## REGIONAL LESSONS LEARNED FROM GAP IMPLEMENTATION (2014-2017)

**(1) Commitment to Gender Mainstreaming:** UNICEF has made progress in mainstreaming gender, even as challenges remain and successful efforts need to be further strengthened. An important contributor to progress has been the marked visibility of gender in the UNICEF Strategic Plan, accompanied by management’s commitment to providing resources, leadership and accountability. The role of the executive-level GAP Steering Committee in providing oversight and guidance has been especially important.

**(2) Targeted Approach to Gender Mainstreaming:** The targeted priorities in GAP brought attention to the intense and interlinked forms of gender inequality faced by adolescent girls, helping UNICEF and partners to catalyze global and local investment and action on issues such as child marriage and girls’ secondary education. Targeted priorities also deepened country-level analysis and ownership of gender results. Progress on some targeted priorities, however, has been slower than for others, with UNICEF programming on gender-responsive adolescent health requiring greater attention.

**(3) Enhancing Gender Capacity:** The most critical contributor to progress under GAP has been the investment in senior-level gender expertise. Gender staff and focal persons have been essential to improving the quality and scope of gender programming, building gender capacity,

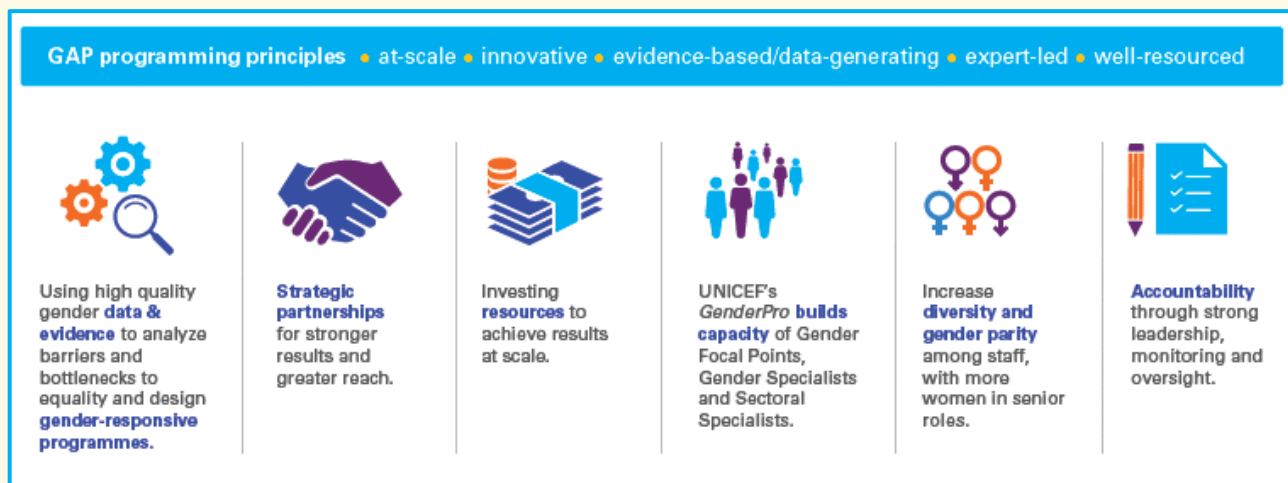
establishing internal and external gender networks and partnerships, fostering learning, knowledge-sharing, communications and advocacy, and supporting more effective measurement and accountability. Adequate gender capacity at the country level and within sectors at all levels of the organization, however, remains a challenge.

**(4) Strengthening the Knowledge Base on Gender:** The focus on having robust data and evidence on gender equality is recognized by staff as one of the areas where the GAP has added the most value, increasing both the credibility of and demand for sex-disaggregated data, and motivating the demand for gender data beyond disaggregation alone. At the same time, the practical application of gender mainstreaming in UNICEF work needs further delineation. Tools and guidance such as the Gender Programmatic Review have provided a methodology for gender analysis that makes concepts more concrete for field-based staff. These tools need to support a broader range of countries, even as they undergo refinement. The pathways for the engagement of boys and men need to be better articulated within UNICEF programme priorities, as do those for advancing UNICEF work on gender equality and children’s rights in fragile and humanitarian contexts.

(Source: UNICEF Gender Action Plan 2018-2021 and Regional Evaluation of UNICEF’s Implementation of the Gender Action Plan 2014-2017 in South Asia)

## ● The Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework underlying the GAP recognizes that gender is about the relationships between and among women and men, girls and boys; and **gender equality means that girls/women and boys/men enjoy the same rights, resources, opportunities and protections**. In a wide range of circumstances, gendered power structures tend to privilege boys and men, giving them greater access to resources, decision making, greater personal freedom, making them less vulnerable to the violation of rights as compared to women and girls. However, it is important to note that men’s attitudes and behaviors are also profoundly shaped by the rigid social and cultural expectations related to masculinity. This may at times, manifest in negative outcomes for boys as well, for instance the proclivity of adolescent boys to not seek access to health care and support, particularly for depression, substance abuse and sexual and reproductive health; or indulge in risk taking behaviour. Deepening the discussion about how gender norms affect both women and men enables us to understand the complex ways in which rigid gender norms and power relations burden society, and underscore the need to more effectively engage men and boys in reflections about inequalities and social change. To that end, UNICEF’s programmatic efforts are directed at levelling the playing field (in terms of providing equal opportunities to boys and girls), but also ensuring that these translate into equal outcomes for all, in line with the principle of Substantive Equality as mandated by CEDAW.

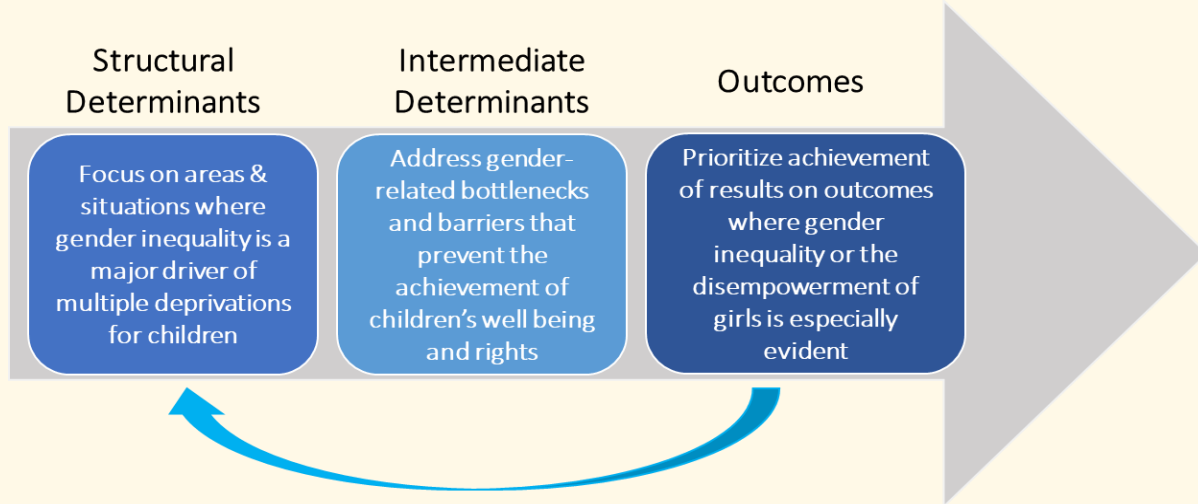


The GAP 2018-2021 notes that UNICEF advances gender mainstreaming, as both a bottom-up and top-down endeavor; and that the added value of a decentralized organization like UNICEF can best be tapped by fostering field-level models of good gender programming through targeted and integrated efforts. These can eventually accumulate to become a critical mass that triggers shift in organizational systems and processes. At the same time, top-down efforts in the form of steady leadership commitment, investment of resources, capacity development, and articulation of accountabilities are also important for direction, consistency and legitimacy.

UNICEF’s mainstreaming strategy includes integration of gender in both programmatic results and institutional systems and processes. The GAP programmatic framework emphasizes both the structural and intermediate determinants of outcomes that are affected by gender inequality (Figure 1). It further defines a twin-track approach: (a) integration of gender equality outcomes across all programme areas, and (b) specification of “targeted gender priorities” focused on empowering adolescent girls.



Figure 1. Programmatic Framework for UNICEF’s Work on Gender Equality



The GAP provides indicators for measuring success and specifies the steps UNICEF undertakes to improve institutional effectiveness in implementing programmatic work on gender equality, through commitment of resources and strengthening of staffing, capacity and systems. In the context of current SP, this translates into the following programming framework at the global, regional and country level with five targeted results and eight integrated results cutting across the SP Goal areas (Figure 2). As is evident, the current GAP continues to maintain a focus on targeted gender priorities and a results-based gender mainstreaming approach to address critical issues such as girl's secondary education, gender-based violence (GBV) in emergencies, child marriage, menstrual hygiene management and gender responsive adolescent health.

Figure 2. UNICEF Strategic Plan and GAP 2018-2021 Programming Framework

**GENDER RESULTS IN PROGRAMMES**

Programming Track	SP Goal 1	SP Goal 2	SP Goal 3	SP Goal 4	SP Goal 5	
<b>STRATEGIC PLAN GOALS</b>	Every child survives and thrives	Every child learns	Every child is protected from violence and exploitation	Every child lives in a safe and clean environment	Every child has an equitable chance in life	
<b>INTEGRATED</b>	Gender equality for girls and boys and in care and support for all children	Gender-equitable health care and nutrition Quality maternal care Gender equality in community health systems	Gender equality in access, retention and learning Gender equality in teaching and education systems	Prevention of and response to gender-based violence against girls and boys	Gender-responsive water and sanitation systems	Non-gender-discriminatory roles, expectations and practices
<b>TARGETED</b>	Empowerment and wellbeing for adolescent girls	Nutrition, pregnancy care, HIV and HPV prevention	Girls' secondary education and skills	Gender-based violence in emergencies Child marriage and early unions	Menstrual health and hygiene management	

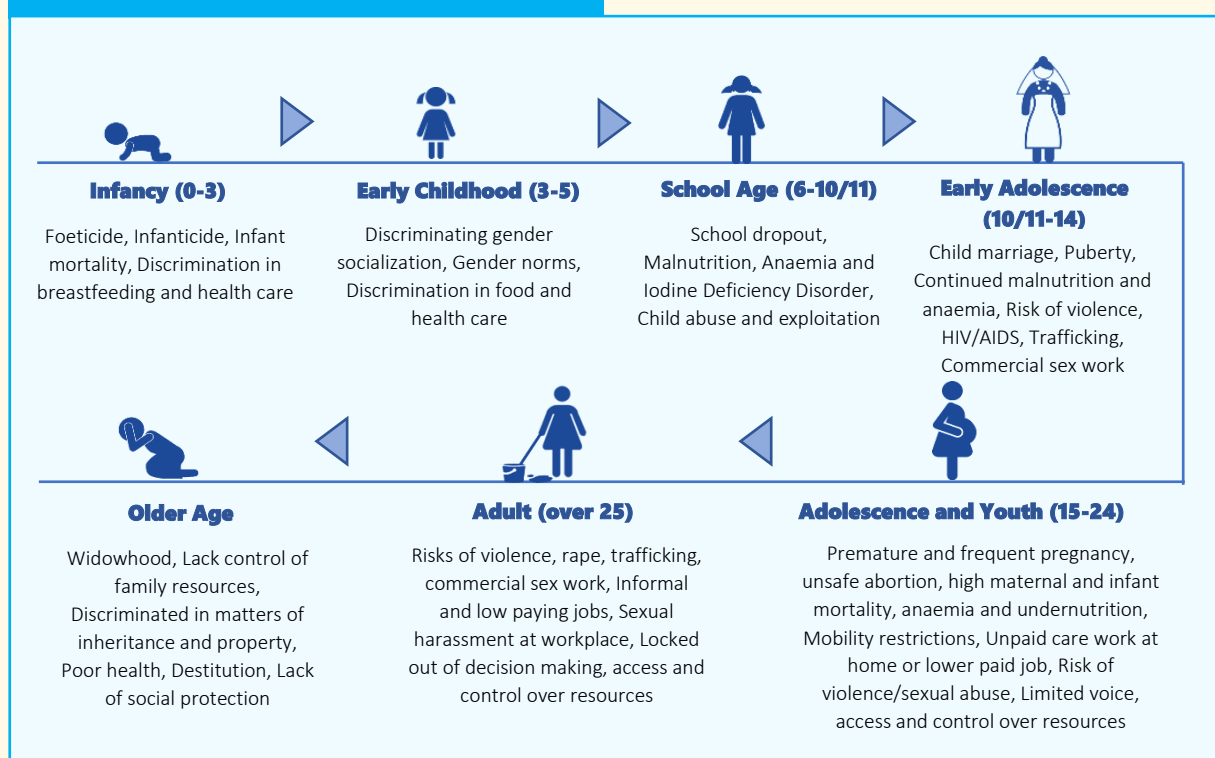
### III. REGIONAL STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

#### ● Status of Women and Girls in South Asia: An Overview

Throughout the South Asian region inequalities arising from caste, class, religion, ethnicity, location is further complicated by severe gender-based discriminations that holds back progress and development for both girls and boys. According to the [2017 Global Gender Gap Report<sup>12</sup>](#), South Asia is projected to close its gender gap in 62 years. From the region, Bangladesh tops the list at 47, followed by Maldives (106), India (108), Sri Lanka (109) Nepal (111), and Bhutan (124). At 143, Pakistan remains the second-worst country in the world for gender inequality for the third consecutive year.

Existing evidence points to the fact that despite considerable progress (especially with regard to education and health) critical gender gaps persist. Across all South Asian countries, patriarchal values and social norms tend to privilege men and boys’ access to opportunities and control over resources.<sup>13</sup> These inequalities are manifested across the life cycle – from conception, to birth, to childhood, adolescence through to adult life. Additionally, challenges facing girls/young women, may be more pronounced in certain phases of their lives, in different countries of the region. For instance, gender gaps in Bhutan, Maldives and Sri Lanka tend to be more pronounced in the second decade of life (adolescence) in terms of unequal opportunities for social mobility and work participation; while those confronting girls in India, Bangladesh, Nepal, and Pakistan span across their lives - starting before birth and continuing into adulthood. Whilst gender discrimination may be systemic and overt in the latter countries, it remains more subtle in the former. In the following paragraphs, some of the key gender issues that cut across UNICEF’s programming areas are highlighted.

Figure 3. Gender Issues Across the Life Cycle<sup>14</sup>



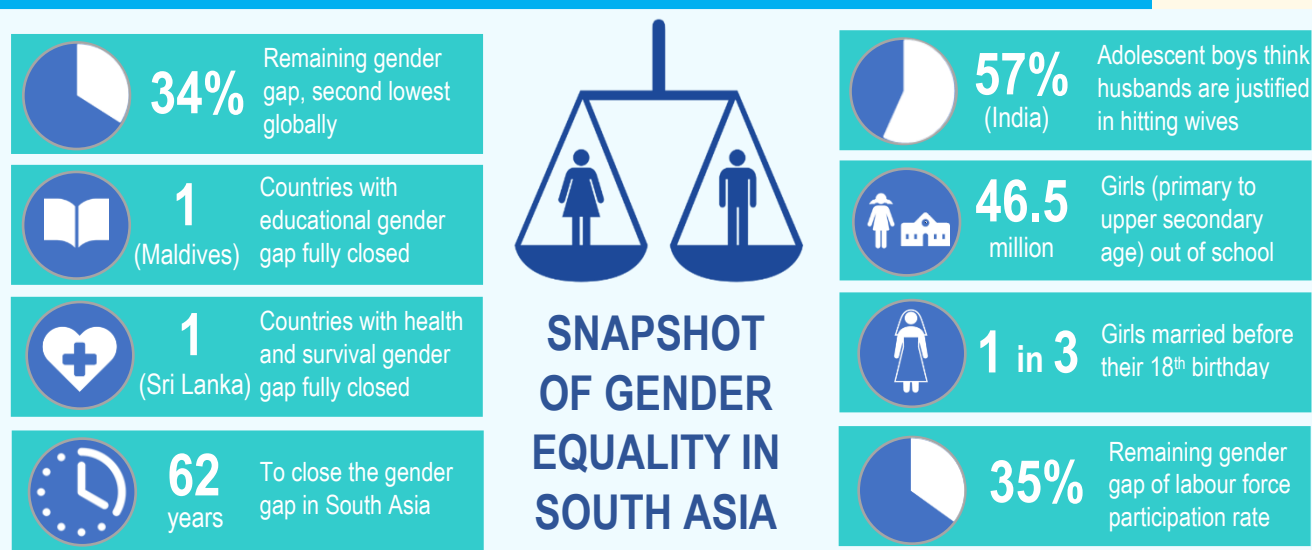
An extremely important demographic indicator of gender-based discrimination is sex ratio. The **sex ratio** at birth, is 1.087 in Pakistan and 1.106 in India.<sup>15</sup> This has serious repercussions on the gender balance in some populations, which may result in further violence against women and girls.<sup>16</sup> Further countries like India and Nepal have higher **child mortality rates** for girls than boys.<sup>17</sup> Qualitative research also points to significant health care and nutritional biases amongst boys and girls. Studies conducted in Bangladesh, Pakistan, Nepal and India, show that more male children are immunized and treated in hospitals; and breast-fed longer; while mortality due to diarrhea, respiratory infections, and measles is higher among female children; and that girls are usually brought to hospitals in worse conditions than boys.<sup>18</sup> The region also has the second highest number of maternal deaths worldwide with 66,000 **maternal deaths** a year.<sup>19</sup> Afghanistan has the highest maternal mortality rate (MMR) in the region approximately 396 per 100,000 live births, followed by Nepal at 258 per 100,000 and Pakistan at 178 per 100,000.<sup>20</sup>

Another area of growing concern is **psychosocial and emotional health of adolescents** in this region given the increase in incidence of depression, anxiety, and self-harm. According to WHO's Global Health Estimates 2015, suicide or self-harm is the second most common cause of mortality – among people aged 15–29 years in the South-East Asia Region including South Asia. Research also highlights the complex linkages between gender and psychosocial and emotional health. Gender norms may negatively affect adolescent girls and boys.<sup>21</sup> For instance, while limiting girls' ambitions and opportunities, social norms often place higher economic expectations from boys. These problems intensify in emergency situations; with studies showing that adolescent girls are up to six times more likely than their male counterparts to develop post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms, even though the latter report more exposure to violence.<sup>22</sup>

There are significant gender differentials in **education**. South Asia has the second highest number of out of school girls at 46.5 million, followed by sub-Saharan Africa.<sup>23</sup> Significant gender disparities are visible in enrolment, retention and completion. Further on the supply side, lack of qualified female teachers, and absence of gender responsive school infrastructure remain critical gaps. Discriminatory practices and gender norms often come into play; for instance, in Afghanistan and Pakistan, heightened concerns for safety and security of girls, have severely restricted their mobility and by implication their access to education. On the other hand, in Maldives, for instance, geographic location is a key determinant of whether or not girls (and boys) are able to access educational institutions. Another emerging issue in the region is the number of boys dropping out at the lower secondary level.<sup>24</sup>

Prevalence of **gender-based violence (GBV)** and **violence against children (VAC)** remains high. An aspect of deep concern is the relatively high tolerance and social acceptance of violent behaviour towards children and women (particularly in the context of intimate partners) in the region. According to the Violence in Childhood Index<sup>25</sup>, South Asia has the third highest rate of violence against children<sup>26</sup>; wherein more than half of the children aged 2 to 17 years have experienced some form of violence.<sup>27</sup> Studies also reveal the gendered nature of violence – with boys more often subjected to physical violence; and girls to sexual and emotional violence. Conflict, fragility, and natural disasters across the region are likely to exacerbate gender disparities by exposing girls, boys, men and women to varied and gender-specific risks and vulnerabilities. Social roles change when communities become uprooted during conflict or emergencies. Women are often left as sole caregivers for their children/families in these contexts. There is evidence to suggest that women and girls are disproportionately affected in these situations, with rates of sexual and GBV rising dramatically during and following periods of unrest. In some instances, rape and sexual assault are systematically used as a weapon of war. Decreased access to healthcare, safe water, sanitation and educational services further exacerbates their vulnerability.

Figure 4. Gender Equality in South Asia: A Snapshot (Source: Global Gender Gap Report 2017)



South Asia also has the second highest prevalence of **child marriage** in the world, with 59% girls being married before the age of 18 in Bangladesh, 40% in Nepal and 27% in India.<sup>28</sup> However, it is important to note that the region has recorded the steepest decadal decline in child marriage — from 50% to 30% — mainly owing to progress on child marriage prevalence rates in India, which has registered a drop from 47% to 27% over a ten-year period.<sup>29</sup> Child brides remain at greater risk of experiencing a range of poor health outcomes, having children at younger ages, having more children over their lifetime, dropping out of school, earning less over their lifetimes and living in poverty than their peers who marry at later ages. Marriage with significantly older husbands tends to preclude the establishment of an equal, consensual relationship—child brides have limited or no capacity to negotiate sexual relations, contraception, and other reproductive decisions with limited bodily control, including the terms of childbearing, and decisions regarding other aspects of their lives, mobility, access and control of resources. The situation is further compounded by the prevalence of ‘dowry’ or ‘bride price’ in most countries. In India, Nepal and Pakistan where the practice of dowry is prevalent, marrying off the girl child at an early age reduces the value of dowry. In Afghanistan, and tribal Pakistan where bride price is practiced, girls are often married off as a survival strategy.

**Menstrual hygiene management (MHM)** is another critical gender issue. In South Asia, menstruation continues to be a taboo in many countries; with deep rooted social norms and practices that prohibit women and girls from using sanitation facilities while they are menstruating. For instance, the practice of ‘*Chaupadi*’ continues unabated in some parts of Nepal, despite being criminalized through a national legislation. Much work needs to be done, to address such harmful practices and social norms: challenge discrimination and stigma around menstruation; improve awareness for girls and boys on the issue; and invest in providing safe sanitary facilities across public institutions including health facilities and schools.

Women and girls in South Asia also bear a disproportionate **burden of unpaid and care work**, for which they are often penalized with poverty and poor health in old age. As they grow up, girls/young women enter the labour market on a smaller range of jobs with barriers to entry, less stability, lower wages, work place and labour market exploitation and with limited access to resources. They are therefore more likely to be caught up in a vicious cycle of inequality. Yet as increasing numbers of women enter the labour force, many are being left with a double work-burden, which means that they are expected to earn an income in addition to

carrying out their existing domestic chores and childcare responsibilities.<sup>30</sup> Reinforcing these gender-based differences is the prevalence of restrictive attitudes around gender roles. These further limit/impedes girls' mobility, access to the labour market, ability to network, their political representation, leadership and decision-making platforms both in terms household and public decision making. Those who attempt to challenge these norms, often face backlash, including through violent means.

It is evident thus that South Asia continues to lag significantly on various dimensions of gender equality and in terms of empowerment of women. Studies and estimates show that improvements in gender equality could add up to USD \$3.4 trillion to the South Asian countries' GDP by 2025.<sup>31</sup> To advance gender equality commitments, national governments along with other stakeholders such as UNICEF will have to design interventions that can effectively respond to emerging challenges such as urbanization, migration, climate change and digitization where women and girls are often invisible in the interventions. The [2018 Mobile Gender Gap Report](#) highlights the region's dramatic gender inequality in access to **mobile technology**. As a region, South Asia has the largest average gender gap in both mobile ownership (26%) and mobile internet use (70%), followed by sub-Saharan Africa.<sup>32</sup> Further there are also emerging concerns that increased automation and technological upgradation of low-skill jobs (predominantly done by women) will lead to higher levels of inequality and polarization of the labour force.<sup>33</sup> In this context, there is a critical need to ensure that young women and adolescent girls and boys learn and acquire appropriate **market relevant vocational skills** (including digital literacy) and have access to opportunities in the market that will especially allow girls and women to transition from education/out of school contexts to employability and obtain jobs in formal growth sectors, while simultaneously advocating for stronger enforcement of legislative, system and policy measures to protect women and girls in the labour market.

## ● Gender Priorities for UNICEF South Asia


UNICEF in South Asia is committed to equality for all and strongly promotes and advocates for gender equality across the organization's results. Improving gender equality outcomes in South Asia will require all office leadership and programme accountability levels to **ensure gender is incorporated in UNICEF interventions as a key programming principle** with a range of contextualized measures focused on closing the gender gaps across priority sectors, tailored interventions for adolescent girls and boys especially to ensure that girls have access to marketable skills, gender responsive health, nutrition and WASH services as well as cross-sectoral efforts to prevent and respond to GBV.

Dedicated interventions are required to address gender norms that manifest in discriminatory practices such as child marriage, high incidence of GBV, high female mortality rates, and limited mobility, voice and agency for girls and women in the region. To address these underlying gender norms, it is critical to invest in multi-sectoral programmes – that effectively combine awareness-raising efforts, with targeted interventions to close gender gaps across sectors, and advocacy for legal and institutional reforms that advance gender equality. In addition to bolstering efforts and creating opportunities for empowerment of girls; it is important to recognize that gender norms also affect men and boys in relation to expectations of masculinity. Sustained efforts are therefore required to bring men and women; boys and girls on an equal footing, by removing systemic biases and structural inequalities that continue to exclude women and girls from decision making, and limit their voice, choice and agency. Across UNICEF's programming areas building cross-sectoral synergies is crucial for strategically integrating gender in both programmes and operations. Initiatives to collect and analyze sex-disaggregated data and indicators and strengthen monitoring and evaluation of gender results and outcomes require greater focus across the region.

Drawing from the Regional Evaluation of the Implementation of Gender Action Plan 2014-2017 conducted in 2017<sup>34</sup>, priority areas for action are noted below. In line with the GAP framework, these correspond to both programmatic and institutional priorities in terms of:

- a** Integrating gender equality in all programme areas;
- b** Adopting targeted priorities on empowering adolescent girls; and
- c** Strengthening gender across change strategies, institutional systems and processes.


## (a) Integrating gender equality in all programme

GOAL AREA 1				
SP Goal Area	Regional Headline Results	GAP 2.0 Priority	SDGs	CRC/CEDAW
 Every Child Survives and Thrives	Saving Newborns Stop Stunting Eradicate Polio	Gender equitable health care and nutrition Quality Maternal Care Gender equality in community health systems	SDG 2 SDG 3 SDG 5	CRC Articles 6 and 24 CEDAW Article 12

### [Proposed Actions]

- Strengthen positive **engagement among fathers and male relatives** in caregiving in support of newborn health. Evidence from the ground shows that men despite their limited knowledge about reproductive, maternal and child health or nutrition related issues, tend to make household decisions in these areas. It is imperative thus, to shift their perceptions and beliefs. Health programmes should primarily address the notion that sexual and reproductive health (SRH), family planning and newborn care is only a women’s issue. Some strategies that have proven to be effective in the region, include interventions where men engage other men and act as peer counsellors on issues of basic reproductive, maternal and child health, nutrition, infant feeding, early childhood development and family planning.
- Increase emphasis on **women’s empowerment**, given women’s lower status in the household and limited decision-making power.
- Invest in generating more evidence and analyzing **sex-disaggregated data for newborns**, especially in countries, where son preference is prevalent (India but possibly others), and where girl children are at risk of suffering greater neglect or mortality.
- Design and sustain efforts to address **discriminatory attitudes** of service providers/health care sector workers and as well as of household and community member level.
- Strengthen direct **delivery of health services** and investments in awareness generation on newborn care to households.
- Support governments to review **Newborn Action Plans, multi-sectoral Nutrition Plans** or other important policy documents from a gender review as a matter of good practice.
- **Build synergies across thematic areas** including child protection, education, C4D, adolescent development, WASH, social protection, and gender section for greater collective impact. To reduce excess female child mortality, linkages should also be built with interventions around birth registration.


## GOAL AREA 2

SP Goal Area	Regional Headline Results	GAP 2.0 Priority	SDGs	CRC/CEDAW
 Every Child Learns	Every Child Learns	Gender equality in access, retention and learning Gender equality in teaching and education systems	SDG 4 SDG 5	CRC Articles 28 and 29 CEDAW Article 10

### [Proposed Actions]

- Continue to support government and education counterparts to **develop and implement adaptive and innovative approaches** targeting the most vulnerable girls and boys.
- **Scale up evidence generation/data collection** especially sex-disaggregated data, to better identify who the most vulnerable children are; where they are located, and to understand the primary barriers towards educational attainment. This will also provide further insights into the various factors that determine whether or not a child enrolls or continues her/his education.
- Design interventions to directly **address the constraints to enrolment and learning for girls** - such as mobility and other safety-related constraints on travel to and from school. Issues such as the overall school environment and how gender responsive it is (for example, a lack of separate sanitation/toilet facilities for girls; a lack of boundary walls around girls' schools in fragile or insecure environments; lack of female teachers; and the threat of sexual harassment or violence in schools or on the way to school) can have a significant bearing.
- Strengthen **cross-sectoral synergies**: for instance with child protection to address demand-side barriers related to child labor and child marriage; with social policy, scale up conditional cash transfer programmes to help the poorest girls stay in school and improve completion and learning rates could be scaled up, especially in countries where girls still lag significantly behind boys in attendance and completion of primary (Afghanistan, Pakistan) and secondary school (all countries except Maldives and Sri Lanka). These interventions can also help to reduce the prevalence of child marriage or to change the discriminatory norms and beliefs that favor educating boys over girls. However, in countries (Nepal and Maldives) that are witnessing an increasing trend of boys dropping out of lower secondary school; it would be critical to understand the root causes and design gender responsive interventions that can help both girls and boys to enroll and stay in school.
- Scale up **alternative learning programmes and centers** for those children who are unable to attend school – due to their location, socio-cultural or gender barriers, disabilities or conflicts.
- Ensure **continued investment of resources** targeting the unmet needs of vulnerable girls and boys as well as their families.


### GOAL AREA 3

SP Goal Area	Regional Headline Results	GAP 2.0 Priority	SDGs	CRC/CEDAW
 Every Child is protected from violence and exploitation	End Child Marriage	Prevention of and response to GBV against boys and girls	SDG 5 SDG 8 SDG 16	CRC Articles 19, 34 and 38 CEDAW Article 16

#### [Proposed Actions]

- Invest in more efficient design and delivery of **multi-sectoral and multi stakeholder interventions** to address GBV (both in terms of prevention and response).
- Continue to invest in **systems strengthening** to aid in the prevention of and response to GBV; as well as scale up existing school- and community-based violence prevention efforts. Interventions such as providing safe space for girls, improved capacity of girls and boys to recognize and report GBV along with sustained capacity building of child protection committees, school teachers, police, judicial staff, service providers and community members on GBV prevention and intervention techniques.
- **Promote cross-learning** by documenting strategies/interventions that have been found to be effective in shifting community members' perspectives and behaviors on issues such as GBV.
- Design strategies to promote the **engagement of men and boys** in GBV prevention.
- Continue to **strengthen partnerships** with agencies working on GBV such as UNFPA and UN Women. However, it is critical to ensure that roles and responsibilities are clearly defined and negotiated to be mutual beneficial.
- Invest in **evidence generation and data collection** on the prevalence, nature and type of GBV against girls and boys; and its short and long-term impact on the health and well-being of girls and boys. This should inform programming on school-related GBV, capacity building of service providers, system strengthening, advocacy on gender responsive infrastructure and increased budgets to address GBV.

### GOAL AREA 4


SP Goal Area	Regional Headline Results	GAP 2.0 Priority	SDGs	CRC/CEDAW
 Every Child Lives in a Safe and Clean Environment	End Open Defecation	Gender responsive WASH systems	SDG 6 SDG 11 SDG 13 SDG 16	CRC Articles 24

#### [Proposed Actions]

- Continue to invest in the provision of **quality gender-responsive WASH facilities and services**.
- Strengthen **evidence generation on gender issues in WASH** specifically on understanding the structural barriers and intra-household power dynamics, in relation to improving hygiene and sanitation; or women's time use and drudgery.
- **Build capacities of young women** to participate in the planning and monitoring of WASH projects at the community level, including in leadership and decision-making positions in WASH committee.
- Explore **partnerships with private sector**, to promote the creation of economic spaces for women and girls in WASH supply and management.




## GOAL AREA 5

SP Goal Area	Regional Headline Results	GAP 2.0 Priority	SDGs	CRC/CEDAW
 <p>Every Child has an Equitable Chance in Life</p>		Non-gender-discriminatory roles, expectations and practices for girls and boys	SDG 1 SDG 5 SDG 10	CRC Articles 2, 23, 26 and 30 CEDAW Article 5

### [Proposed Actions]

- **Strengthen knowledge and evidence generation** on specific aspects such as the gendered-dimensions of poverty; specific risks factors that are key to the understanding of women and girls' needs with regard to social protection, as well as coping strategies used; analysis of macroeconomic trends for its gender differential impacts such as increased migration of male members to urban areas; limited public provisioning for social sectors; impact of conditional and unconditional cash transfer on empowerment of women and girls.
- **Documentation of best practices/global case studies** on gender responsive social protection.
- Strengthen **advocacy efforts at the national level** for increased financing for gender equality commitments as part of the larger Public finance for Development (Pf4D) efforts.
- Design **cross-sectoral strategies to address and transform unequal gender norms and discriminatory practices**, keeping in mind the context specific issues and challenges.


## (b) Targeted Gender Priorities on Empowering Adolescent Girls

GOAL AREA 1				
SP Goal Area	Regional Headline Results	GAP 2.0 Priority	SDGs	CRC/CEDAW
 Every Child Survives and Thrives	Saving Newborns Stop Stunting	Promoting nutrition, pregnancy care, and prevention of HIV/AIDS and HPV	SDG 2 SDG 3 SDG 5	CRC Articles 6 and 24 CEDAW Article 12

### [Proposed Actions]

- Improve **targeted interventions with adolescent boys and girls** to enhance their access and engagement in health, Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH) and nutrition services and initiatives.
- Improve **targeting of out-of-school girls and boys** for anemia prevention and invest in scaling up successful initiatives.
- Strengthen existing **psychosocial and emotional health services** to meet the needs of adolescent girls and boys.
- Design interventions that **promote girls/women’s voice and agency** at the household and community level aimed at challenging intra-household power differentials.
- At the system level, **strengthen capacities of community health workers, education and health practitioners and service providers** and with communities to promote gender responsive health and nutrition awareness.
- Develop **stronger synergies between child marriage and health interventions** with an increased focus on adolescent mothers and their children. It is imperative to target this group, especially adolescent girls, given the high prevalence of child marriage and its links to a range of poor health and nutrition outcomes, including high adolescent fertility rates, low access to SRH services, higher risk of intimate partner violence and adverse maternal and child health outcomes—including unplanned pregnancy, repeat childbirths, and inadequate use of maternal health.
- Invest in research to demonstrate the **linkages between early investments across the life cycle and improved adolescent health for boys and girls**. This should inform cross sectoral programming in the region towards improving the health and nutrition of young girls, address catch up growth to mitigate neonatal/child mortality.


## GOAL AREA 2

SP Goal Area	Regional Headline Results	GAP 2.0 Priority	SDGs	CRC/CEDAW
 Every Child Learns	Every Child Learns	Advancing secondary education, learning and skills development, including STEM	SDG 4 SDG 5	CRC Articles 28 and 29 CEDAW Article 10

### [Proposed Actions]

- Strengthen **cross-sectoral approaches** that include health, nutrition, WASH (especially Menstrual Hygiene Management), child protection, social protection and adolescent empowerment, with a focus on unpacking and addressing the gender-based barriers affecting girls' enrolment and retention.
- **Strengthen employment-related skills development** for adolescent girls, so as to enhance their overall quality of life and help break intergenerational poverty and child marriage. Additionally, integrating a **life skills training** component with the goal of improving knowledge on gender roles and discrimination, health and nutrition and on legislation and legal rights—with a special focus on child marriage and girls' and women's rights will help improve awareness, voice and agency for adolescent girls.
- Invest in **more systematic data collection on enrolment, retention and transition**, with emphasis on further disaggregation by locality, ethnicity, caste and other social variables to further understand the issue.


## GOAL AREA 3-1

SP Goal Area	Regional Headline Results	GAP 2.0 Priority	SDGs	CRC/CEDAW
 Every Child is protected from violence and exploitation		Preventing and responding to gender-based violence in emergencies	SDG 5 SDG 8 SDG 16	CRC Articles 19, 34 and 38 CEDAW Article 6

### [Proposed Actions]

- Invest in **evidence and data generation** on the various aspects of gender-based violence in emergencies (GBViE), including the specific challenges of reaching the at-risk populations most in need of services.
- **Identify and document good practices** in prevention, mitigation and response interventions, including psychosocial care, community empowerment, camp safety, protection desks especially targeting vulnerable boys and girls who are at higher risk of sexual and GBV, trafficking and child marriage.
- **Design services in a culturally relevant manner**, and that protection considerations including GBV are factored into the design of programmes.
- Conduct **awareness campaigns** that target different stakeholder groups and beneficiary population (men/boys and girls/women) on the complex nature of GBV. Specific messaging on the gender specific risks – such as child marriage, trafficking and transactional sex (for essential services) should be included.
- Improve **coordination, understanding and expertise on GBViE**; across programming areas. Further it is critical to ensure that emergency rosters are strengthened with relevant GBV capacity and expertise.


## GOAL AREA 3-2

SP Goal Area	Regional Headline Results	GAP 2.0 Priority	SDGs	CRC/CEDAW
 Every Child is protected from violence and exploitation	End Child Marriage	Preventing and responding to child marriage and early unions	SDG 5	CRC Articles 19, 34 and 38 CEDAW Article 16

### [Proposed Actions]

- Strengthen **cross-sectoral synergies** across UNICEF's programming areas and other key stakeholders to address the issue of child marriage in a holistic manner. The high prevalence countries should strengthen linkages with adolescent empowerment and life skills programming, education and communication for development (C4D) to target key populations/priority areas. Further, cross-sectoral linkages should focus on empowering adolescent girls and promoting their voice and agency.
- Design and implement **public awareness** that highlight the ills of child marriage, as well as draw attention to prevention and response interventions against GBV.
- Design and implement **life skills and livelihood marketable trainings for girls**, promote women and girl's leadership, mentoring, counselling and support in schools and communities to help redress parental and social pressures and incidences of violence and abuse.
- Develop clear strategies for the **engagement of men and boys** in high-burden countries. In applying a gender lens to child marriage with a focus on girls, the risk can be to pay less attention to what is happening to boys. Across the region, more than one in three girls aged 15-19 have experienced physical, sexual or emotional violence by their intimate partner and given the high child marriage rates, interventions that specifically engage men and boys are required to instill awareness about harmful gender norms to diminish the high tolerance for and practice of GBV.
- Continue **system strengthening and advocacy efforts** for improved implementation of child marriage laws and other related legislative/policy measures such as enforcement of birth registration, strengthened awareness among the general public and law enforcement, and addressing the structural weaknesses in legal systems to ensure access to justice and protection for women and girls.

## GOAL AREA 4

SP Goal Area	Regional Headline Results	GAP 2.0 Priority	SDGs	CRC/CEDAW
 Every Child Lives in a Safe and Clean Environment	End Open Defecation	Facilitating accessible and dignified menstrual hygiene management	SDG 6 SDG 11 SDG 13 SDG 16	CRC Articles 24

### [Proposed Actions]

- Develop and implement **holistic multi-sectoral MHM programmes**, moving beyond the current focus on WASH in schools; and as an area of focus beyond the WASH sector into the domain of work around Adolescents, Health, Nutrition, C4D, and Education with a strong gender lens.
- Build **strong cross-sectoral collaboration and evidence base on MHM**, including sustainable and contextually appropriate MHM solutions, keeping the dignity of girls at the centre. Examples of some opportunities in the region are policy reforms that incorporate MHM related to adolescent health and nutrition, ensuring MHM awareness raising is incorporated in the school curriculum for teachers to better support girls.

- **Strengthen MHM infrastructure in public institutions** (i.e. schools, health, community centres). The focus should be creating hardware (facilities, supplies, safe disposal) as well as software (knowledge and information sharing, counselling, capacities of service providers) related to MHM.
- Develop **partnerships with private sector** to ensure girls have supplies and facilities to better manage their menstruation. Specific approaches may include market-shaping efforts to identify locally appropriate products and brands and reduce the cost of supplies to end users; defining minimum performance standards; and developing partnerships with national and international manufacturers to lower prices for safe and higher-quality products. An interesting approach used by some countries in the region has been to include this component under Adolescent Life Skills programme wherein boys and girls are being trained to make sanitary pads out of cloth.
- Design **C4D interventions to address harmful practices/stigma** around menstruation through social and behaviour change strategies such as campaigns to increase awareness on MHM at the individual, household and community level.

### (c) Institutional results on gender equality

The GAP notes that in addition to strengthening gender investments across programming areas, it is critical to strengthen gender equality across change strategies and institutional systems and processes. For UNICEF in South Asia, the following priority actions are noted, across the four building blocks namely the commitment of senior leadership, engagement of all sectors, enhancing capacity of staff (and partners), and performance and documentation of gender results.

Commitment of Senior Leadership	Sectoral Priorities	Human Resources	Performance & Documentation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide oversight by reviewing and monitoring integration of gender results during the Regional Management Team (RMT) and Country Management Team (CMT) meetings.</li> <li>• Ensure that necessary resources are allocated to fulfil the gender equality mandate both in terms of programming as well as institutional measures.</li> <li>• Strengthen office wide accountability mechanisms on gender equality by selecting measures suited to their contexts – such as recognition events for strongly performing teams, inclusion of gender equality in performance appraisal reviews of senior managers, rewarding innovations and good performance in gender equality by different teams or field offices, including gender mainstreaming milestones in unit work plans, among others.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Integrate gender in the work flow and planning processes for new country programme documents with clear action plans and results matrix.</li> <li>• Ensure regular reinforcement of gender and normative principles across each Programme Strategy Notes. This should be made mandatory, and should be undertaken jointly by Planning, Section Chiefs and Gender focal persons/unit.</li> <li>• Ensure greater accountability of gender results across sector staff, so that gender results are not seen as the core accountability alone of the gender focal persons or specialists.</li> <li>• Country Office Gender Specialists and focal persons should ensure countries have sufficient gender analysis and materials (e.g., country gender assessments, policy reports on key gender gaps in the country, sector-specific gender analyses, etc.) that identifies the most critical, country-specific gender issues to be addressed through UNICEF programmes.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strengthen knowledge and capacity of all staff as well as management to understand and address critical gender issues in their work. Human Resource Units in country offices should prepare a staff capacity development plan on gender that is monitored and updated on a regular basis.</li> <li>• In terms of institutional benchmarks, ROSA and the COs have made it a priority to improve gender parity. While noting that not all country offices are comparable, the parity and workplace environment for female staff merits further action to incentivize, attract and retain qualified and competent female staff members.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strengthen internal systems for monitoring and documentation of gender results across outcome areas.</li> <li>• Ensure gender programmatic reviews are undertaken by each country office and an operational gender work plan (as part of the Annual Work Plan) with articulated results, outcomes, timeline and accountabilities developed.</li> </ul>

## IV. OPERATIONALIZING THE STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

Drawing from past learnings and factoring in the emerging priorities, the South Asia ROMP 2018-2021 identifies gender equality as a cross-cutting issue across its six headline results, while prioritizing three Result Areas namely Every Child Learns, End Child Marriage and Save Newborns, for action. It underscores the need for a life cycle approach to effectively identify and respond to gender issues across result areas, and notes that:

**“ROSA will support COs to identify and respond to barriers and bottlenecks that continue to fuel gender differences in education, social norms, gender barriers linked to adolescent health and nutrition, stronger integration of gender into country programme strategies, evidence generation, data and policy processes. Technical support will be provided so that sectoral strategies will be made more gender inclusive for all children girls and boys, adolescents, and women to have equitable access to gender responsive quality services and development opportunities.”**

All eight country offices in their respective CPDs and PSNs also posit gender equality as a cross-cutting priority. In this context, the Regional Gender Mainstreaming Strategy further delineates these priorities, and identifies the pathways that will be used to operationalize the same. The Regional Gender Mainstreaming Strategy emphasizes a holistic approach to gender mainstreaming that translates analysis into action on the ground; with the aim to transform unequal power relations (gender) and the structural causes that sustain these relations. In other words, it seeks to effectively equip this mandate through: influencing/advocating for the inclusion of gender responsive goals, strategies and resources; building capacities and providing technical inputs on gender mainstreaming during the programme design, implementation, reporting and evaluation phases; and creating accountability mechanisms for gender equality commitments.<sup>35</sup>

The Regional Gender Mainstreaming Strategy has three broad objectives to facilitate the achievement of gender responsive results for children:



### Integration of Gender

To strengthen integration of gender equality issues across UNICEF’s programming areas (including in emergency and humanitarian crisis contexts), aimed at showcasing a critical mass of programming excellence at scale



### Empowerment of Staff

To enable and empower all the staff and implementing partners to take on the responsibility to mainstream gender concerns in their work



### Institutional Strengthening

To create an enabling environment for gender equality commitments at the institutional level

The Theory of Change (ToC) underlying the Regional Gender Mainstreaming Strategy is:

- If gender is integrated as a key programming principle in all UNICEF interventions and upheld by senior management;
- If the knowledge base on gender (and its intersections) across UNICEF's priority areas and sectors are strengthened;
- If capacities of UNICEF staff and partners on gender mainstreaming are strengthened;
- If gender responsive convergent programmes in select sectors are designed and taken to scale;
- If systems for tracking and monitoring gender equitable results and data across country offices are bolstered; and
- If institutional mechanisms for gender equality, gender parity and diversity are strengthened, and an enabling work environment is created;



UNICEF and its partners in South Asia will be better equipped to effectively develop and apply gender analysis, to deliver gender equitable results for children which contribute to national and international commitments for children, gender equality, and promote the value and empowerment of women and children.

The ToC is presented in the next page with five output areas to meet the three overarching objectives. This corresponds to the larger GAP 2018-2021, which seeks to consolidate the gains from the previous GAP period specifically on defining corporate priorities and the establishment of a basic gender architecture; to focus on showcasing a critical mass of programming excellence at scale and investing in gender capacity and resources, as well as strengthening systems for measuring gender results, in the current SP/GAP period 2018-2021.

**IMPACT** Gender equitable results for women and children across UNICEF’s priority areas in South Asia (particularly for End Child Marriage, Every Child Learns and Save Newborns)

**OUTCOME**

By 2021, UNICEF and its partners in South Asia are better equipped to effectively develop and apply gender analysis, to deliver gender equitable results for children which contribute to national and international commitments for children, gender equality, and promote the value and empowerment of women and children (ROMP OUTPUT 2.8)

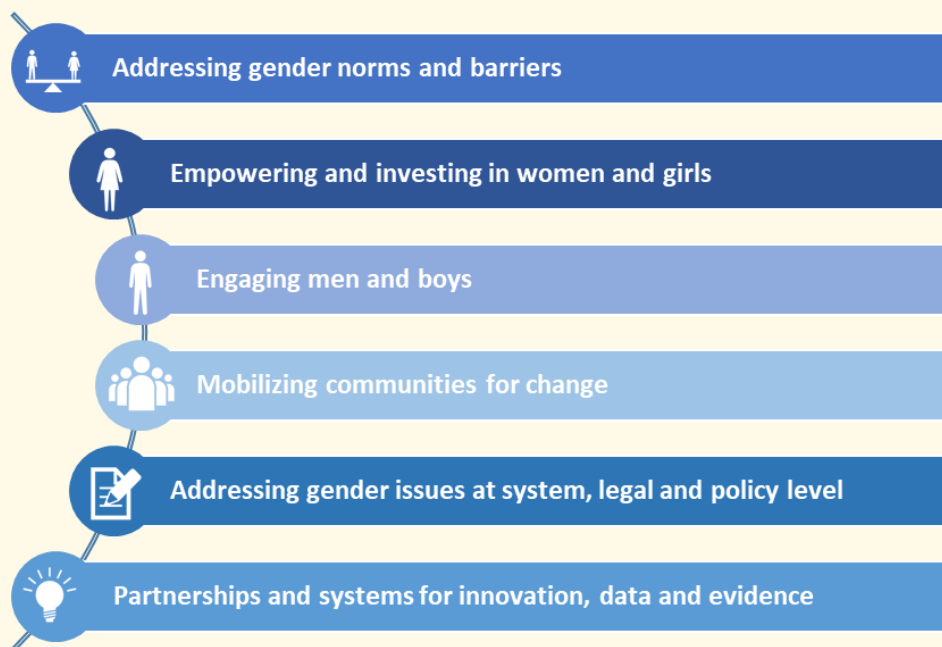
(Note: Focus will be on achieving the three priority headline results and their corresponding GAP results aligned to SP goal 1, 2 and 3)

No.	OUTPUTS	STRATEGY	ASSUMPTIONS	RISKS
1	Gender responsive programmes in select sectors designed and piloted/taken to scale (ROSA and CO)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Technical Support</li> <li>• Documentation and replication of best practices</li> <li>• Partnerships and advocacy</li> <li>• Cross-sectoral and multi stakeholder programming</li> </ul>	Ongoing leadership commitments at the regional and country level	Limited priority accorded to gender mainstreaming
2	Strengthened capacities of UNICEF and its partners on gender mainstreaming (both ROSA and CO)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Training and capacity building</li> <li>• Technical and accompaniment support (expert-led)</li> <li>• Knowledge exchange/learning platforms (peer to peer)</li> <li>• Customized training and guidance/toolkit</li> <li>• Innovative programming</li> </ul>	Opportunities for collaboration with regional/national stakeholders on gender equality	Limited financing for gender equality
3	Strengthened knowledge base on Gender (and its intersections) across the three priority headline results (ROSA and CO)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Research and evidence generation</li> <li>• Knowledge management</li> <li>• System strengthening</li> <li>• Partnerships and advocacy</li> </ul>	Continued resources for gender equality	Limited gender capacity, data and partners
4	Strengthened systems for tracking and monitoring gender equitable results for the region (UNICEF and national partners) (ROSA and COs)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Partnerships and advocacy</li> <li>• Technical support</li> <li>• System strengthening</li> </ul>	Commitment of programmatic/sectoral staff and partner agencies to mainstream gender	
5	Strengthened institutional mechanisms for gender equality, gender parity and diversity in UNICEF (ROSA and CO) and enabling work environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gender and diversity/inclusion mapping and strategy</li> <li>• Advocacy and accountability for gender responsive practices at the workplace</li> <li>• Oversight and redressal mechanisms for addressing gender issues at work place</li> <li>• Institutional strengthening and policy implementation</li> <li>• Resource allocation and capacity building</li> </ul>		



## ● Pathways for Operationalizing the Strategy

To achieve these objectives as outlined in the ToC, the Regional Gender Mainstreaming Strategy will focus on six priority action areas as follows.



### (a) Addressing gender norms and barriers

The most significant issue in the region is the **prevalence of harmful gender norms and cultural barriers** that hinder the advancement of gender equality. UNICEF ROSA will invest in research to unpack underlying gender norms, understand their regional and country wise specificities, and the ways in which they impact/impede the achievement of gender equality results. Evidence thus generated will be used to develop practical programming strategies to address gender norms in a systematic manner (including through cross-sectoral programming) to integrate this into Country Programme Strategies. Enhancing the [value of the girl child](#) will form the capstone for designing social media campaigns, to influence awareness and social behavioural change and engage stakeholders across the region at scale. At the level of programming, interventions on early childhood development (ECD), positive parenting, engagement of men and boys will be explored to help break the intergenerational transmission of negative gender norms and ensure positive gender socialization through shift in attitudes toward gender equality.

### (b) Empowering and investing in women and girls

UNICEF's Strategic Plan states that gender equality and empowerment of women and girls is one of its core principles. However, there is limited evidence from the ROSA region, on how this is being achieved through country level programming; or the extent to which 'empowerment of women/girls' acts as a central tenet for country level programming. Through capacity building, technical support, documentation of best practices and knowledge exchange, UNICEF regional and country offices (COs) in South Asia will invest in identifying and incorporating programme strategies across the six headline results to empower women and girls. This will further reinforce UNICEF's Gender Policy and the Gender Action Plan emphasis on engaging with women and

girls as change agents, and not merely beneficiaries. Further collaborations with women's rights organizations especially those working on areas/issues related to UNICEF's programming, will be sought to draw on their perspectives and experiences in promoting women and girls' empowerment. Advocacy for increased financing for such empowerment interventions/programmes both internally at the CO and regional office (RO) level; as well as with external partners including national government through equitable investments and social policy will be strengthened.

### (c) Engaging men and boys

Promotion of mutually empowering relationships between girls and boys in both the public and private spheres, is a key dimension of UNICEF's work. Men and boys can be powerful allies in the achievement of gender equality. Interventions such as joint parenting in ECD, positive gender socialisation, challenging toxic masculinities, reduction of risk-taking behaviours amongst boys, transformation of male attitudes, roles and behaviours that promote gender equality are extremely critical. Therefore, it is important to strengthen the direct involvement of boys and men in programmes that advance their own processes of change and transformation. Across the six Regional Headline Results, UNICEF ROSA will focus on designing and implementing strategies to engage men and boys. The focus will be on designing communication strategies and awareness raising campaigns on the benefits of more gender equal social structure and relationships, as well as direct engagement with boys and men to address the specific discriminations they experience, for example in some education systems, or when forced into combat or sexual exploitation. Further efforts will also be made to create/strengthen partnerships with organizations/agencies working on issues such as masculinities, as well as community-based youth platforms, at the country and regional level.

### (d) Mobilizing communities for change

Social mobilization is one of the key strategies for UNICEF at the corporate level and can also be a very powerful instrument to accelerate gender equality results. This will be particularly relevant for programmes/interventions addressing gender norms and barriers. UNICEF ROSA and country offices will therefore focus on designing/documenting strategies for mobilizing grass roots groups, including community-based organizations that are also led by women. Further it will enhance C4D (Communication for Development) capacities to mainstream gender across their communication and advocacy efforts, including social campaigns that address gender norms and barriers. Towards this, a [gender responsive C4D guideline](#) has been developed and disseminated by ROSA in 2017 for application at every country office level.

### (e) Addressing gender issues at system, legal and policy level

UNICEF will leverage its leadership and voice to advocate for the inclusion of gender issues at the system, legal and policy level. The regional office will utilize its technical and policy advisory role to support COs to develop and implement advocacy strategies across their priority areas. Further at the regional level, UNICEF will invest in developing gender responsive sectoral frameworks in line with international normative standards, documenting best practices, as well as generating advocacy material/policy briefs to support these efforts. Additionally, partnerships with inter-governmental regional platforms will be leveraged for the same.

### (f) Partnerships and systems for innovation, data and evidence

UNICEF is committed to promoting equal outcomes for girls and boys, through its partnerships; however, there is limited evidence on the extent to which COs are leveraging their partnerships (government, civil society, UN entities, private sector) to support the gender equality mandate of UNICEF. UNICEF ROSA will

therefore focus on strengthening its existing partnerships, as well as engaging with COs to explore new collaborations to accelerate action towards gender equality. A detailed **Regional Partnership Strategy for Gender Equality** is already in place to further guide these efforts.<sup>36</sup>

Further investments are required for commitments at both regional and country office level in strengthening systems for innovation, data and evidence. Collection of sex-disaggregated data will be prioritised across sectors, and tracking of gender results improved through the inclusion of gender sensitive indicators. Baseline and end line evaluations will be required to better assess the impact of gender equality programming. Additionally, primary and secondary research studies will need to be commissioned to garner country wise/cross country analysis of gender barriers and bottlenecks. Identification and replication of programming models for accelerated action on gender equality, will also require to be prioritised. Country offices will be required to make investments to generate gender/social assessments and qualitative studies to identify the gender impact of programmes as well as constraints towards gender equitable outcomes in their programmes. While strengthening its internal systems for innovation, data and evidence, UNICEF will also advocate with national and regional stakeholders to address gender gaps in data, and invest in systems to improve tracking and reporting of outcomes for women and girls, in line with the SDGs framework.

## V. CONCLUSION

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UNICEF is committed to gender equality as core to its mission to realize the rights of all children, especially the most disadvantaged, and to its efforts to contribute to progress towards the SDGs. Leveraging the regional momentum and the lessons learned from implementing the Gender Action Plan (2018-2021), UNICEF ROSA and country offices will take its work on advancing gender equality to the next level, by ensuring gender is a critical principle to its programming for taking quality gender results to scale for greater reach and impact. In doing so, UNICEF ROSA and country offices are to reference the Regional Gender Mainstreaming Strategy as an overarching framework (with its priority actions and minimum standards) to guide their own planning/programming/implementation processes. To this effect, all country offices will benefit from clear articulation of their gender results and focus and accountabilities through a Gender work plan.

A Regional Gender Action Plan detailing the key actions and timeline is provided in Annex 1.

# ENDNOTES

1. Available here: [www.unicef.org/about/execboard/files/2017-17-Rev1-Strategic\\_Plan\\_2018-2021-ODS-EN.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/about/execboard/files/2017-17-Rev1-Strategic_Plan_2018-2021-ODS-EN.pdf).
2. Available here: [www.unicef.org/gender/files/2018-2021-Gender\\_Action\\_Plan-Rev.1.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/gender/files/2018-2021-Gender_Action_Plan-Rev.1.pdf).
3. The GAP is aligned with the organization's Policy on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Girls and Women (2010). Available here: [www.unicef.org/gender/files/UNICEF\\_Gender\\_Policy\\_2010.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/gender/files/UNICEF_Gender_Policy_2010.pdf).
4. Available here: <https://unicef.sharepoint.com/teams/ROSA/Programs%20and%20Planning/ROMP/ROSA%20ROMP%202018-2021%20FINAL.pdf>.
5. Available here: <https://una-gp.org/the-sustainable-development-goals-2015-2030/>.
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9. Available here: [https://www.unicef.org/gender/files/Working\\_for\\_an\\_Equal\\_Future\\_UNICEF\\_Gender\\_Policy\\_2010.pdf](https://www.unicef.org/gender/files/Working_for_an_Equal_Future_UNICEF_Gender_Policy_2010.pdf).
10. Available here: [https://www.unicef.org/gender/files/Strategic\\_Priority\\_Action\\_Plan\\_for\\_Gender\\_Equality\\_2010-2012.pdf](https://www.unicef.org/gender/files/Strategic_Priority_Action_Plan_for_Gender_Equality_2010-2012.pdf).
11. Available here: [https://www.unicef.org/esaro/UNICEF\\_Gender\\_Action\\_Plan\\_2014-2017.pdf](https://www.unicef.org/esaro/UNICEF_Gender_Action_Plan_2014-2017.pdf).
12. The Global Gender Gap Report ranks 144 countries and uses four major criteria to establish each country's gender gap including differences between men and women in economic terms, political power, health and education. Data for Afghanistan is not available.
13. Social norms in this region are deeply interconnected with religion, ethnicity, caste, language and geography that promote some groups and exclude others. Available here: <https://www.weforum.org/reports/the-global-gender-gap-report-2017>.
14. The issues listed here are illustrative, as several of these cut across the life cycle such as gender-based violence, limited mobility, lack of access to and control over resources, limited participation and decision making.
15. United Nations Population Division. World Population Prospects: 2017 Revision, as cited on World Bank Data Portal. Available here: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.BRTH.MF?locations=PK>.
16. Emerging evidence can be seen, for example, in trafficking of young women and girls as brides-to-be from Viet Nam to rural China, where many young women live in virtual slavery.
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34. As part of the Regional Evaluation of the GAP 2017, seven results (integrated and targeted) were evaluated in depth across the region, namely (1) Ending Child Marriage; (2) Advancing Girls' Secondary Education; (3) Promoting Gender-Responsive Adolescent Health; (4) Addressing Gender-Based Violence in Emergencies; (5) Saving Newborns; (6) Stop Stunting; and (7) Educate All Girls and Boys. For the remaining integrated and targeted GAP results, the set of recommended actions are drawn from programming experiences at the regional level.
35. This is in line with the three critical building blocks for mainstreaming gender outlines in the Regional Evaluation - the commitment of leadership, capacity of staff (and partners) and performance in gender results.
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## ANNEX 1: ROSA Gender Action Plan 2018-2021

Outputs	Measures	Sub-Outputs	Time Frame	Responsibility
1. Gender responsive programmes in line with GAP and ROMP, designed and delivered	1.1. Ensure sex disaggregation of sectoral data and gender analysis is undertaken for the identification of key challenges in each context (programmes/projects/ regional levels), in specific themes	Specific gender analysis is undertaken and key gender specific sectoral challenges identified	Continuous	All sector staff with technical support from ROSA Gender unit (applicable at country level with gender specialists)
	1.2. Establish gender sensitive indicators for measuring the impact of sectoral policies, strategies and programmes, in cooperation with office-wide efforts	Key gender indicators established at the design stage of projects/programmes and respective unit's work plan	By Q1 2019 and continuous	Sector staff with Planning section with technical support from ROSA Gender unit (applicable at country level with gender specialists)
	1.3. Ensure the integration of gender concerns in research, advocacy, projects, technical advisory work, capacity-building across the programme	Gender responsive tools and approaches are applied as an integral part of the office's work at the regional and national level	By Q1 2019 and continuous	Sector staff with technical support from ROSA Gender unit (applicable at country level with gender specialists)
	1.4. Develop specific gender guidance across the Regional Headline Results and tools which are gender responsive	Gender mainstreaming toolkit/guidelines for Regional Headline Results to support integrating gender concerns	By Q3 2018 and continuous	ROSA Gender unit with inputs from relevant sectors
2. Strengthened gender mainstreaming capacity of the staff and implementing partners	2.1. Identify capacity needs and organize trainings on gender mainstreaming	Training session(s) organized for all country offices and regional office	By Q3 2018 and continuous learning	ROSA Gender unit with inputs from relevant sectors  Continuous learning to be ensured by Country Office Gender Specialists/HR

	2.2. Develop gender guidelines and training manuals or modules, or integrate gender concerns in various capacity building materials of the respective intervention areas	Strengthening existing RBM training with gender mainstreaming	By Q4 2018 with continuous application, training and learning	sections- Technical support from ROSA Gender unit  ROSA Gender and Planning units with inputs and participation from relevant sectors and Country Office (CO)
3. Strengthened knowledge base on gender across six priority areas	3.1. Bring visibility to gender and sectoral products on the UNICEF website to facilitate ease of reference, information searches and dissemination	The ROSA web site covering updated gender issues maintained  ROSA Intranet (online) has a section on gender where related knowledge products disseminated/shared with CO access to the site	By 2018 and continuous update/learning  (Set up in 2017) Updated in 2018 and with continuous learning	ROSA Gender unit with Communications section and inputs from relevant sectors  ROSA Gender Unit with inputs from relevant sectors
	3.2. Share relevant information on innovative initiatives and new publications/tools that are developed through UNICEF Gender Network, and the sector's regular information dissemination channel	Document updated evidence/research/studies/progress on gender outcomes in their Regional Headline Results – and made available for learning and sharing	By Q3 2018 and continuous learning	Sector staff with ROSA Gender unit
	3.3. Organize thematic dissemination and webinars on emerging gender and sectoral issues	Seminars/webinars organized every quarter	By Q3 2018 and continuous learning	ROSA Gender unit with inputs from relevant sectors/COs
4. Strengthened tracking and monitoring mechanisms to track	4.1. All sectors have established gender sensitive indicators/outputs for each Headline Result in accordance with the office's planning cycle	Gender sensitive indicators/outputs identified/defined at all levels that relate to GAP	By 2018	Sector staff with Planning section with technical support of ROSA Gender unit

gender equality results	4.2. Ensure that management meetings review progress in the implementation of gender mainstreaming in the sector on a regular basis	Gender mainstreaming included in the agenda of senior management meetings at least once every quarter; and in quarterly cross sectoral gender task force meetings	Continuous (review quarterly)	RO and CO management with all sectors and ROSA Gender unit and Country Office Gender specialists
	4.3. Prepare regular progress reports on the implementation of the Gender Mainstreaming, Strategy, plus interim updates on specific issues circulate them to the sector's senior management and staff	Annual gender results (ROSA) documented and disseminated	Annually	ROSA Gender unit with inputs from relevant sectors/CO gender specialists/focal persons
5. Strengthened institutional mechanisms for gender equality, gender parity and an enabling work environment	5.1. Timely completion of Gender Equality Markers (GEM) (at CO and ROSA level)	All offices have ensured the application of GEM	By 2018 and reviewed annually	Section Chiefs with Planning and ROSA Gender unit (including at country office planning and gender section level)
	5.2. Investments in capacity building and partnerships for gender equality	All country offices with management action have ensured gender capacity building plans and resources are incorporated in Human Resources Development Team (HRDT) plans	By 2018 and with continuous learning (reviewed annually)	CO Management, Gender Specialists, Section Chiefs and HR with all sectors and technical support of ROSA Gender unit
	5.3. Action plans for gender mainstreaming at CPAP (Country Programme Action Plan)/CPD (Country Programme Document) developed and institutionalized	All country offices have an annual gender work plan that notes programmatic and institutional results, accountability and action	By 2018 and reviewed annually	CO Management, Gender Specialists/focal persons, Planning and Section Chiefs/CMT with all sectors. Technical support from ROSA Gender unit



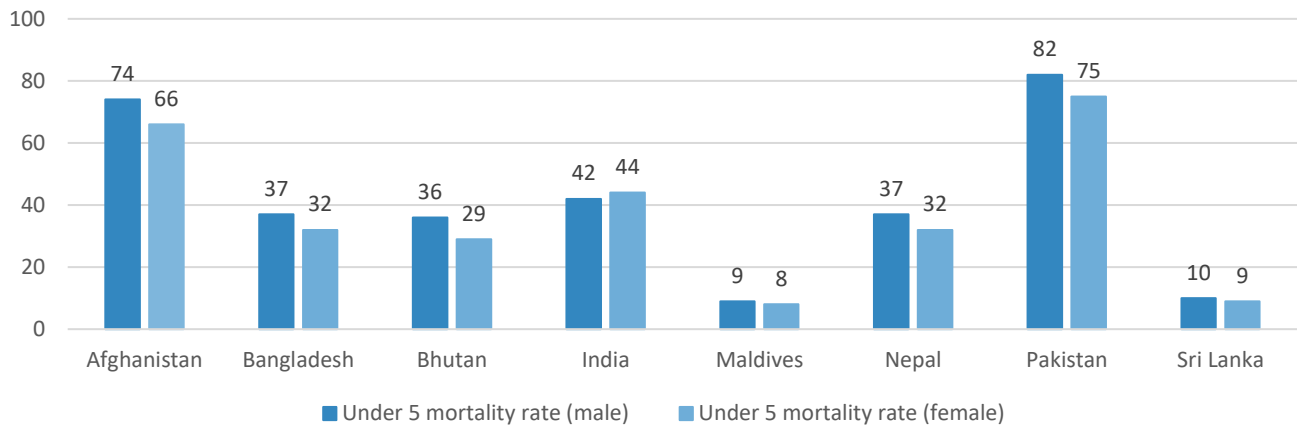
	<p>5.4. Performance benchmarks for individual/sectoral and organizational level developed and institutionalized</p>	<p>All country offices have signed off management and HR Action Plans on enhancing gender parity and implementation of gender policies at work place</p>	<p>By 2018 and reviewed annually</p>	<p>CO Management with all section chiefs, Gender Specialists and HR section. Technical support from ROSA Gender unit</p>
	<p>5.5. Adoption of the Gender and Diversity Plans at the CO and ROSA level</p>	<p>Performance benchmarks for management, CMT and gender focal points clearly note in their PERs level of accountability and performance on gender results</p>	<p>By 2018 and reviewed annually</p>	<p>CO and RO Management with all sectors and HR section</p>

## ANNEX 2: Gender statistics across headline results areas

### Headline Result 1: SAVE NEWBORNS

#### Under 5 mortality rate (deaths per 1,000 live births), 2016

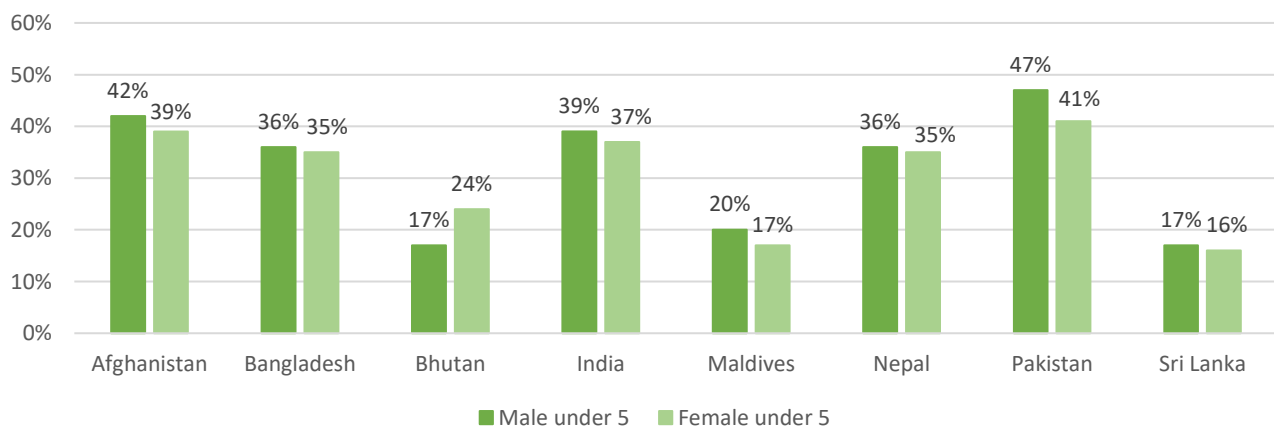
(Source: State of World Children 2017, UNICEF)



### Headline Result 2: STOP STUNTING

#### Stunting prevalence (moderate and severe) in children under 5 (%)

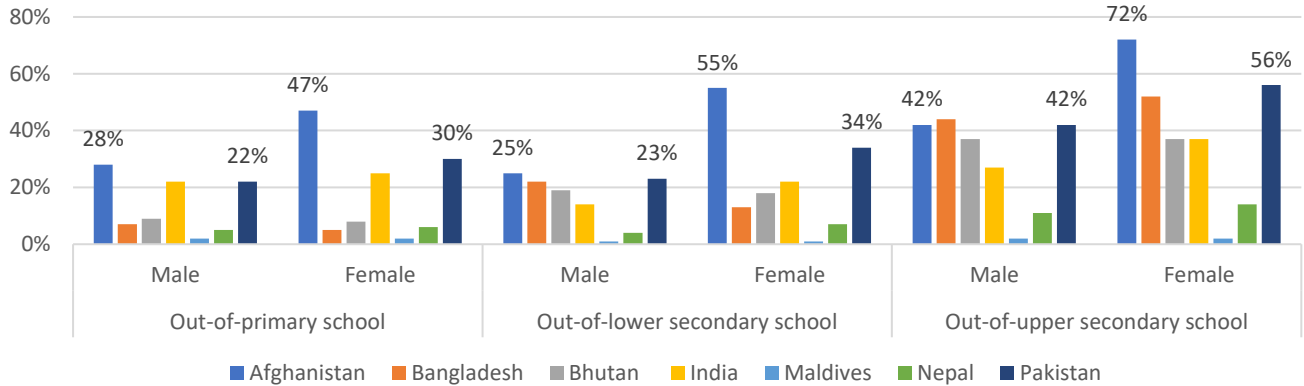
(Source: DHS and MICS 2007-2016)



### Headline Result 3: EVERY CHILD LEARNS

#### Out-of-school children, adolescents and youth of primary, lower and upper secondary school age (%)

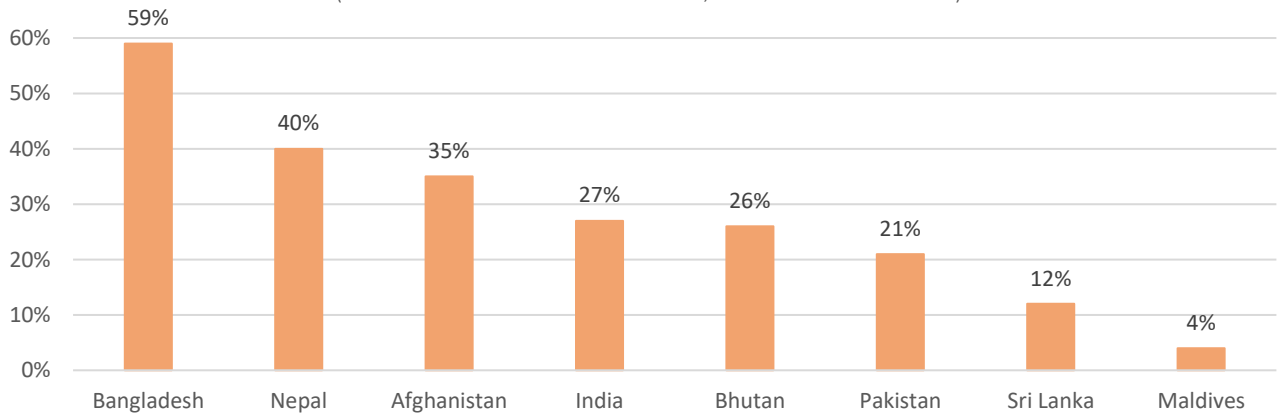
(Source: World Inequality Database on Education 2018, UNESCO)



### Headline Result 4: END CHILD MARRIAGE

#### Percentage of women (20-24 years old) who were first married or in union before they were 18 years old (%)

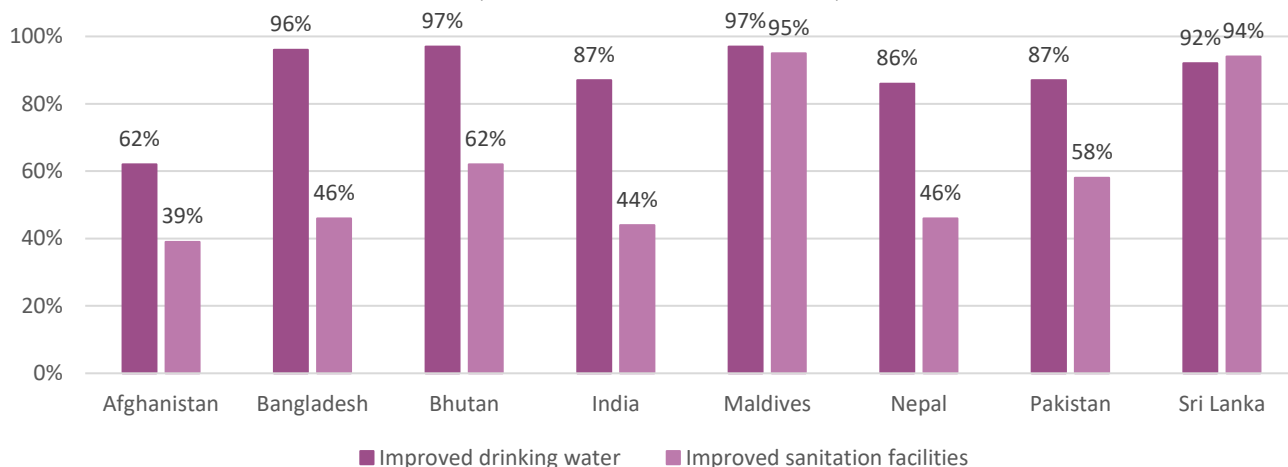
(Source: DHS and MICS 2006-2016, India NFHS 2015-2016)



## Headline Result 5: STOP OPEN DEFECCATION

### Population using improved drinking water sources and sanitation facilities (%)

(Source: WHO/UNICEF JPM, 2017)



### South Asia Regional Headline Results 2018-2021



**United Nations Children's Fund  
Regional Office for South Asia**

P.O. Box 5818, Lekhnath Marg  
Kathmandu, Nepal

Tel: +977 1-4417082

E-mail: [rosa@unicef.org](mailto:rosa@unicef.org)

Website: [www.unicef.org/rosa](http://www.unicef.org/rosa)

Facebook: [www.facebook.com/UNICEFSouthAsia](http://www.facebook.com/UNICEFSouthAsia)

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