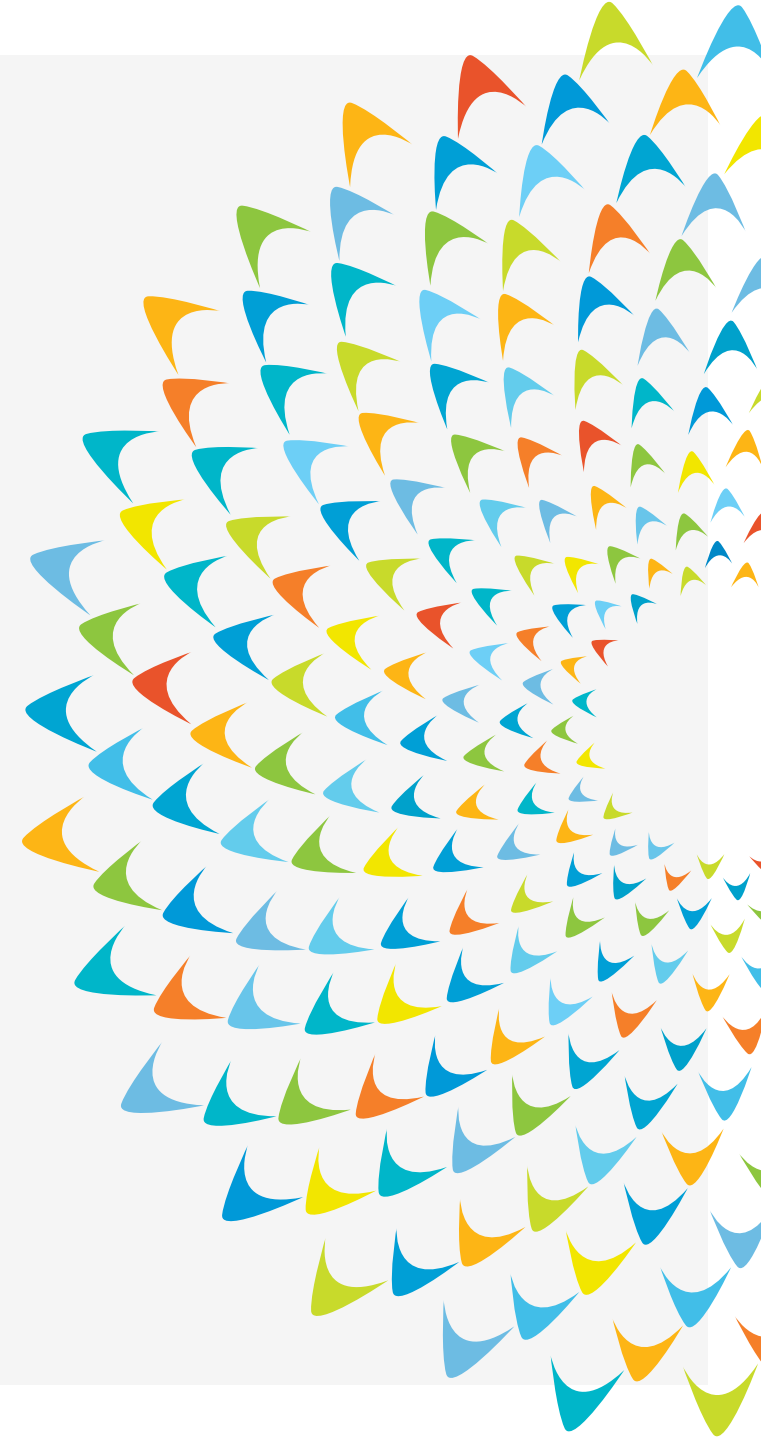


COVID-19 is no excuse to regress on gender equality

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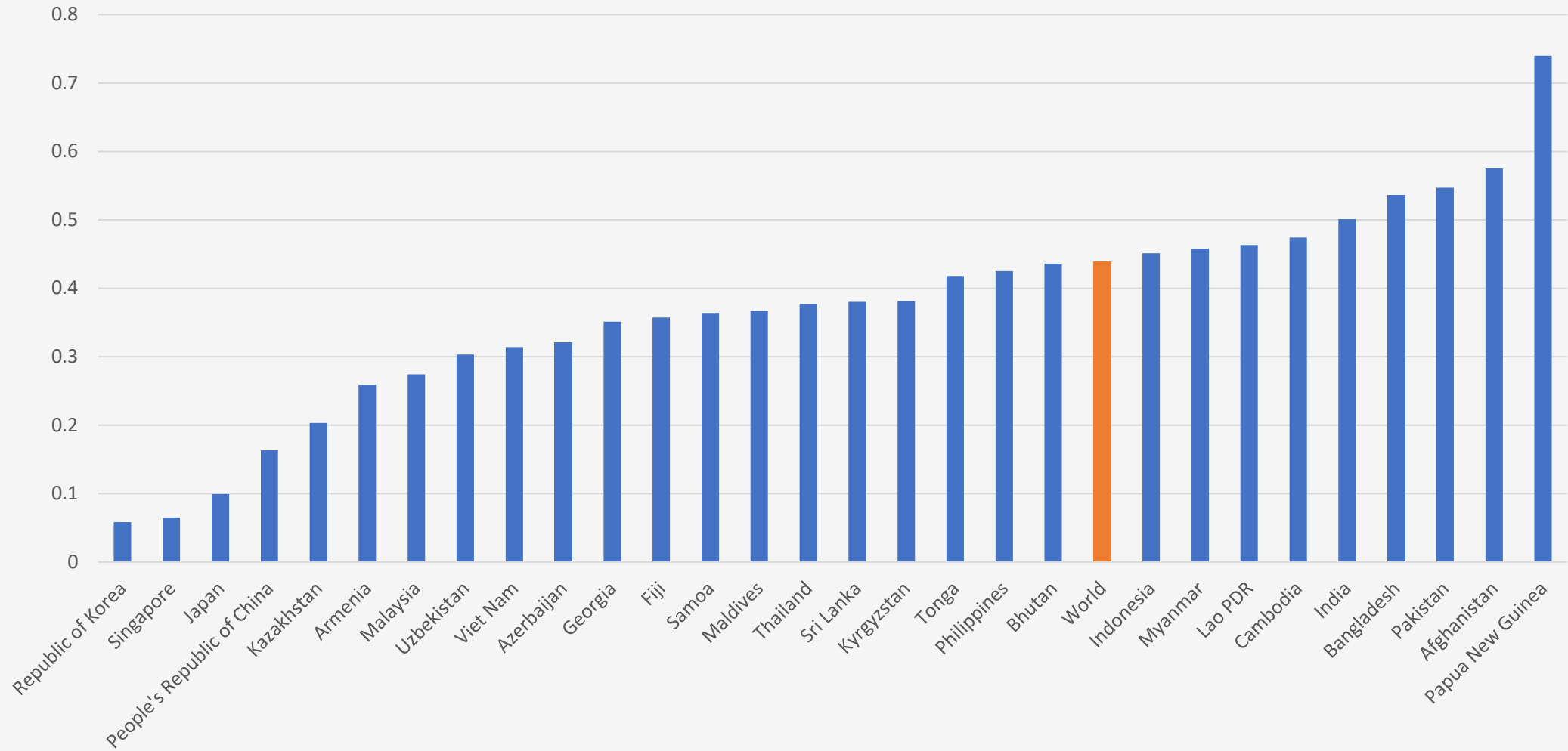


COVID-19 affects women's lives and livelihoods differently

- The COVID-19 crisis threatens to reverse hard-won gains in gender equality.
- COVID-19 has caused both jobs and incomes to decline significantly more for women.
- Lockdowns and mobility restrictions related to containment efforts could also unduly burden women and girls.
- Given the significant gendered effects of COVID-19, we recommend governments to adopt specific actions particularly securing social and health protection, gender-responsive education, skills training among others.

Despite significant progress, gender gaps persist

Gender Inequality Index in Asia and the Pacific, 2018



Gender gaps in employment and wages

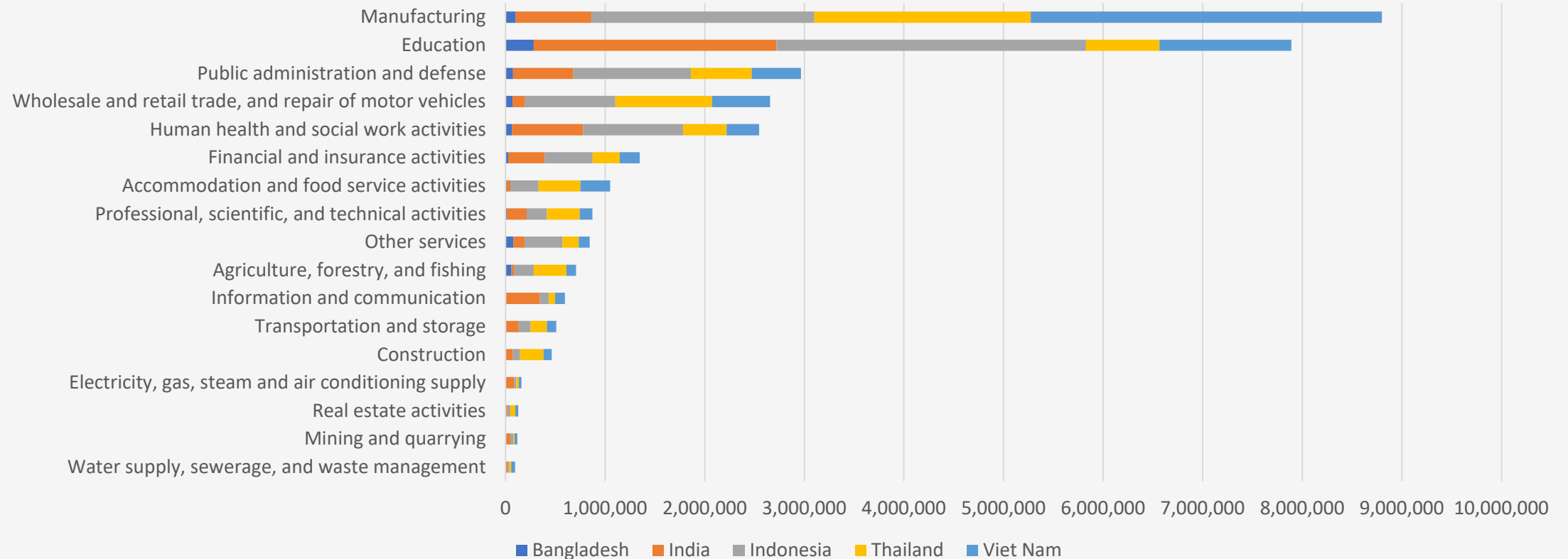
Labor Force Participation Rate by Sex (%)

	2019 November	
	Male	Female
Asia	74.7	52.6
Advanced Asia	72.5	59.3
Central Asia	72.1	51.3
East Asia	70.6	55.2
South Asia	78.9	39.9
Southeast Asia	78.7	60.2
Pacific	69.5	53.5



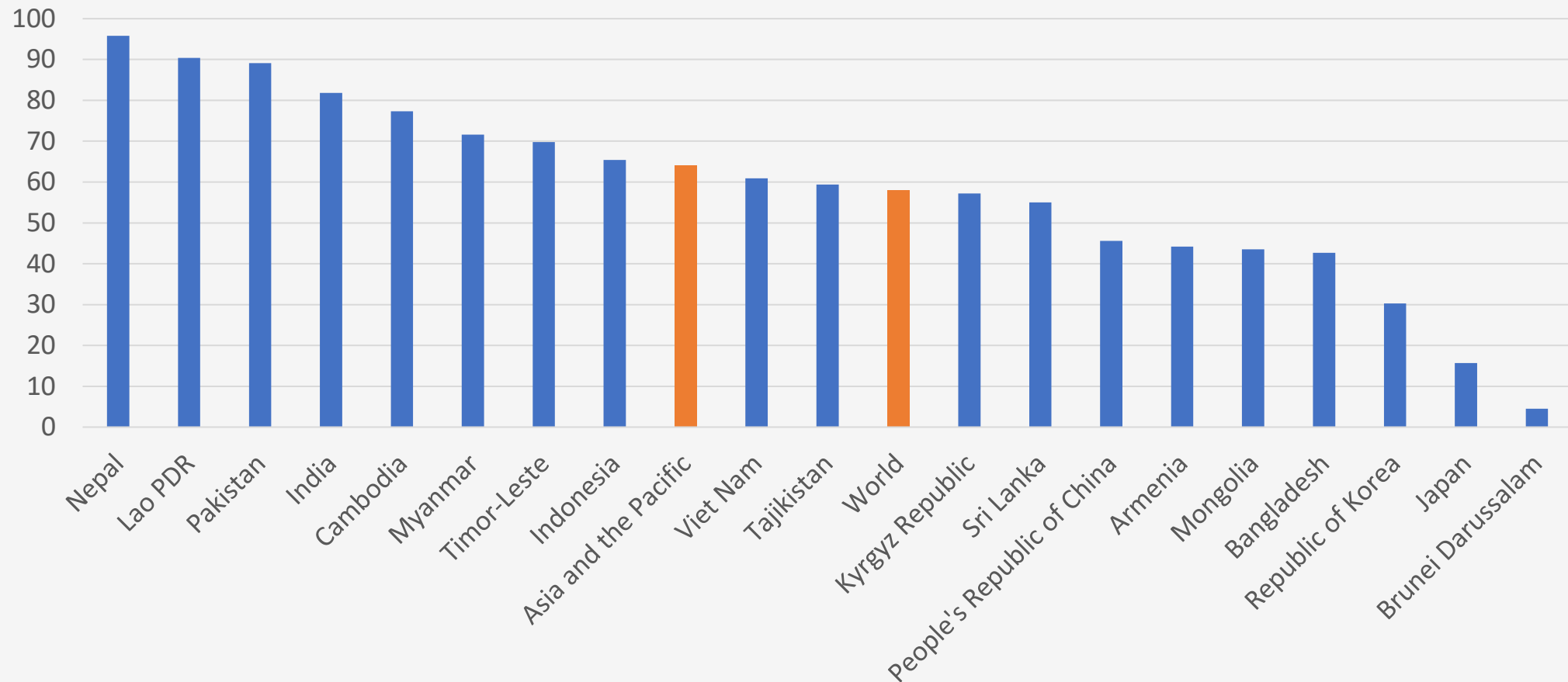
Gender-based segmentation of jobs

Women in Formal Employment by Industry in Select Asian Countries



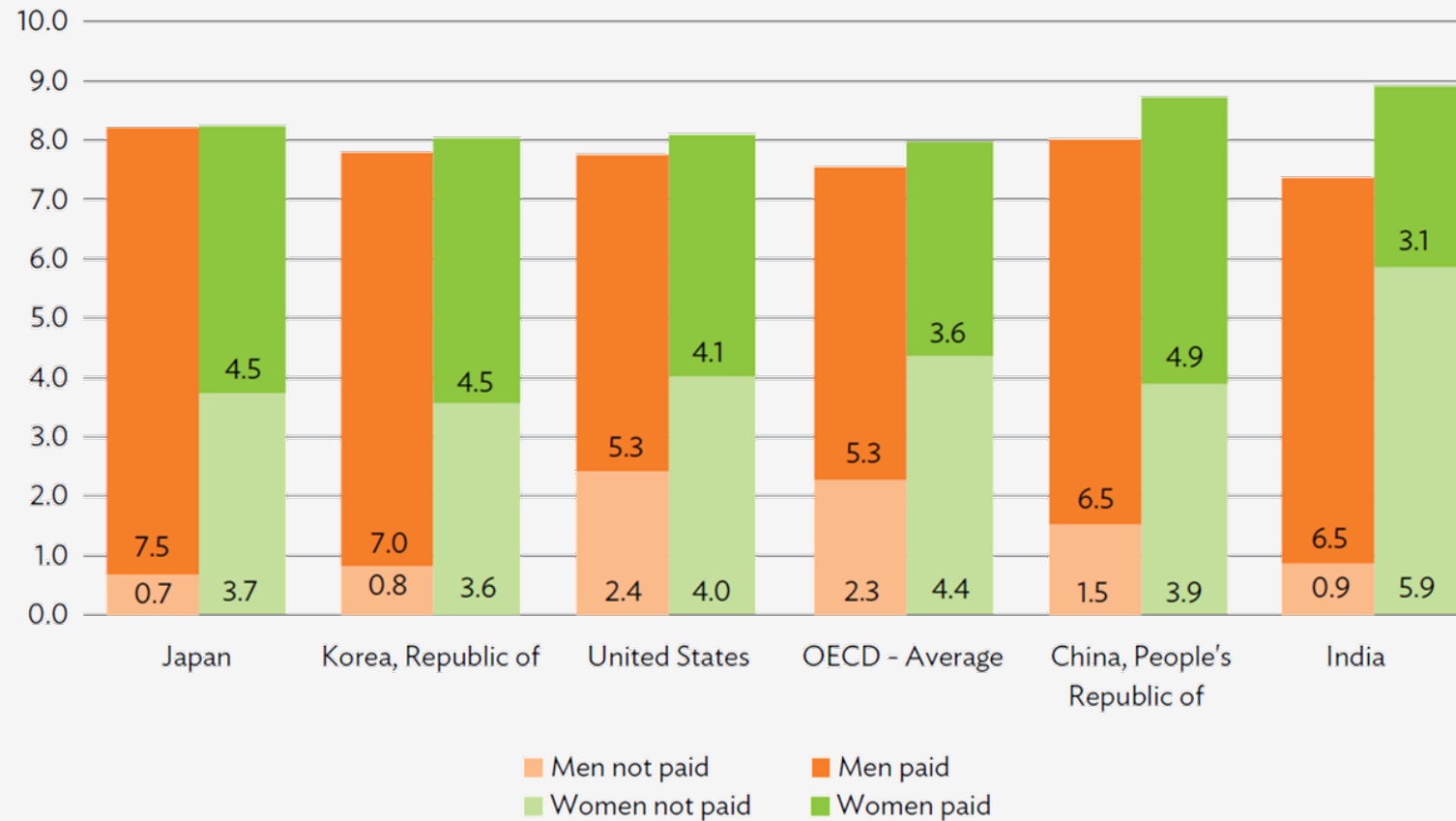
Women are also predominantly in informal sectors

Women's Share of Informal Employment in Total Employment in Asia and the Pacific



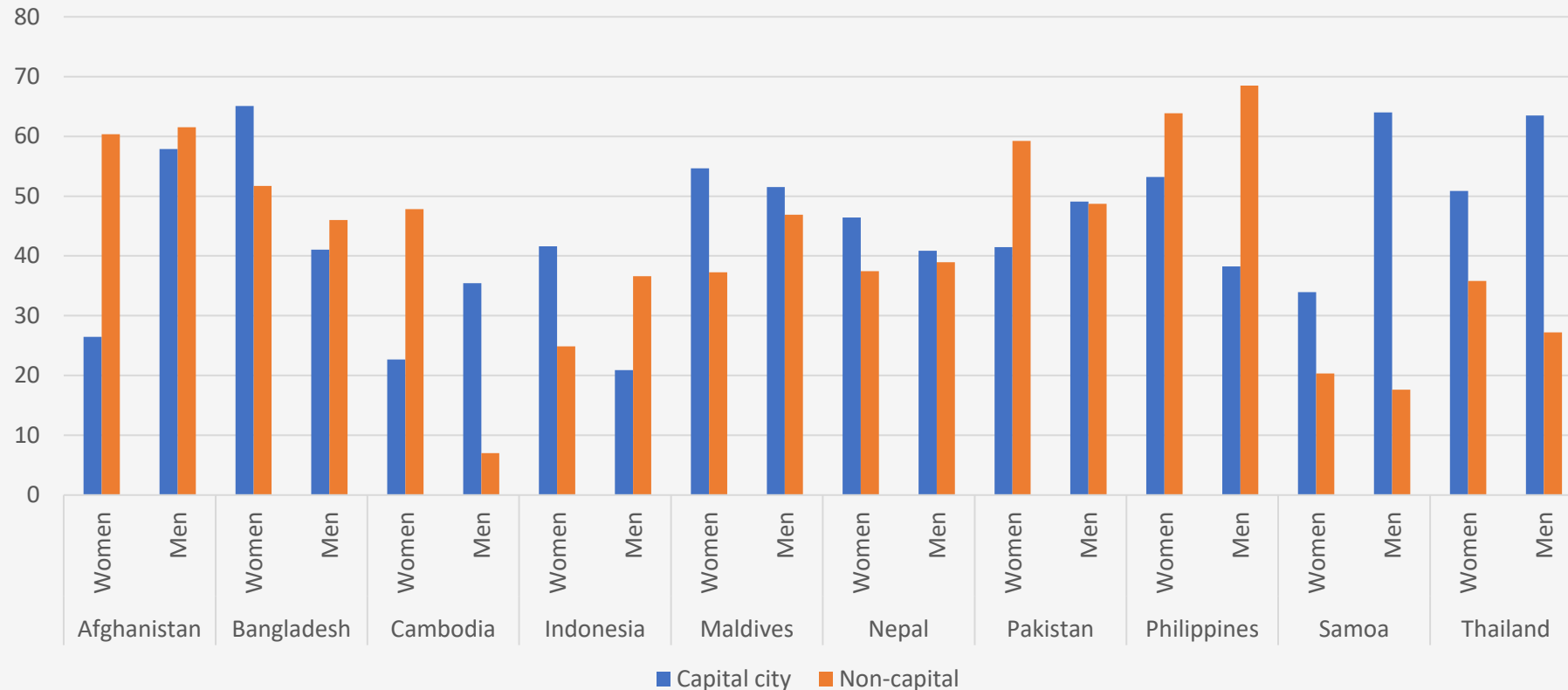
Women spend more time on unpaid care work

Hours in Paid and Unpaid Labor by Gender (2018 or latest year available)



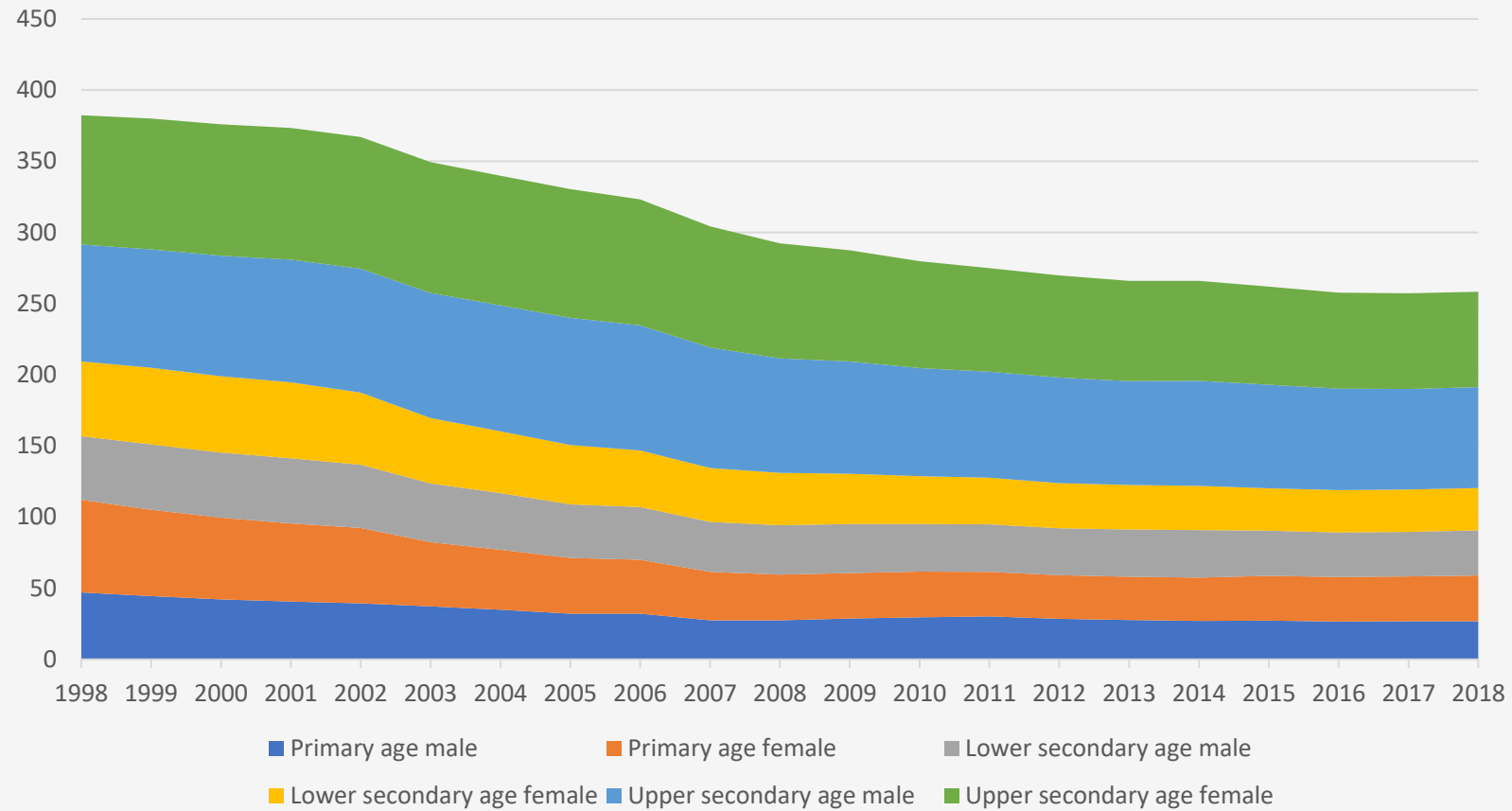
Health and Nutrition

Share of Men and Women Whose Health Routines Were Affected due to COVID-19



Education

Number of Out-of-School Children, Adolescents, and Youth, 1998–2018



Gender-based violence increases during crisis

- COVID-19 caused massive unemployment, which has resulted in increased alcohol and drug use, and worsened mental health.
- These risk factors have led to higher emotional and physical violence in Bangladesh.
- In India, the strictest lockdown rules had higher domestic violence and cybercrime complaints.
- The current situation exposes girls to increased sexual abuse, and girls aged 15 to 19 forced to have sex and facing unplanned and unwanted pregnancies.

Policy Implications and ADB's role

1. Enhance social services and health protection
2. Provide conditional or unconditional cash transfers and food assistance
3. Provide targeted support for the most marginalized girls and boys
4. Create gender-responsive education
5. Narrow gender gaps through skills development and job creation
6. Pursue gender-responsive labor market policies
7. Address different forms of gender-based violence

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KEY POINTS

Given the significant gendered effects of COVID-19, governments need to adopt the following specific actions:

- Enhance social services and health protection.
- Provide conditional or unconditional cash transfers and food assistance.
- Provide targeted support for the most marginalized girls and boys.
- Create gender-responsive education.
- Address different forms of gender-based violence.
- Narrow gender gaps through skills development and job creation.
- Pursue gender-responsive labor market policies.

COVID-19 is No Excuse to Regress on Gender Equality¹

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The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) crisis threatens to reverse hard-won gains in gender equality, further exposing women's vulnerabilities based on their precarious social, economic, and political situations. Understanding the gendered impact of the COVID-19 pandemic can guide policy makers as they pursue gender-responsive policy making and budgeting. This can ensure a response mindful of the needs of women and girls that addresses existing and emerging gender inequalities and challenges. In this context, this policy brief provides a set of recommendations for gender-responsive policies and sector-specific strategies in response to the pandemic.

THE UNEVEN IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON WOMEN'S LIVES AND LIVELIHOODS

Cases of COVID-19 are still rising globally, with nearly 46 million cases and 1.2 million deaths as of 1 November 2020.² COVID-19 affects men and women differently in several ways. Early data across several countries show that men tend to be more susceptible than women, and older people more susceptible to the disease regardless of gender (Mueller, McNamara, and Sinclair 2020). Figure 1 shows that the number of cases is higher for men than women, except for those aged 85 and up. Interestingly, however, survey data from eight Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries from March and April 2020 showed that men were less likely to view COVID-19 as serious, and consequently less likely to agree with public policy measures such as closing schools and nonessential businesses, and less likely to follow social distancing rules (Galasso et al. 2020).³

¹ The authors would like to thank Tsolmon Begzsuren, Samantha Heng, Keiko Horiuchi, and Yousyuki Sawada for their review and very useful and valuable comments on various technical issues examined in this paper.
² See Johns Hopkins University of Medicine at <https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/map.html>.
³ Their finding was robust to differences in sociodemographic, employment, and behavioral factors. Other public policies included were stopping public transportation, prohibiting meetings of two or more people, imposing quarantine on people entering the country, and closing borders. Other COVID-19-related health guidelines include keeping physical distance from others, staying at home, and avoiding crowds (Galasso et al. 2020).

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