Beyond the Digital Divide: Gender Justice and the Politics of Digital Governance

Thematic Analyses

Terms of Reference for Authors

1. Background and Introduction

Artificial intelligence (AI) and digital technologies are being rapidly introduced, developed and implemented across government, commerce, health, education, public service sectors in Asia and Pacific. The rapid transformation, while important, must occur alongside regulated, ethical and right-based frameworks. Existing evidences suggests that AI and digital systems are not gender-neutral. Systems are trained on biased or incomplete datasets that can reproduce or even exacerbate existing social inequalities. Rising occurrence of technology-facilitated gender-based violence, digital identity invisibilisation and theft, independent access and control of devices and restructuring of gig and platform economy is restructuring labour in ways that can directly or indirectly amplify gender injustices.

Against this background, **The FES Competence Center for Gender Justice Asia-Pacific Kathmandu** is commissioning **up to four analytical papers** under **four of the six workstreams** set out in Section 3, subject to the quality and relevance of proposals received.

2. Objectives of the study

The primary objective of each paper is to **produce a rigorous, empirical and policy-actionable baseline on AI and digital governance in Asia-Pacific** across six critical thematic areas from an intersectional feminist perspective. Each paper, therefore, should aim to:

- Unpack how AI and digitalised systems replicate/compound/reduce patriarchal and intersectional inequalities across the region
- Provide concrete, evidence-based recommendations for national and regional stakeholders
- Equip policymakers, thought leaders, labour unions, and civil society organisations across Asia-Pacific with analyses to engage in policy debates
- Identify concrete entry points South-South and North-South for feminist dialogue and discussions

3. Scope of work and thematic focus

Four papers will be commissioned from the six outlined workstream. Papers should engage with regional and national debates while using a limited number of carefully selected cases, examples or datasets to illuminate broader policy implications.

All papers will cover the Asia-Pacific region broadly with in-depth analysis concentrated in a purposively selected countries within the feasibility of the assignment. The finalisation of the geographic scope of each selected paper will be mutually agreed during the inception stage to ensure coherence, complementarity and to avoid duplication.

Cross-cutting analytical requirements
Across all workstreams, authors should:

- Apply a feminist governance perspective and gender transformative continuum
- Apply intersectional lens of analysis and make use of data feminism principles
- Critical reflection of power dynamics and structural power relations that shape who designs, governs, benefits from, and is harmed by AI and digital systems

Note:
The call uses "AI and digitalisation" broadly to encompass both AI-specific developments and wider processes of digital transformation, including digital infrastructures, platforms, automated decision-making and datafication.

Workstream 1: Algorithmic Justice and the Governance of Welfare, particularly Social Protection

Core Focus:

Examine how digital identification, data infrastructures, automated decision-making systems and algorithmic eligibility mechanisms are transforming the governance of social protection, with particular attention to gendered and structural inequalities.

Indicative questions for analysis:

- How do digital identification systems, including binary sex markers and biometric requirements, shape who is recognised, counted and able to claim entitlements?
- How are social protection eligibility, targeting and risk criteria translated into digital and algorithmic systems? What assumptions about households, employment, income and dependency are embedded within these systems?
- How do automated and data-driven welfare systems reproduce, amplify or mitigate existing inequalities affecting women, informal workers, unpaid care workers, single-headed households and other marginalised groups?
- How does digitalisation transform the role and discretion of frontline bureaucrats, and where does decision-making power shift when welfare decisions are automated?
- What mechanisms exist, or are needed, for transparency, explanation, human review, appeal, correction and remedy when automated systems produce erroneous or exclusionary outcomes?
- What institutional, legal, administrative and technical safeguards can ensure that digital social protection systems remain rights-based, inclusive and accountable? What alternative approaches to automated welfare governance can strengthen inclusion, human agency and access to remedy?
- What roles can labour unions, policy makers, parliamentarians and bureaucrats play in order to ensure algorithmic justice and inclusive governance of the welfare?

Workstream 2: Sovereignty, Bodily Autonomy and Technology-Facilitated Gender-based Violence (GBV)

Core Focus:
Examine how the collection, processing, inference and circulation of intimate and bodily data are transforming the nature of gender-based violence, bodily autonomy and digital power, and assess the legal, institutional, technological and platform-governance mechanisms required to prevent and address technology-facilitated GBV.

Indicative questions for analysis:

- What constitutes intimate and bodily data in an increasingly datafied society, and what does meaningful control over such data mean for bodily autonomy?
- How are digital technologies, surveillance and data infrastructures being used to facilitate coercive control, stalking, harassment and other forms of gender-based violence?
- How are generative AI, synthetic media and other emerging technologies changing the scale, nature and governance of technology-facilitated GBV? Are existing understandings of consent adequate?
- What does data sovereignty mean for bodily autonomy and gender justice in contexts where personal and intimate data are processed through transnational digital infrastructures?
- What responsibilities should technology platforms have in preventing, responding to and providing remedies for technology-facilitated GBV?
- What roles can labour unions, policy makers, parliamentarians and bureaucrats play in order to protect bodily autonomy and ensure accountability for technology-facilitated GBV?

Workstream 3: Platform Governance, Digital Labour and Gendered Global Value Chains

Core Focus:
Analysis of how digital platforms and algorithmic management are restructuring labour relations and global value chains, including the emergence of new forms of digitally mediated work such as platform labour, data annotation and AI-related microtasking, with particular attention to gendered patterns of participation, remuneration, risk and access to labour and social protection.

Indicative questions for analysis:

- Does platform work expand women's economic opportunities, or reproduce existing gendered labour-market inequalities in new forms?
- What kinds of platform and digital work are women concentrated in, and why? Are women disproportionately represented in lower-paid or less visible forms of digital labour, such as data annotation, content moderation, transcription, virtual assistance and micro-tasking?
- How do gender norms influence the allocation and valuation of different forms of digital labour?
- How do algorithmic management, worker data, ratings and platform rules affect women's autonomy, bargaining power and ability to challenge decisions?

- What role can governments, trade unions, women's rights organisations and workers themselves play in governing the gendered platform economy and ensure that digital platforms provide decent work for all?

Workstream 4: Digital Gender Backlash, Networked Politics and Mobilisation

Core Focus:
Analysis of how digital platforms, algorithmic systems and platform economies are reshaping gender politics, including the emergence, circulation and monetisation of anti-feminist, masculinist and anti-gender narratives, and the strategies used by feminist movements to respond.

Indicative questions for analysis:

- How do digital platforms facilitate the production, circulation and mobilisation of gender backlash?
- How do recommendation systems, engagement-based business models and influencer economies shape the visibility of anti-feminist and anti-gender content?
- How do attention economies, influencer models and platform monetisation create economic and political incentives for the production and circulation of gender backlash?
- How are traditional femininity, masculinity and gender roles packaged, performed and monetised online?
- What forms of platform governance, media literacy, regulation and feminist digital organising can strengthen democratic and gender-just digital spaces? And what roles can governments, trade unions, women's rights organisations and workers themselves play?

Workstream 5: Gender, Representation and Tech Diplomacy

Core Focus:
Analysis of gendered inequalities in representation, expertise and decision-making in global digital governance, and of how women's rights, gender equality and Global South perspectives are incorporated into technology diplomacy, international negotiations and digital standard-setting.

Indicative questions for analysis:

- Who participates in technology diplomacy, and do women and gender-justice actors have meaningful influence over negotiating agendas and outcomes?
- How are gender equality and women's rights reflected in national foreign-policy positions on AI, data, cybersecurity, digital trade and emerging technologies?
- How are gender considerations incorporated into the development of technical standards and digital infrastructures?
- How do differences in technological capacity, economic power and geopolitical position shape the ability of Asia-Pacific countries and gender-justice actors to influence global digital governance?
- What would a gender-responsive approach to technology diplomacy look like, and what opportunities exist for regional and South-South cooperation to advance it?

Workstream 6: Digitalisation and Care Work

Core Focus:
Examine how digital technologies, platforms and AI are reshaping the organisation, distribution, valuation and governance of paid and unpaid care work with particular attention to how digitalisation interacts with gendered divisions of labour, social reproduction and the organisation of responsibility for care.

Indicative questions for analysis

- How is digitalisation transforming both paid and unpaid care work?
- Does technology reduce women's unpaid care burden, or create new forms of digital household labour?
- Does digitalisation increase the visibility and valuation of care or commodify and fragment it? How is AI changing the organisation, valuation and provision of care, and what forms of human labour remain invisible behind supposedly automated care systems?
- Does digitalisation redistribute care or individualise it?

4. Format, methodology and coordination

Format:
Each commissioned paper shall be written in English and consist of approximately 10-15 pages in Word format, including an executive summary but excluding references and annexes.

Methodology:
Each paper should combine relevant desk and literature review, policy and legal analysis, institutional and governance analysis, country case examples, and where useful have online expert interviews. The papers should be able to answer the following analytical questions:

- What is changing?
- Who is affected?
- What power relations are involved?
- How does gender inequalities operate? What are the governance gaps?
- What are the policy entry points?

Each paper should be able to identify (i) the problem, (ii) the mechanism through which digitalisation produces or transforms inequality, (iii) the actors and institutions with power to intervene; and (iv) concrete policy and governance entry points.

Illustrative list of countries for case studies/examples

- South Asia: Nepal, India, Bangladesh, Pakistan
- Southeast Asia: Indonesia, the Philippines, Vietnam, Thailand
- East Asia: Mongolia, South Korea, Japan
- Central Asia: Kazakhstan
- Pacific: Australia, New Zealand

5. Indicative Timeline

Submission of the concept notes:	15th October
Selection and contracting:	30th October
Inception meeting:	*Time TBC*
Submission of first draft:	30th November
Submission of second draft:	15th December
Editing and publication process:	December 2026 – February 2027

6. Payment terms

- 60 per cent of the contracted amount to be paid after the submission of first draft
- 40 per cent of the contracted amount to be paid after the submission of second draft

7. Expected qualification and profile of author(s)

- Strong academic or professional background in feminist theory, international relations, development policy or related fields on the workstream
- Proven experience in policy-oriented research and writing
- Demonstrated analytical and methodological ability
- Familiarity with international policy frameworks
- Demonstrated expertise in the Asia-Pacific context
- Capacity to work independently and engage with diverse knowledge systems
- Excellent command in English language

8. Application Guidelines

Interested author(s) are invited to submit the following by email to *priyanka.kapar@fes.de*.

- **A concept note of maximum 500 words indicating the proposed workstream, central research question, key argument, selected countries, selected cases, and the proposed outline of the paper**
- **A CV of the author (s) indicating expected qualification listed in no. 7**
- **Financial proposal** (including cost breakdown and number of working days)

9. Deadline for submission

The deadline for submission is **15th October, 11:59 pm Kathmandu time** (*see your timezone here:* https://tinyurl.com/37jnexcz*)*.

10. Evaluation criteria

Proposals will be evaluated based on the following criteria:

25 per cent	Experience, expertise and qualification

Note: Authors exceeding 20 percent will only be evaluated further

45 per cent	Strength of the concept note
30 per cent	Cost

11. Contact Person

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