

Gender equality in corporate leadership Asia

2023



MARKET MONITOR



In strategic collaboration with:



THE GOVERNMENT
OF THE GRAND DUCHY OF LUXEMBOURG
Ministry of Finance

With support from:

Highlights

- On average, women hold 16% of board seats, 7% of board chair positions and 5% of CEO positions across the entire region.
- Bursa Malaysia leads the region with 26% of board seats held by women. This performance is followed closely by the stock markets of Vietnam (21%), Philippines (20%) and Thailand (20%).
- VNX (Vietnam), with 15%, has the highest percentage of female board chairs, followed by IDX (Indonesia) with 13% and NEPSE (Nepal) with 11%. VNX (Vietnam) has the highest percentage of female CEOs (12%), followed by SET (Thailand) with 9% and SGX (Singapore) and PSE (Philippines) both with 8%.
- On Bursa Malaysia, 44% of issuers exceed the 30% female board participation threshold. For the exchanges of Vietnam and Thailand, more than 20% of issuers exceed this threshold.
- All-male boards persist as a significant proportion of boards in most markets in the region with 10 out of 17 markets having more than 20% all-male boards.

Introduction

This review of 1,700 Asian companies grouped by primary listing venue, provides exchanges, regulators and policy makers with the state of gender equality in the leadership positions of companies listed on their markets. UN member States have agreed through the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that gender equality is an integral element of sustainable development. SDG5 explicitly addresses gender equality, and gender equality is further integrated as a cross cutting issue in a total of 10 different SDGs.¹ Stock exchanges, regulators and other capital market participants can play an important role in promoting gender equality through their own gender-inclusive practices, market education and promoting gender-focused products and applicable reporting.² This UN SSE Market Monitor has been prepared with IFC and UN Women, with the support of the Government of Luxembourg. This paper is part of an annual series launched in 2021 that serves as a benchmark for exchanges and other relevant institutions in their efforts to promote women's full and effective participation in, and equal opportunities for, corporate leadership positions. The data serves as a benchmark for exchanges and other relevant institutions in their efforts to promote women's full and effective participation in, and equal opportunities for, corporate leadership positions.



¹See Annex 3 of the SSE-IFC publication [How exchanges can advance gender equality](#) for the full list of indicators

²For an action plan with key activities stock exchanges can do to advance gender equality, see the joint SSE-IFC publication [How exchanges can advance gender equality](#)

Ranking of Asian exchanges

The table below ranks Asian stock exchanges based on the gender balance of issuers' boards, by % of board seats held by women.

Analysis of the top 100 issuers by market capitalization from each exchange.

Stock exchange		% Board seats held by women	Mandatory minimum rule for women on boards (Number)	% Firms with at least 30% women on board	% Firms with all male boards	% Chair position held by women	% CEO position held by women	
Market	Exchange							
1	Malaysia	Bursa Malaysia	26	1	44	4	5	2
2	Viet Nam	Vietnam Stock Exchange (VNX)	21		26	30	15	12
3	Thailand	Stock Exchange of Thailand (SET)	20		24	9	8	9
4	Philippines	Philippines Stock Exchange (PSE)	20		18	13	7	8
5	Singapore	Singapore Exchange (SGX)	18		17	18	9	8
6	India	National Stock Exchange of India (NSE) Bombay Stock Exchange (BSE)	17	1	10	1	6	6
7	China	Shenzhen Stock Exchange (SZSE)	17		14	22	6	6
8	Japan	Japan Exchange Group (JPX)	17		11	6	3	1
AVERAGE			16		15	21	7	5
9	Bangladesh	Chittagong Stock Exchange (CSE)	15		19	25	8	6
10	Bangladesh	Dhaka Stock Exchange (DSE)	15		15	26	9	6
11	China	Stock Exchange of Hong Kong (HKEX)	14	1	13	28	6	5
12	Nepal	Nepal Stock Exchange (NEPSE)	13	1*	6	26	11	2
13	Sri Lanka	Colombo Stock Exchange (CSE)	13		7	33	3	3
14	Indonesia	Indonesia Stock Exchange (IDX)	13		17	47	13	6
15	Pakistan	Pakistan Stock Exchange (PSX)	13	1	2	6	3	2
16	China	Shanghai Stock Exchange	12		10	33	2	1
17	Korea (ROK)	Korea Exchange (KRX)	10	1	3	34	1	2

Source: UN SSE, based on data from Bloomberg and companies' latest FY annual reports

Note: Sample size for each market was the top 100 issuers by market capitalization.

*Nepal's Companies Act of 2006 calls for "at least one female director on the boards of public companies with one or more female shareholders."

Corporate Board Gender Equality in Asia

- The Malaysian stock market, Bursa Malaysia, led the list with 26% of board seats held by women.
- This performance was followed closely by the percentage of women on boards in companies found on the stock markets of Vietnam (21%), Philippines (20%) and Thailand (20%).
- On average, women hold 16% of board seats across the entire region.

- This report includes data on the percentage of firms in a market that have at least 30% of board seats held by women. The level of 30% is seen as the level at which women's participation in the board reaches a critical mass. Internationally, civil society groups such as The 30% Club³ use this as a benchmark, noting that it represents a floor rather than a ceiling for women's participation. On Bursa Malaysia, for example, 44% of issuers exceed this 30% female board participation threshold. For the exchanges of Vietnam and Thailand, more than 20% of issuers exceed this threshold.
- All-male boards are a minority in every market in Asia analyzed, but do persist as a significant proportion of boards in most markets in the region with 10 out of 17 markets having more than 20% all-male boards.
- In some Asian markets not included in this study, there is insufficient disclosure of basic corporate governance data, including consistent disclosure of board members.

CEO and Chair Gender Equality in Asia

- VNX (Vietnam), with 15%, has the highest percentage of corporate boards chaired by women, followed by IDX (Indonesia) and NEPSE (Nepal), with 13% and 11%, respectively.
- VNX (Vietnam) also has the highest percentage of female CEOs in the region among its top 100 companies (12%), followed by SET (Thailand) with 9% and SGX (Singapore) and PSE (Philippines) both with 8%.
- On average, women occupy 7% of board chair positions and 5% of CEO positions in the Asian markets included in the study. Every country in this study has at least one woman holding the position of CEO or Chair in a publicly listed company.

Regulatory Developments

- Five exchanges in this study are subject to rules requiring a mandatory minimum number of women on corporate boards. Of these five markets with regulatory requirements, all of them have a mandatory minimum of one female board member. These markets are Bursa Malaysia (Malaysia), NSE/BSE (India), HKEX (China), PSX (Pakistan) and KRX (Republic of Korea).
- The practice of specifying a number of women on boards (as opposed to a percentage) contrasts with other markets outside this region whose rules specify a percentage. Note that the average board size in the Asian markets included in this study ranges from a low of 6 to a high of 12. In this context, a rule based on an absolute number of women on boards will have very different proportional effects in different markets. The average board size of the top 100 issuers on KRX (Korea) for example is 8 board members, making a mandatory minimum of 1 woman translate into 13%. For issuers on PSX (Pakistan) and Bursa Malaysia, the average board size is 9, translating a mandatory minimum of one woman into 11% representation. For HKEX (China) and NSE/BSE (India) issuers, who have an average board size of 11, the mandatory minimum of one woman equals 9% representation.
- In January 2022, Bursa Malaysia supplemented their previously voluntary targets in an effort to eliminate all male boards by requiring all listed companies to have a minimum of one female director on the board by June 2023.⁴ The revised Malaysian Code of Corporate Governance 2021 by the Securities Commission Malaysia recommended that all boards should comprise at least 30% women directors. Similarly, the Institutional Investors Council Malaysia in their Malaysian Code for Institutional Investors 2022, clearly laid expectations for investee companies to comprise at least 30% women representation on their boards by 2025.
- HKEX (China) became the first exchange in the world to ban single-gender boards for new IPO applicants in January 2022. All issuers on the exchange are expected to comply with this rule by the end of 2024.⁵

³ 30percentclub.org

⁴ Bursa Malaysia (2023) [Bursa Malaysia applauds progressive PLCs for embracing board gender diversity and censures PLCs with all-male boards.](#)

⁵ HKEX (2022) HKEX Insight ["Exploring the Future of Markets: Part 2 – ESG Becomes Part of the DNA of Markets"](#)

Creating a Benchmark for Progress

This report contributes to a joint UN SSE and IFC research programme, in strategic collaboration with UN Women, to provide boardroom and senior leadership gender equality data organized by primary listing venue. The annual data collection in this program allows stock exchanges to view their market's progress year-on-year. The SSE will seek to expand this program to collect data on all of its more than 100 SSE Partner Exchanges.

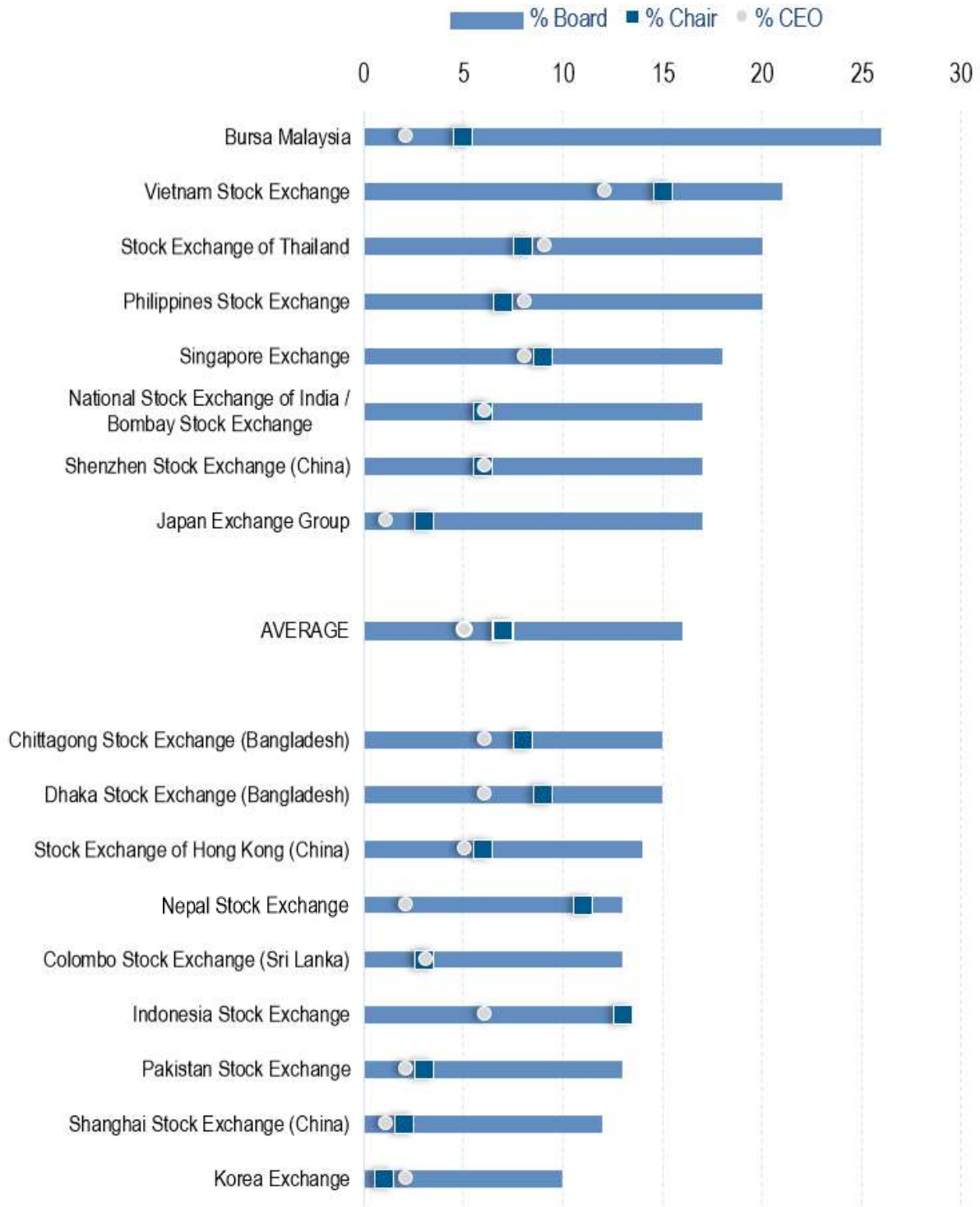
Tracking the gender balance of issuers' boards, leadership positions and related data, provides a useful benchmark for exchanges and other key stakeholders to assess progress in promoting gender equality among listed companies. Collaborating with stock exchanges, as well as other relevant international organizations and local partners, the SSE will use this benchmark to guide its technical assistance and training programmes.

Methodological Notes

The Asia analysis examined the gender balance of the boards of the largest 100 listed companies by market capitalization on each of 17 exchanges in Asia. Regions referenced in this report are based on the UNSD definitions of region, sub-region and intermediate region. The study excluded exchange-traded funds and secondary listings of subsidiary companies sharing the same board as another listed company in the study. These criteria resulted in a sample of 1,700 companies listed across 17 markets. For each of these companies, UN SSE researchers examined the general board size and composition and the gender of C-suite personnel. The information was collected in Q1 and Q2 2023 using publicly available information provided by companies in their latest available annual reports, on their websites, as well as company-specific information available in the Bloomberg data terminal. If conflicting information was available through these sources, the latest recorded datapoint was given priority over older information.

Statistical Annex

Asian stock exchanges by gender balance of issuers' boards (Percent of positions held by women among top 100 issuers by market capitalization)



Source: UN SSE, based on data from Bloomberg and companies' latest FY annual reports

Acknowledgements

The report was prepared by: Anthony Miller (SSE Coordinator), Lisa Remke (SSE Deputy Coordinator), and Loty Salazar (Lead, IFC's Women on Boards & in Business Leadership Program). Additional peer review and drafting was provided by Tiffany Grabski (SSE Academy Head), Vanina Vegezzi (SSE Project Officer) and Corli Le Roux (SSE Senior Specialist). SSE Research Assistants Jane Qing Yu and Anson Yat Fund Tam played a crucial role in compiling more than 17,000 data points. Jane Qing Yu provided additional statistical analysis and drafting support. The SSE gratefully acknowledges data contributions from Bloomberg. SSE Design Assistants Sylvana Kempka and Monserrat Vazquez designed the cover and typeset the report. The SSE-IFC collaboration takes place under the overall supervision of James Zhan (UNCTAD Director of Investment and Enterprise, and Chair of the UN SSE Governing Board) and Martine Valcin (IFC Global Manager, Corporate Governance / ESG Advisory, Knowledge and Learning). The report was prepared in strategic collaboration with UN Women.

About UN SSE

The SSE initiative is a UN Partnership Programme organised by UNCTAD, the UN Global Compact, UNEP FI and the PRI. The SSE's mission is to provide a global platform for exploring how exchanges, in collaboration with investors, companies (issuers), regulators, policy makers and relevant international organisations can enhance performance on environmental, social and corporate governance issues and encourage sustainable investment, including the financing of the UN Sustainable Development Goals. The SSE seeks to achieve this mission through an integrated programme of conducting evidence-based policy analysis, facilitating a network and forum for multi-stakeholder consensus-building, and providing technical guidelines, advisory services and training.



www.SSEinitiative.org

About IFC

IFC—a member of the World Bank Group—is the largest global development institution focused on the private sector in emerging markets. We work in more than 100 countries, using our capital, expertise, and influence to create markets and opportunities in developing countries. In fiscal year 2023, IFC committed a record \$43.7 billion to private companies and financial institutions in developing countries, leveraging the power of the private sector to end extreme poverty and boost shared prosperity as economies grapple with the impacts of global compounding crises. For more information, visit www.ifc.org

Note

Published in 2023 the designations employed and the presentation of the material in this paper do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the Secretariat of the United Nations concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area, or of its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries. This paper is intended for learning purposes. The inclusion of company names and examples does not constitute an endorsement of the individual exchanges or organisations by UNCTAD, UN Global Compact, UNEP, the PRI or IFC. Material in this paper may be freely quoted or reprinted, but acknowledgement is requested. A copy of the publication containing the quotation or reprint should be sent to [info @SSEinitiative.org](mailto:info@SSEinitiative.org).

IFC does not guarantee the accuracy, reliability or completeness of the content included in this work, or for the conclusions or judgments described herein, and accepts no responsibility or liability for any omissions or errors (including, without limitation, typographical errors and technical errors) in the content whatsoever or for reliance thereon.



www.ifc.org