

Timor-Leste Municipality Gender Profiles



Executive Summary

The Municipality Gender Profiles, developed using official statistics from the 2022 National Institute of Statistics Timor-Leste (INETL.IP), support evidence-informed decision-making at national and municipal levels. They position gender data not only as a descriptive tool, but as a core instrument for governance and a strategic asset for identifying disparities, prioritizing interventions, and strengthening the design, targeting, and monitoring of policies that advance gender equality and women's economic empowerment across Timor-Leste's 13 municipalities and Special Administrative Region of Oecusse-Ambeno (RAEOA). The Profiles were developed by UN Women in close collaboration with between the INETL.IP and the Secretariat of State for Equality (SEI).

By providing territorially disaggregated insights, the Profiles enable municipalities to better understand how structural factors, such as demographic dynamics, education, marital status, labour market participation, vulnerable employment, subsistence production, ageing, and disability, interact to shape gendered opportunities and constraints over the life course. This localized evidence supports the alignment of policy responses with the specific needs of communities, improves resource allocation, and strengthens the effectiveness of policy and programmatic interventions. In doing so, the Profiles support the implementation of national policy frameworks, including the IX Constitutional Government Programme (2023–2028), the Strategic Development Plan 2011–2030, and the Maubisse Declaration for rural women's development, while also contributing to Timor-Leste's commitments under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

In line with UN Women's commitment to advancing gender equality through its normative, coordination, and operational mandate, the Profiles contribute to strengthening national and local data ecosystems by bridging the gap between data production and use. They demonstrate the value of official statistics in generating comparable, policy-relevant data across geographic areas and for monitoring progress towards the SDGs, particularly those related to quality education (SDG 4), gender equality (SDG 5), decent work (SDG 8), and reduced inequalities (SDG 10). Results are disaggregated, where possible, by sex, location, age, disability status, and marital status, enabling a more nuanced understanding of gender inequality and who is being left behind.

Ultimately, the Municipality Gender Profiles are designed as practical tools for policymakers, planners, and development partners to translate gender data into action, supporting more targeted, gender-responsive, and evidence-informed decision-making and accelerating progress towards sustainable, inclusive and gender-responsive economic development in Timor-Leste.

Data scope and limitations

The analysis uses 2022 TLPHC data, with selected 2015 comparisons where available. The analysis is limited to individuals whose sex was recorded as female or male, and the population living in private households. While census data provides broad geographic coverage and strong comparability across municipalities, it captures only a limited subset of gender-relevant issues. Census data does not directly measure important dimensions of gender equality and women's empowerment, including gender-based violence, decision-making, ownership or control of assets, access to financial resources and services, earnings and working conditions, or unpaid care and domestic work.



Cross-cutting findings across municipalities

High care needs in predominantly rural contexts shape women's economic opportunities.

13 out of 14 municipalities are predominantly rural, with rural population shares ranging from **81 per cent in Oe-Cusse to 100 per cent in Atauro**. At the same time, population structures remain young across municipalities, with **children under the age of 15 accounting for approximately one-third of the population in most areas**.

This demographic profile creates sustained demand for care, particularly childcare, which continues to be largely met through unpaid care and domestic work within households. In predominantly rural settings, where access to infrastructure, services, and labour market opportunities is more limited, these care responsibilities disproportionately constrain women's ability to engage in paid employment or transition into more productive economic activities.

Gender inequalities persist across the life course, limiting women's capabilities and economic opportunities.

Across municipalities, gender inequalities emerge early and accumulate over the life course, shaping women's access to education, economic opportunities, and well-being in later life.

Early marriage remains a concern, with between **2.3 per cent and 9.2 per cent of young women married before the age of 18** across municipalities, constraining their educational attainment and limiting future labour market participation. Educational disparities persist across generations. In almost all municipalities, **women and girls are more likely than men and boys to have never attended school**, indicating enduring barriers to access and completion. These gaps have long-term consequences for skills development, employability, and income generation.

In older age, these disadvantages become more pronounced. Across municipalities, between **61 per cent and 96 per cent women aged 65 and above** are

unable to read or write. **Widowhood among older women** ranges from **37 per cent to 57 per cent**, compared with **9 per cent to 20 per cent among older men**, reflecting both demographic patterns and heightened risks of economic and social vulnerability.

Taken together, these findings underscore the importance of **adopting a life-course and intergenerational approach to policy design**, one that addresses early disadvantages, supports girls' education, and strengthens social protection and care systems for older women. Targeted interventions at different stages of life are essential to break the cycle of cumulative inequality and expand women's capabilities and economic participation.

Unpaid care responsibilities and limited access to decent work constrain women's economic empowerment.

Across municipalities in Timor-Leste, women's labour force participation is shaped by the combined effects of unpaid care responsibilities and limited access to decent work opportunities.

Women are consistently more likely to be **outside the labour force**, with **caregiving** identified as main reason for this gap, particularly among **married women** and those in **prime caregiving ages**. Across municipalities, **women's labour force participation** ranges from **18 per cent to 43 per cent**, compared with **27 per cent to 54 per cent for men**.

Even when employed, **women are more likely than men to be in vulnerable employment**. Across municipalities, the share of **women in vulnerable employment** ranges from **25 per cent to 66 per cent**, compared with **17 per cent to 53 per cent for men**. This reflects persistent constraints in accessing opportunities for decent work.

For those who are economically active, livelihoods remain closely tied to subsistence production, particularly in rural areas. Across municipalities, between **33 per cent and 5 per cent of working-age people are engaged in subsistence production**. While subsistence activities play a critical role in household survival, they often provide limited

income security and are not fully reflected in formal measures of economic participation.

These patterns highlight the need for integrated policy responses that address both the redistribution of unpaid care work and the expansion of decent work opportunities for women. This includes investments in care services and infrastructure, as well as measures to support women's transition from subsistence and vulnerable employment into more productive and secure livelihoods.

Women and girls with disabilities face compounded and intersecting forms of disadvantage across the life course.

Across municipalities in Timor-Leste, women and girls with disabilities experience multiple and reinforcing forms of disadvantage that limit their access to education, economic opportunities, and social participation. These intersecting inequalities emerge early and persist over the life course.

Educational exclusion is particularly pronounced. Across municipalities, **58 per cent to 89 per cent of women and girls with disabilities aged 5 and above have never attended school**, significantly constraining their future opportunities for skills development and economic participation. These early disadvantages translate into weaker labour market outcomes. In most municipalities, **labour force participation** is lower for women with disabilities compared with men, reflecting both gender- and disability-based barriers to employment.

These findings highlight the need for targeted, inclusive, and intersectional policy responses that address both gender and disability-related barriers. This includes strengthening inclusive education systems, improving accessibility to services and infrastructure, and expanding access to decent work opportunities for women with disabilities. Adopting an intersectional approach is essential to ensure that those facing the greatest disadvantages are not left behind.

Key cross-cutting recommendations

- **Strengthen women's economic opportunities through inclusive education and skills development.** Invest in policies and programmes that support girls' and women's progression, retention, and re-entry into education and training systems. Particular attention should be given to married women, women in rural areas, and women and girls with disabilities to address persistent barriers and expand their long-term economic opportunities.
- **Recognize, reduce, and redistribute unpaid care and subsistence work.** Prioritize integrated care policies that address the disproportionate demands for unpaid work on women and girls, especially in rural areas. This includes expanding access to affordable, quality childcare and long-term care services, investing in basic infrastructure, and promoting more equitable sharing of care responsibilities within households and communities.
- **Strengthen rural women's productive livelihoods.** Enhance women's access to and control over productive resources, including land, inputs, finance, and extension services, to improve productivity, income generation, and resilience. Support women-led cooperatives, producer groups and other collective economic models to strengthen bargaining power, improve scalability and market access, and support the transition from subsistence activities to more sustainable and market-oriented livelihoods.
- **Promote pathways to decent work.** Align skills development, employment policies, and labour market programmes to support women's transition from vulnerable and informal employment into more secure, productive and decent work. This includes addressing structural barriers to women's labour force participation.
- **Expand gender-responsive and inclusive social protection systems.** Strengthen and scale up social protection schemes to better reach women at risk of economic insecurity, including widows, unpaid caregivers, and women with disabilities. Simplify administrative

procedures and improve delivery mechanisms to ensure accessibility, particularly in rural areas.

- **Strengthen intersectional and gender-responsive data for local planning and accountability.** Invest in the production, dissemination and use of sex-disaggregated and intersectional data to inform policy design, resource allocation, and monitoring. Strengthen linkages between national statistical systems and local planning processes to ensure that data is effectively used for evidence-informed decision-making and accountability. Complement census data with other evidence sources, including administrative data and time-use surveys, to better capture women's decision-making power, access to and control over land and productive assets, access to financial resources, and unpaid care and domestic work.



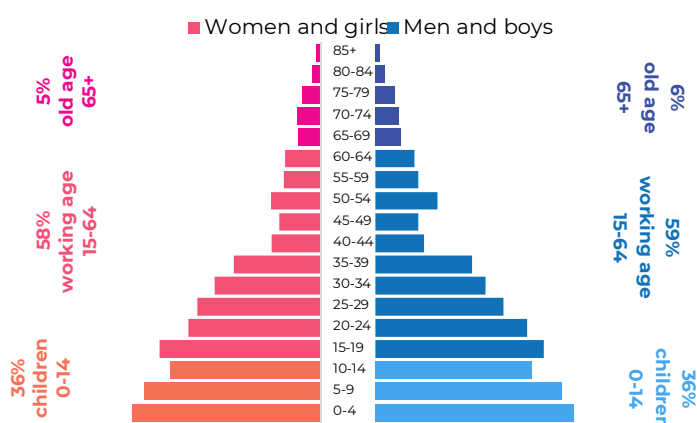
Municipality Gender Profile: Aileu

Aileu is home to 54,243 people¹, representing 4 per cent of Timor Leste's population. Women and girls account for 48 per cent of Aileu's population, compared with 52 per cent of men and boys. The municipality is **almost entirely rural**, with 95 per cent of residents residing in rural areas, well above the national average of 71 per cent.

Aileu's demographic profile points to a notably higher demand for childcare services, as **36 per cent of the residents are under 15 years of age** (Figure 1).

FIGURE 1.

Population, by sex and age groups



Source: Timor-Leste Population and Housing Census 2022.

Gender inequalities begin early in life and accumulate across the life course.

Gender inequalities are rooted in **discriminatory social norms and practices** that influence women's lives from childhood to old age, restricting autonomy, limiting access to education and employment, and reinforcing unequal expectations around caregiving and family formation. In Aileu, child marriage remains a significant barrier to gender equality, with **5.3 per cent of women aged 20 to 24 married before age 18**. While the national rate declined by nearly 2 percentage points between 2015 and 2022, progress in Aileu has been more limited (1 percentage point). Child marriage often channels women into early domestic roles, curtailing their opportunities for education and future economic opportunities.



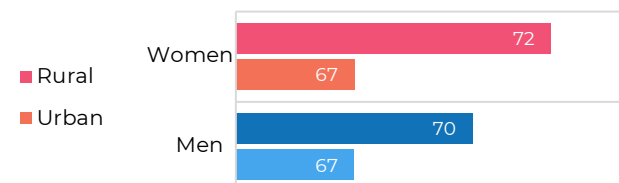
More than **1 in 20 young women** in Aileu were married before age 18

Gender norms around caregiving and early marriage continue to shape young women's trajectories. Women aged 5 and above remain more

For every 100 people in working-age (aged 15-64) in Aileu, there are 62 children (aged 0-14) and 9 older persons (aged 65 and above), placing sustained pressure on care systems, particularly childcare. Yet, the demand for care falls unevenly: **women in rural areas support the highest number of dependents**, highlighting persistent gender and geographic inequalities in care responsibilities (Figure 2).

FIGURE 2.

Dependency ratio, by sex and location



Source: Timor-Leste Population and Housing Census 2022.

AILEU'S POPULATION STRUCTURE POINTS TO A SUBSTANTIAL DEMAND FOR CARE SERVICES, WITH IMPLICATIONS FOR WOMEN'S ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES BOTH WITHIN THE CARE SECTOR AND ACROSS THE BROADER ECONOMY.

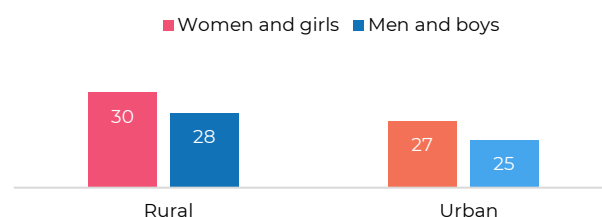
likely than men to have never attended school, with wider gender gaps in rural areas, reinforcing intergenerational cycles of poverty and exclusion (Figure 3). Nearly 4 in 10 women aged 20-24 are married compared with 14 per cent of men, limiting their chances to continue education.

In Aileu,

91% of married women aged 20-24 are not currently attending school compared with **57 per cent of never-married women.**

FIGURE 3.

People aged 5+ who never attended school, by sex (percentage)



Source: Timor-Leste Population and Housing Census 2022.

¹For the purpose of this Gender Profile, only the population living in private households is considered. The population living in collective living quarters represents less than 0.06 per cent of the total population in Timor-Leste. All data is based on the 2022 Timor-Leste Population and Housing Census 2022, unless otherwise stated.

Older women, face very high illiteracy rates, particularly in rural areas, limiting their participation in social, economic and political life (Figure 4). Women's longer life expectancy also means they are more likely to reach older age widowed and economically insecure, facing heightened risks of poverty, isolation, and poor health.

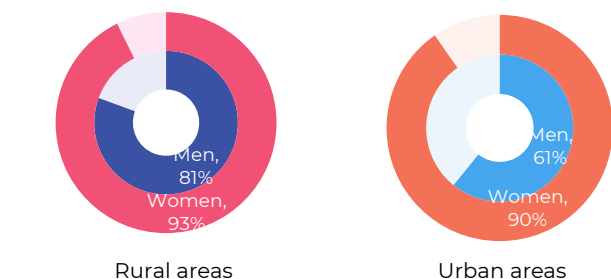
In Aileu,

44% of women aged 65+ are widowed compared with **20 per cent of men.**

Structural barriers limit women's access to the labour market. In Aileu, more women than men are outside the labour force (Figure 5), with **40 per cent of working-age women outside the labour force citing care responsibilities as the main reason** - more than double the share of men (Figure 6). Gender disadvantages are more pronounced **among women in rural areas and those in their prime working years.** Women aged 30-34 are the most likely to be outside the labour force due to caregiving (Figure 7), coinciding with peak childcare responsibilities.

FIGURE 4.

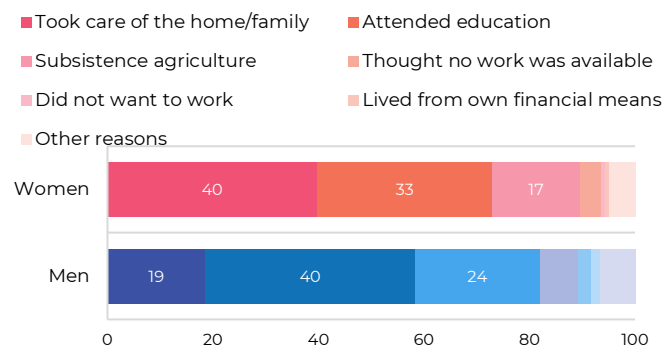
Illiteracy rates among people aged 65+, by sex and location (percentage)



Source: Timor-Leste Population and Housing Census 2022.

FIGURE 6.

Main reason for being outside the labour force, by sex (percentage)²



Source: Timor-Leste Population and Housing Census 2022.

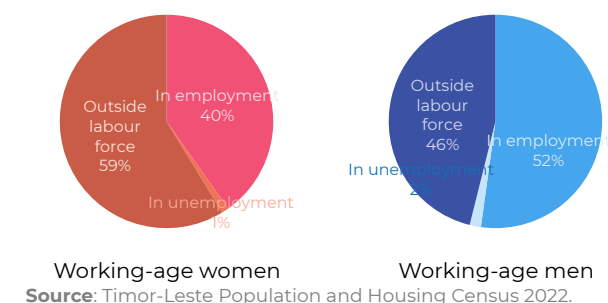
Women's labour force participation remains well below men's (41 versus 54 per cent, respectively), with the widest gender gap among those aged 35-39 years (19 percentage points). While more women in absolute terms are in the labour force in rural areas (5.9 thousand) than in urban areas (0.4 thousand), **labour force participation remains lower in rural settings** (41 compared with 44 per cent), reinforcing the economic vulnerability of rural women.

Care responsibilities intersect with marital status in ways that shape women's labour market outcomes across the life course. The widest gender gap in the employment-to-population ratio is among married individuals, with 49 per cent of women in employment compared with 67 per cent of men. While more married women are in employment compared with those who never married, this partly reflects higher participation in education among the latter.

Almost **7 in 10 never-married women cite education** as the main reason for being outside the labour force, whereas more than **6 in 10 married women cite caregiving.**

FIGURE 5.

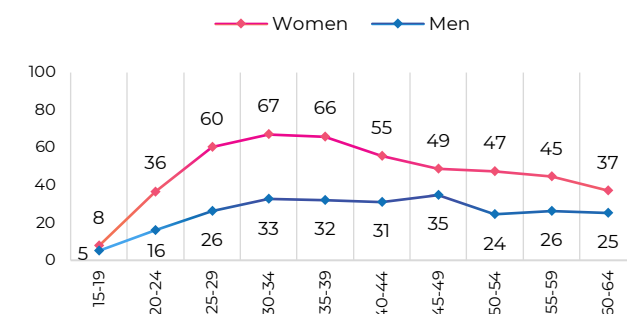
Labour force status among people aged 15-64, by sex (percentage)



Source: Timor-Leste Population and Housing Census 2022.

FIGURE 7.

Care responsibilities as the main reason for being outside the labour force, by sex and age groups (percentage)



Source: Timor-Leste Population and Housing Census 2022.

² 'Other reasons' here includes 'was a seasonal worker', 'was disabled, ill, in bad health', 'was pensioner/retired/old age', and 'other reason'.

Even when women enter the workforce, structural barriers restrict women's access to decent work.

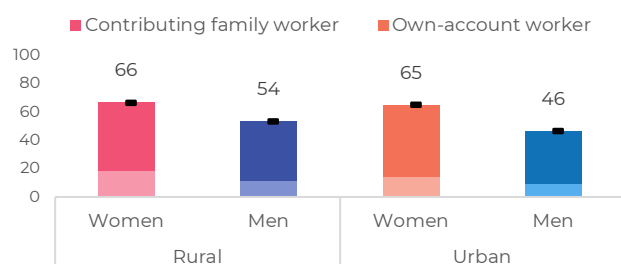
Aileu records the highest rate of vulnerable employment in the country. Women's continued overrepresentation in vulnerable employment exposes them to greater risks and vulnerabilities across their life cycle, with limited income stability, job protections, and access to social safety nets. Gender disadvantages are more pronounced in rural areas, driven by own-account work (Figure 8).

In Aileu,

66% of employed working-age women are in vulnerable forms of employment compared with **53 per cent of 10 men**

ECONOMIES THAT PRIORITIZE DECENT WORK ACT AS CATALYSTS FOR WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT, STIMULATING JOB GROWTH BOTH WITHIN THE SECTOR AND BEYOND.

FIGURE 8.
Vulnerable employment, by sex and location (percentage)



Source: Timor-Leste Population and Housing Census 2022.

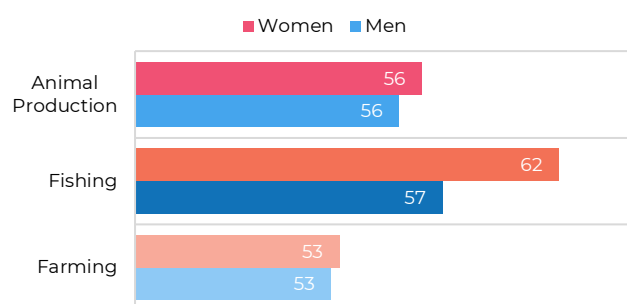
Overall, these patterns reflect structural inequalities that **constrain women's access to income-generating opportunities** while concentrating their work in subsistence activities and unpaid care. This underscores the need for targeted employment policies that recognize and address unpaid responsibilities, particularly for rural women and those balancing early family formation with economic aspirations.

Subsistence agriculture remains a crucial, yet often overlooked, pillar of women's economic contributions.

Agriculture is a key livelihood in Aileu, with **47 per cent of the working-age population engaged in agricultural activities**, whether for sale or self-consumption – the highest share in the country. While women are almost as likely as men to participate overall, those who do are more concentrated in own-use production³ (55 versus 54 per cent, respectively). This is particularly evident in fishing, where women's participation in own-use production exceeds that of men (62 versus 57 per cent, respectively) (Figure 9).

Engagement in subsistence production increases with age, particularly among women in old age (65 per cent), underscoring the role of own-use production as a livelihood strategy across the life course. Among working-age women engaged in agriculture, own-use production is more prevalent in urban (65 per cent) than in rural areas (55 per cent). Even so, women outside the labour force in rural areas are more likely than their urban counterparts to engage in own-use agricultural production (27 versus 23 per cent). Their contributions often fall outside conventional labour market measures, yet remain central to agricultural production and household food security.

FIGURE 9.
People aged 15-64 engaged in subsistence production, by sex and type (percentage)



Source: Timor-Leste Population and Housing Census 2022.

TO HARNESS DEMOGRAPHIC OPPORTUNITIES, IT IS CRUCIAL TO DISMANTLE STRUCTURAL BARRIERS TO WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT.

Aileu's declining dependency ratio signals a window of economic opportunity, but only if matched by sustained investments in care systems, decent jobs and inclusive policies. The **dependency ratio**, a demographic indicator measuring the number of care dependents relative to the working-age

³ Subsistence production is here defined as production undertaken only or mainly for own-family consumption; production for sale is defined as production undertaken only or mainly for sale.

population, **declined from 81 to 71 dependents per 100 working-age people** between 2015 and 2022. This trend points to the potential for a demographic dividend, whereby a relatively larger working-age population can support accelerated economic growth. With sustained investments, **gender-responsive care systems can serve as the cornerstone of inclusive and resilient economies,**

improving outcomes for all while ensuring dignity and equity for both caregivers and care recipients. Expanding access to affordable and quality care services, particularly in rural areas, would reduce women's care responsibilities but also stimulate job growth, boost GDP, and contribute to a more gender-equal world.

Disabilities affect women and men differently, with women often facing intersecting forms of disadvantage that compound across the life course.

In Aileu, overall disability prevalence is similar for women and men (1.2 and 1.4 per cent, respectively), but rises sharply in older age, reaching 7.1 per cent among women aged 65 and over and 7.6 per cent among men (Figure 10).

Women and girls with disabilities face significant educational disadvantages, including stigma, lack of inclusive infrastructure, and limited access to assistive devices. These challenges lead to lower educational attendance and higher rates of never having attended school (Figure 11), with long-term implications for skills development, economic independence, and wellbeing. **Limited access to education may, in turn, reduce future employment prospects and reinforce cycles of poverty.**

These compounded disadvantages continue into adulthood. **Fewer women with disabilities participate in the labour market compared with men with disabilities** (Figure 12), highlighting how the intersection of disability, gender, and economic vulnerability increases the risk of marginalization and poverty.

FIGURE 10.

People with disabilities, by sex and age groups (percentage)

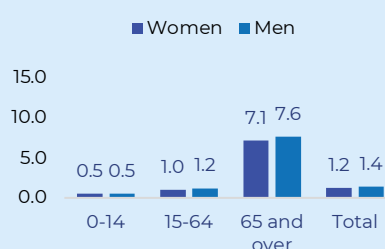


FIGURE 11.

People with disabilities aged 5+ who never attended school, by sex (percentage)

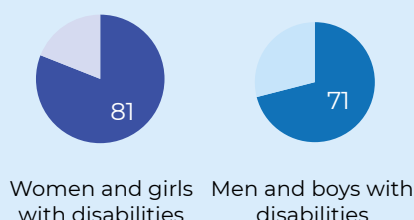
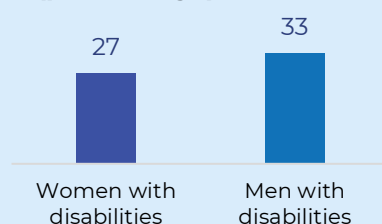


FIGURE 12.

Labour force participation rate of people with disabilities, by sex (percentage)



Source: Timor-Leste Population and Housing Census 2022.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ADVANCING WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT IN AILEU

Strengthen women's capacities through education and training. Invest in measures that support women's and girls' school progression, including for married women, women living in rural areas, and women and girls with disabilities.

Recognize, reduce, and redistribute unpaid care, especially in rural areas. Prioritize the development of accessible, affordable, and high-quality care services, including childcare and long-term care, particularly in rural areas, where care responsibilities reinforce women's economic insecurity.

Promote pathways to decent work. Support women's transition from vulnerable forms of employment into decent work, including through agriculture, fisheries, and enterprise support.

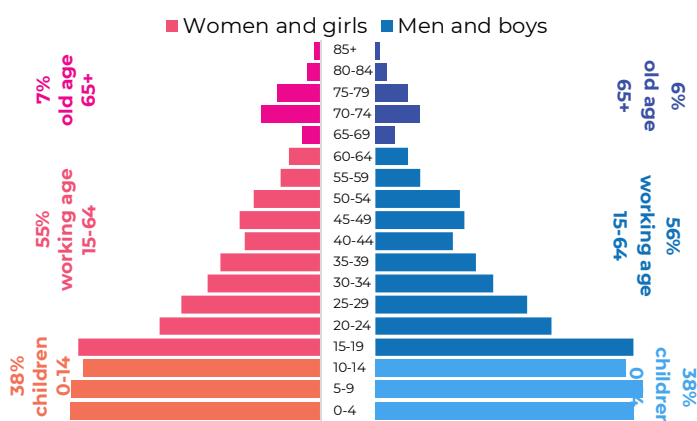
Municipality Gender Profile: Ainaro

Ainaro is home to 73,083 people¹, representing 5 per cent of Timor Leste's population. Women and girls account for 49 per cent of Ainaro's population, compared with 51 per cent of men and boys. The municipality is **predominantly rural**, with 88 per cent of residents residing in rural areas, well above the national average of 71 per cent.

Ainaro's age structure reflects a **feminization of ageing**, with a larger share of women aged 65 and above. At the same time, its demographic profile points to a notably higher demand for childcare

FIGURE 1.

Population, by sex and age groups



Source: Timor-Leste Population and Housing Census 2022.

Gender inequalities begin early in life and accumulate across the life course.

Gender inequalities are rooted in **discriminatory social norms and practices** that influence women's lives from childhood to old age, restricting autonomy, limiting access to education and employment, and reinforcing unequal expectations around caregiving and family formation. In Ainaro, child marriage remains a significant barrier to gender equality, with **6 per cent of women aged 20 to 24 married before age 18**. At the same time, the municipality has seen notable progress, with the rate of child marriage declining by more than 3 percentage points between 2015 and 2022, compared with a nearly 2 percentage point decline recorded nationally. Child marriage often channels women into early domestic roles, curtailing their opportunities for education and future economic opportunities.



In Ainaro **6% of young women** were **married before age 18**

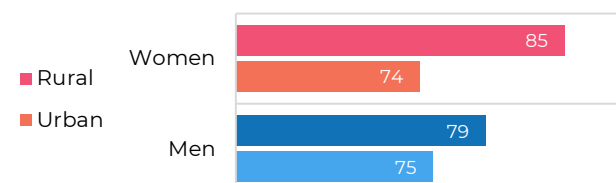
Gender norms around caregiving and early marriage continue to shape young women's

services, as **38 per cent of the residents are under 15 years of age** (Figure 1).

For every 100 people in working-age (aged 15-64) in Ainaro, there are 69 children (aged 0-14) and 11 older persons (aged 65 and above), placing sustained pressure on care systems, particularly childcare. Yet, the demand for care falls unevenly: **women in rural areas support the highest number of dependents**, highlighting persistent gender and geographic inequalities in care responsibilities (Figure 2).

FIGURE 2.

Dependency ratio, by sex and location



Source: Timor-Leste Population and Housing Census 2022.

AINARO'S POPULATION STRUCTURE POINTS TO A SUBSTANTIAL DEMAND FOR CARE SERVICES, WITH IMPLICATIONS FOR WOMEN'S ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES BOTH WITHIN THE CARE SECTOR AND ACROSS THE BROADER ECONOMY.

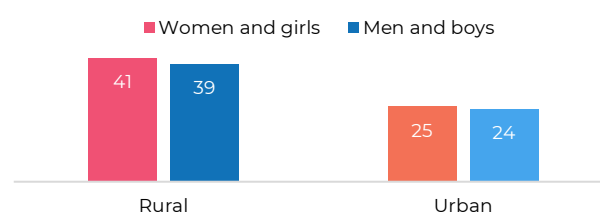
trajectories. Women aged 5 and above remain more likely than men to have never attended school, particularly in rural areas, reinforcing intergenerational cycles of poverty and exclusion (Figure 3). Nearly 4 in 10 women aged 20-24 are married compared with 15 per cent of men, limiting their chances to continue education.

In Ainaro,

88% of married women aged 20-24 are not currently attending school compared with **49 per cent of never-married women.**

FIGURE 3.

People aged 5+ who never attended school, by sex (percentage)



Source: Timor-Leste Population and Housing Census 2022.

¹For the purpose of this Gender Profile, only the population living in private households is considered. The population living in collective living quarters represents less than 0.06 per cent of the total population in Timor-Leste. All data is based on the 2022 Timor-Leste Population and Housing Census 2022, unless otherwise stated.

Older women face very high illiteracy, particularly in rural areas, limiting their participation in social, economic and political life (Figure 4). Women's longer life expectancy also means they are more likely to reach older age widowed and economically insecure, facing heightened risks of poverty, isolation, and poor health.

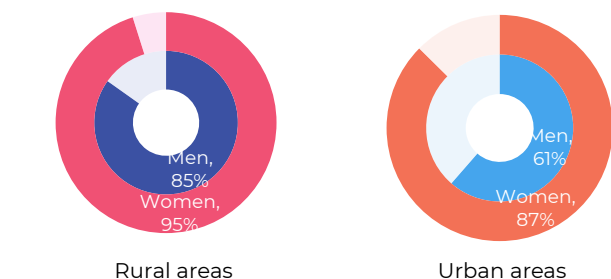
In Ainaro,

48% of women aged 65+ are widowed compared **with 18 per cent of men.**

Structural barriers limit women's access to the labour market. In Ainaro, more women than men are outside the labour force (Figure 5), with **40 per cent of working-age women outside the labour force citing care responsibilities as the main reason** compared with 25 per cent of their male counterparts (Figure 6). Gender disadvantages are more pronounced **among women in rural areas and those in their prime working years.** Women aged 30-44 are the most likely to be outside the labour force due to caregiving (Figure 7), coinciding with peak childcare responsibilities.

FIGURE 4.

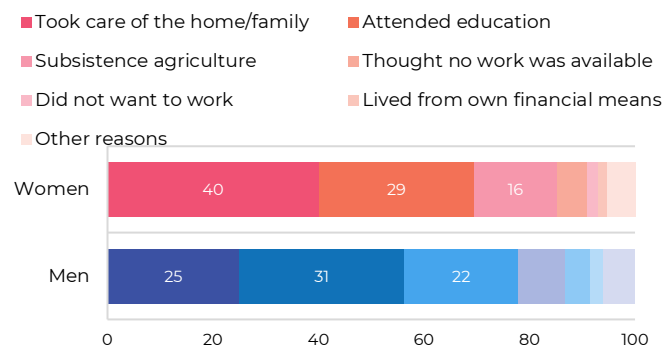
Illiteracy rates among people aged 65+, by sex and location (percentage)



Source: Timor-Leste Population and Housing Census 2022.

FIGURE 6.

Main reason for being outside the labour force, by sex (percentage)²



Source: Timor-Leste Population and Housing Census 2022.

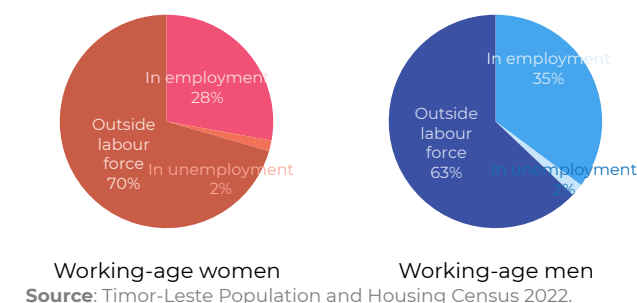
Women's labour force participation remains well below men's (29 versus 37 per cent, respectively), with the widest gender gap among those aged 40-44 years (12 percentage points). While more women in absolute terms are in the labour force in rural areas (5 thousand) than in urban areas (0.7 thousand), **labour force participation remains lower in rural settings** (29 compared with 31 per cent), reinforcing the economic vulnerability of rural women.

Care responsibilities intersect with marital status in ways that shape women's labour market outcomes across the life course. The widest gender gap in the employment-to-population ratio is among married individuals, with 35 per cent of women in employment compared with 47 per cent of men. While more married women are in employment compared with those who never married, this partly reflects higher participation in education among the latter.

Nearly **6 in 10 never-married women cite education** as the main reason for being outside the labour force, whereas more than **6 in 10 married women cite caregiving.**

FIGURE 5.

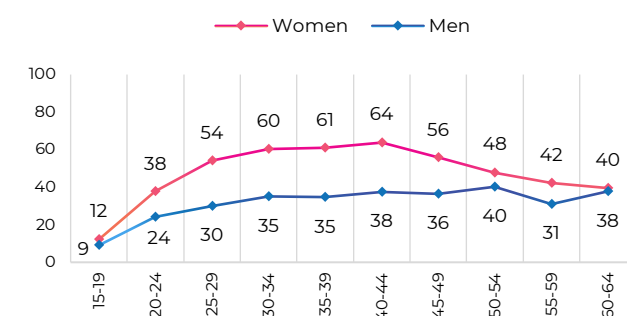
Labour force status among people aged 15-64, by sex (percentage)



Source: Timor-Leste Population and Housing Census 2022.

FIGURE 7.

Care responsibilities as the main reason for being outside the labour force, by sex and age groups (percentage)



Source: Timor-Leste Population and Housing Census 2022.

² 'Other reasons' here includes 'was a seasonal worker', 'was disabled, ill, in bad health', 'was pensioner/retired/old age', and 'other reason'.

Even when women enter the workforce, structural barriers restrict women's access to decent work.

Women's continued overrepresentation in vulnerable employment exposes them to greater risks and vulnerabilities across their life cycle, with limited income stability, job protections, and access to social safety nets. Significant urban-rural disparities continue to pose challenges, with more women in rural areas being contributing family workers or own account workers (Figure 8).

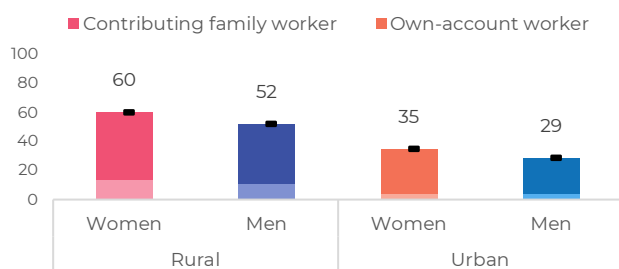
In Ainaro,

57% of employed working-age women are in vulnerable forms of employment compared with **49 per cent of 10 men**

ECONOMIES THAT PRIORITIZE DECENT WORK ACT AS CATALYSTS FOR WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT, STIMULATING JOB GROWTH BOTH WITHIN THE SECTOR AND BEYOND.

FIGURE 8.

Vulnerable employment, by sex and location (percentage)



Source: Timor-Leste Population and Housing Census 2022.

Overall, these patterns reflect structural inequalities that **constrain women's access to income-generating opportunities** while concentrating their work in subsistence activities and unpaid care. This underscores the need for targeted employment policies that recognize and address unpaid responsibilities, particularly for rural women and those balancing early family formation with economic aspirations.

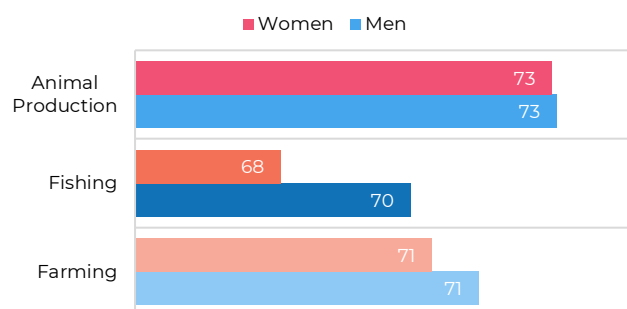
Subsistence agriculture remains a crucial, yet often overlooked, pillar of women's economic contributions.

Agriculture remains a key livelihood in Ainaro, with **40 per cent of working-age people engaged in agricultural activities**, whether for sale or self-consumption. Among those who participate in agriculture, both women and men are highly concentrated in own-use production³, with 72 per cent of each engaged only or primarily for self-consumption. This pattern is also visible across agricultural activities where own-use production accounts for a substantial share of participation (Figure 9).

Engagement in subsistence production increases with age, reaching 75 per cent among older adults, underscoring the role of own-use production as a livelihood strategy across the life course. Among working-age women engaged in agriculture, own-use production is more prevalent in urban than rural areas (84 per cent compared with 71 per cent). At the same time, rural women outside the labour force are more than twice as likely as urban women to engage in own-use agricultural production (25 compared with 11 per cent), underlining the central yet often overlooked role of subsistence production in sustaining rural households.

FIGURE 9.

People aged 15-64 engaged in subsistence production, by sex and type (percentage)



Source: Timor-Leste Population and Housing Census 2022.

TO HARNESS DEMOGRAPHIC OPPORTUNITIES, IT IS CRUCIAL TO DISMANTLE STRUCTURAL BARRIERS TO WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT.

Ainaro's declining dependency ratio signals a window of economic opportunity, but only if matched by sustained investments in care systems, decent jobs and inclusive policies. The **dependency ratio**, a demographic indicator measuring the number of care dependents relative to the working-

³ Subsistence production is here defined as production undertaken only or mainly for own-family consumption; production for sale is defined as production undertaken only or mainly for sale.

age population, **declined from 105 to 81 dependents per 100 working-age people** between 2015 and 2022. This trend points to the potential for a demographic dividend, whereby a relatively larger working-age population can support accelerated economic growth. With sustained investments, **gender-responsive care systems can serve as the cornerstone of inclusive and resilient economies,**

improving outcomes for all while ensuring dignity and equity for both caregivers and care recipients. Expanding access to affordable and quality care services, particularly in rural areas, would reduce women's care responsibilities but also stimulate job growth, boost GDP, and contribute to a more gender-equal world.

Disabilities affect women and men differently, with women often facing intersecting forms of disadvantage that compound across the life course.

In Ainaro, overall disability prevalence is similar for women and men, and increases substantially in older age, reaching 7.5 per cent among women aged 65 and over and 8.0 per cent among men (Figure 10).

Women and girls with disabilities face significant educational disadvantages, including stigma, lack of inclusive infrastructure, and limited access to assistive devices. These challenges lead to lower educational attendance and higher rates of never having attended school (Figure 11), with long-term implications for skills development, economic independence, and wellbeing. **Limited access to education may, in turn, reduce future employment prospects and reinforce cycles of poverty.**

These compounded disadvantages continue into adulthood. **Fewer women with disabilities participate in the labour market compared with men with disabilities** (Figure 12), highlighting how the intersection of disability, gender, and economic vulnerability increases the risk of marginalization and poverty.

FIGURE 10.

People with disabilities, by sex and age groups (percentage)

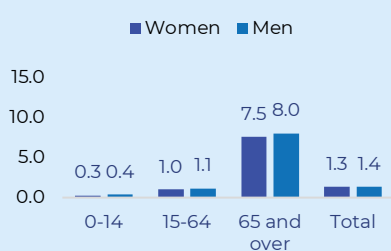


FIGURE 11.

People with disabilities aged 5+ who never attended school, by sex (percentage)

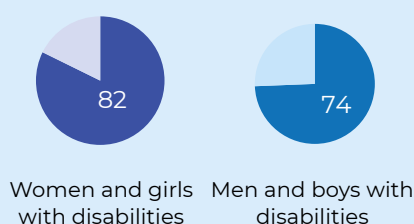
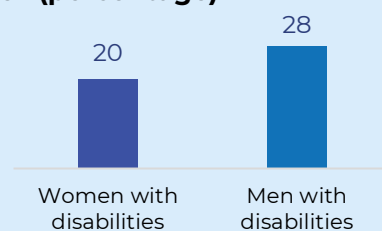


FIGURE 12.

Labour force participation rate of people with disabilities, by sex (percentage)



Source: Timor-Leste Population and Housing Census 2022.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ADVANCING WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT IN AINARO

Strengthen women's capacities through education and training. Invest in measures that support women's and girls' school retention and progression, including for married women, women living in rural areas, and women and girls with disabilities.

Recognize, reduce, and redistribute unpaid care and subsistence work, especially in rural areas. Prioritize the development of accessible, affordable, and quality care services, including childcare and long-term care, particularly in rural areas, where care responsibilities reinforce women's economic insecurity.

Support women's productive livelihoods. Improve women's access to and control over productive resources so that agricultural activities can better contribute to women's incomes, food security and economic resilience. Support women-led producer groups and cooperatives in agriculture, fisheries and livestock to strengthen their bargaining power, improve market access, and support a gradual transition from subsistence to more remunerative production.

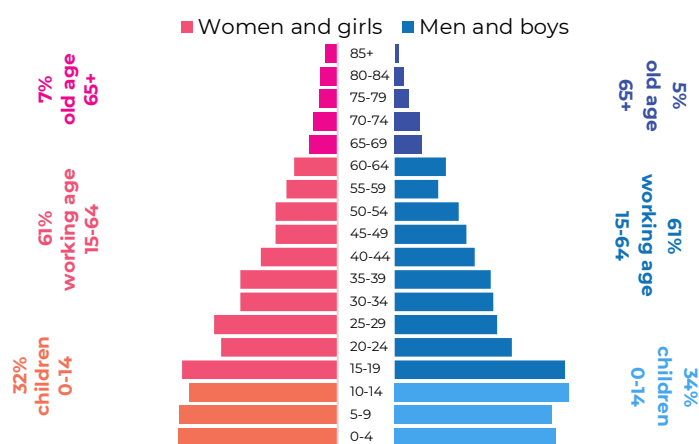
Municipality Gender Profile: Atauro

Atauro is home to 10,295 people¹, representing 1 per cent of Timor Leste's population and making it the smallest municipality in the country by population size. Atauro's population is evenly split between women and girls and men and boys, with each accounting for 50 per cent. Atauro is **entirely rural**, making it the only municipality in Timor-Leste with no urban population.

Atauro's population structure points to substantial care needs. Its age profile reflects a **feminization of ageing**, with a larger share of women aged 65 and above. At the same time, it points to a notably higher demand for childcare services, as **33 per cent of the residents are under 15 years of age** (Figure 1). For every 100 people in working-age (aged 15-64) in Atauro, there are 54 children (aged 0-14) and 10 older persons (aged 65 and above), placing sustained pressure on care systems, particularly childcare.

FIGURE 1.

Population, by sex and age groups



Source: Timor-Leste Population and Housing Census 2022.

ATAURO'S POPULATION STRUCTURE POINTS TO A SUBSTANTIAL DEMAND FOR CARE SERVICES, WITH IMPLICATIONS FOR WOMEN'S ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES BOTH WITHIN THE CARE SECTOR AND ACROSS THE BROADER ECONOMY.

Gender inequalities begin early in life and accumulate across the life course.

Gender inequalities are rooted in **discriminatory social norms and practices** that influence women's lives from childhood to old age, restricting autonomy, limiting access to education and employment, and reinforcing unequal expectations around caregiving and family formation. In Atauro, child marriage remains a significant barrier to gender equality, with **5.4 per cent of women aged 20 to 24 married before age 18**. Child marriage often channels women into early domestic roles, curtailing their opportunities for education and future economic opportunities.



More than **1 in 20 young women** in Atauro were **married before age 18**

Gender norms around caregiving and early marriage continue to shape young women's trajectories. Women aged 5 and above are significantly more likely than men to have never attended school (Figure 2) - with Atauro showing the widest gender gap across municipalities - reinforcing

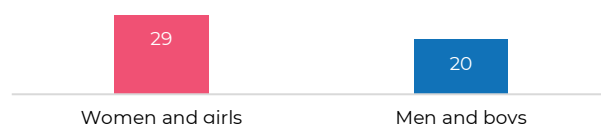
intergenerational cycles of poverty and exclusion. More than one-quarter of women aged 20-24 are married compared with 7 per cent of men, limiting their chances to continue education.

In Atauro,

89% of married women aged 20-24 are not currently attending school compared with **67 per cent of never-married women.**

FIGURE 2.

People aged 5+ who never attended school, by sex (percentage)



Source: Timor-Leste Population and Housing Census 2022.

Older women face very high illiteracy rates, limiting their participation in social, economic and political life (Figure 3). Women's longer life expectancy also means they are more likely to reach older age widowed and economically insecure, facing

¹For the purpose of this Gender Profile, only the population living in private households is considered. The population living in collective living quarters represents less than 0.06 per cent of the total population in Timor-Leste. All data is based on the 2022 Timor-Leste Population and Housing Census 2022, unless otherwise stated.

heightened risks of poverty, isolation, and poor health. Although the share of widowed older women is the lowest across municipalities, women remain much more likely than men to be widowed in older age.

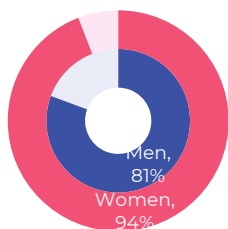
In Atauro,

37% of women aged 65+ are widowed compared with 14 per cent of men.

Structural barriers limit women's access to the labour market. In Atauro, more women than men are outside the labour force (Figure 4), with **27 per cent of working-age women outside the labour force citing care responsibilities as the main reason** compared with 16 per cent of men (Figure 5). At the same time, Atauro stands out because the perceived lack of available work is also relatively more prominent compared to other municipalities, with 23 per cent of women and 27 per cent of men citing it as the main reason for being outside the labour force.

Gender disadvantages are particularly visible **among women in their prime working years.** Women aged 30-34 and 40-44 are the most likely to be outside the labour force. **FIGURE 3.**

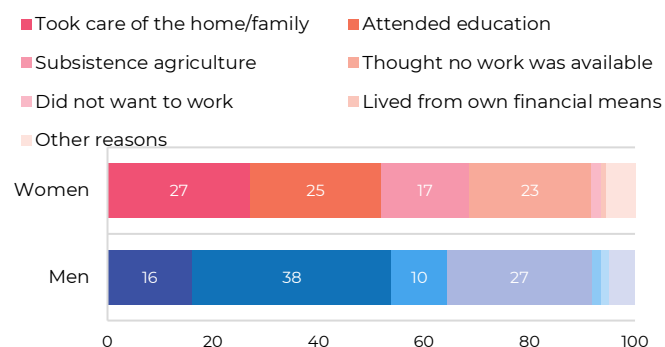
Illiteracy rates among people aged 65+, by sex and location (percentage)



Source: Timor-Leste Population and Housing Census 2022.

FIGURE 5.

Main reason for being outside the labour force, by sex (percentage)²



Source: Timor-Leste Population and Housing Census 2022.

labour force due to caregiving (Figure 6), coinciding with peak childcare responsibilities.

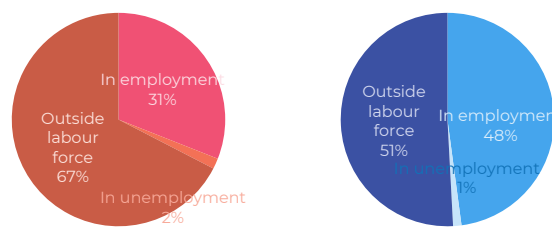
Women's labour force participation remains well below men's (33 versus 49 per cent, respectively), leaving Atauro with one of the widest gender gaps across municipalities. In particular, those aged 55-59 years report the widest gender gap (29 percentage points).

Care responsibilities intersect with marital status in ways that shape women's labour market outcomes across the life course. The widest gender gap in the employment-to-population ratio is among married individuals, with 38 per cent of women in employment compared with 68 per cent of men. While more married women are in employment compared with those who never married, this partly reflects higher participation in education among the latter.

Almost **5 in 10 never-married women cite education** as the main reason for being outside the labour force, whereas more than **4 in 10 married women cite caregiving**.

FIGURE 4.

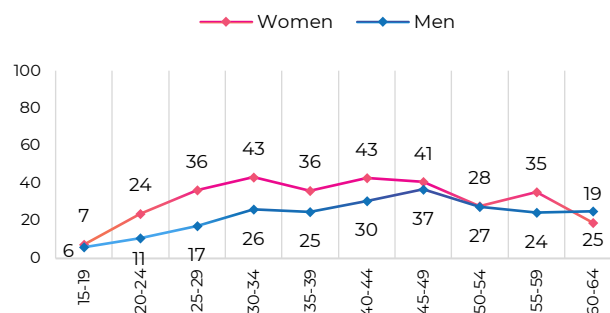
Labour force status among people aged 15-64, by sex (percentage)



Source: Timor-Leste Population and Housing Census 2022.

FIGURE 6.

Care responsibilities as the main reason for being outside the labour force, by sex and age groups (percentage)



Source: Timor-Leste Population and Housing Census 2022.

² 'Other reasons' here includes 'was a seasonal worker', 'was disabled, ill, in bad health', 'was pensioner/retired/old age', and 'other reason'.

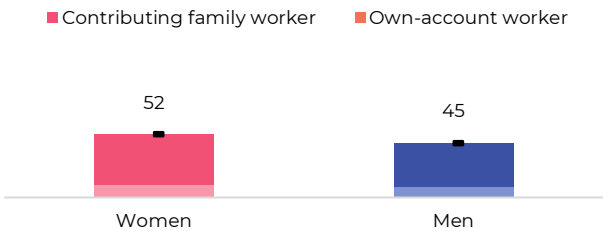
Even when women enter the workforce, structural barriers restrict women’s access to decent work.

Although Atauro records the narrowest gender gap in vulnerable employment in the country, women’s continued overrepresentation in these forms of employment exposes them to greater risks and vulnerabilities across their life cycle, with limited income stability, job protections, and access to social safety nets (Figure 7).

In Atauro,
52% of employed working-age women are in vulnerable forms of employment compared with **45 per cent of 10 men**

ECONOMIES THAT PRIORITIZE DECENT WORK ACT AS CATALYSTS FOR WOMEN’S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT, STIMULATING JOB GROWTH BOTH WITHIN THE SECTOR AND BEYOND.

FIGURE 7.
Vulnerable employment, by sex and location (percentage)



Source: Timor-Leste Population and Housing Census 2022.

Overall, these patterns reflect structural inequalities that **constrain women’s access to income-generating opportunities** while concentrating their work in subsistence activities and unpaid care. This underscores the need for targeted employment policies that recognize and address unpaid responsibilities, particularly for women balancing early family formation with economic aspirations.

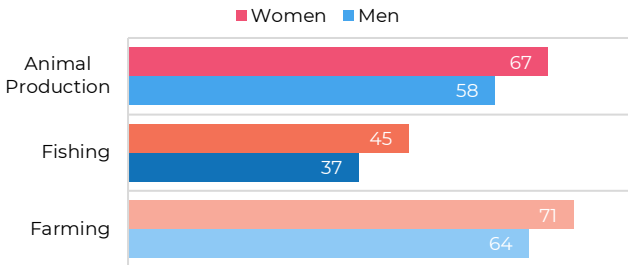
TO HARNESS DEMOGRAPHIC OPPORTUNITIES, IT IS CRUCIAL TO DISMANTLE STRUCTURAL BARRIERS TO WOMEN’S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT.

Subsistence agriculture remains a crucial, yet often overlooked, pillar of women’s economic contributions.

Agriculture is a key livelihood in Atauro, with **46 per cent of working-age people engaged in agricultural activities**, whether for sale or self-consumption, placing Atauro among the municipalities with the highest levels of agricultural engagement. While women are less likely than men to participate overall, those who do are more concentrated in own-use production³ (69 versus 56 per cent, respectively). This is particularly evident in animal production, where women’s participation in own-use production significantly exceeds that of men (67 versus 58 per cent) (Figure 8).

Engagement in subsistence production increases with age, particularly among women in older age (70 per cent), underscoring the role of own-use production as a livelihood strategy across the life course. Notably, 30 per cent of women outside the labour force are engaged in own-use agricultural production, one of the highest shares in the country, underscoring how their contributions remain central to agricultural production and household food security, even when they fall outside conventional labour market measures.

FIGURE 8.
People aged 15-64 engaged in subsistence production, by sex and type (percentage)



Source: Timor-Leste Population and Housing Census 2022.

Atauro’s dependency ratio signals a window of economic opportunity, but only if matched by sustained investments in care systems, decent jobs and inclusive policies. The **dependency ratio**, a demographic indicator measuring the number of care dependents relative to the working-age population, indicates **64 dependents per 100 working-age people**. This trend points to the potential for a demographic dividend, whereby a relatively larger working-age population can support accelerated economic growth. With sustained investments, **gender-responsive care systems can serve as the cornerstone of inclusive and resilient**

³ Subsistence production is here defined as production undertaken only or mainly for own-family consumption; production for sale is defined as production undertaken only or mainly for sale.

economies, improving outcomes for all while ensuring dignity and equity for both caregivers and care recipients. Expanding access to affordable and

quality care services would reduce women's care responsibilities but also stimulate job growth, boost GDP, and contribute to a more gender-equal world.

Disabilities affect women and men differently, with women often facing intersecting forms of disadvantage that compound across the life course.

Disability prevalence in Atauro is the highest across municipalities for both women and men, with **women being slightly more likely than men to experience one or multiple disabilities**, particularly in older age, where 22.4 per cent of women and 19.4 per cent of men live with disabilities (Figure 9).

Women and girls with disabilities face significant educational disadvantages, including stigma, lack of inclusive infrastructure, and limited access to assistive devices. These challenges lead to lower educational attendance and higher rates of never having attended school (Figure 10), with long-term implications for skills development, economic independence, and wellbeing. **Limited access to education may, in turn, reduce future employment prospects and reinforce cycles of poverty.**

These compounded disadvantages continue into adulthood. **While Atauro records the highest labour force participation among women with disabilities, this remains far below the rate for men with disabilities** (Figure 11), highlighting how the intersection of disability, gender, and economic vulnerability increases the risk of marginalization and poverty.

FIGURE 9.

People with disabilities, by sex and age groups (percentage)

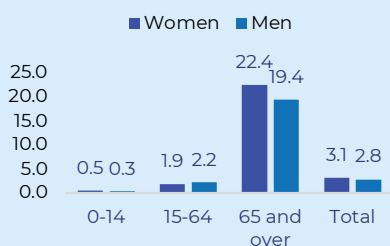


FIGURE 10.

People with disabilities aged 5+ who never attended school, by sex (percentage)

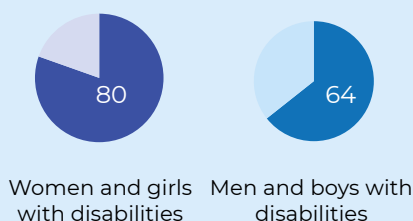
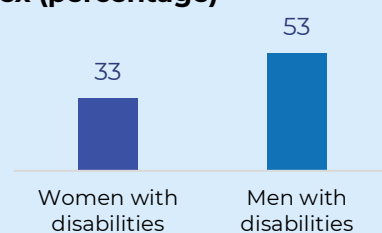


FIGURE 11.

Labour force participation rate of people with disabilities, by sex (percentage)



Source: Timor-Leste Population and Housing Census 2022.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ADVANCING WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT IN ATAURO

Expand gender-responsive and inclusive education and social protection systems, especially for women and girls with disabilities. Strengthen and scale up social protection schemes to better reach women facing compounding challenges, including widows, unpaid caregivers, and women with disabilities.

Support rural women's productive livelihoods. Improve women's access to and control over productive resources so that agricultural activities can better contribute to women's incomes, food security and economic resilience.

Promote pathways to decent work. Target skilling and employment policies and frameworks to support women's transition from subsistence and vulnerable forms of employment into decent work.

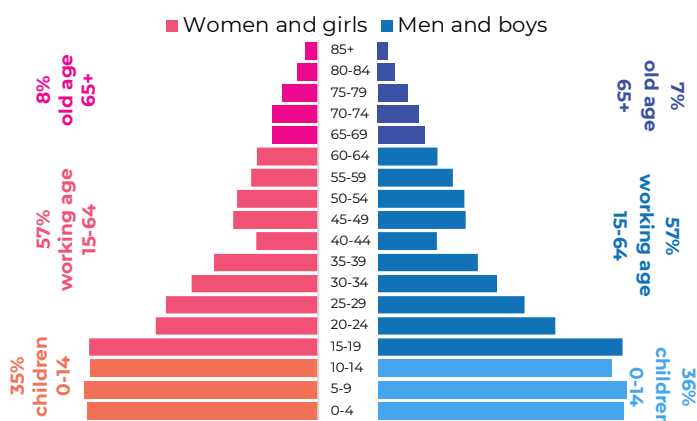
Municipality Gender Profile: Baucau

Baucau is home to 134,830 people¹, representing 10 per cent of Timor Leste's population and making it one of the most populous municipalities in the country. Women and girls account for 49 per cent of Baucau's population, compared with 51 per cent of men and boys. The municipality is **predominantly rural**, with 86 per cent of residents residing in rural areas, well above the national average of 71 per cent.

Baucau's age structure reflects a **feminization of ageing**, with a larger share of women aged 65 and above. At the same time, its demographic profile points to a notably higher demand for childcare

FIGURE 1.

Population, by sex and age groups



Source: Timor-Leste Population and Housing Census 2022.

Gender inequalities begin early in life and accumulate across the life course.

Gender inequalities are rooted in **discriminatory social norms and practices** that influence women's lives from childhood to old age, restricting autonomy, limiting access to education and employment, and reinforcing unequal expectations around caregiving and family formation. In Baucau, child marriage remains a significant barrier to gender equality, with **4.8 per cent of women aged 20 to 24 married before age 18**. While the national rate declined by nearly 2 percentage points between 2015 and 2022, progress in Baucau has been more limited (a 1.3 percentage point decline). Child marriage often channels women into early domestic roles, curtailing their opportunities for education and future economic opportunities.



Almost **1 in 20 young women** in Baucau were **married before age 18**

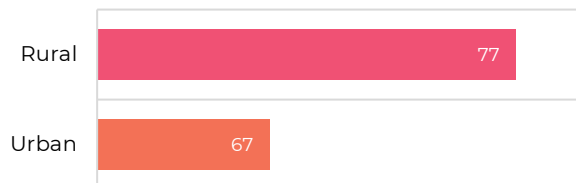
Gender norms around caregiving and early marriage continue to shape young women's

services, as **35 per cent of the residents are under 15 years of age** (Figure 1).

For every 100 people in working-age (aged 15-64) in Baucau, there are 62 children (aged 0-14) and 13 older persons (aged 65 and above), placing sustained pressure on care systems, particularly childcare. Yet, these pressures are more acute in rural areas, where women and men each support substantially more dependents than their urban counterparts, highlighting persistent geographic inequalities in care demands (Figure 2).

FIGURE 2.

Dependency ratio, by location



Source: Timor-Leste Population and Housing Census 2022.

BAUCAU'S POPULATION STRUCTURE POINTS TO A SUBSTANTIAL DEMAND FOR CARE SERVICES, WITH IMPLICATIONS FOR WOMEN'S ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES BOTH WITHIN THE CARE SECTOR AND ACROSS THE BROADER ECONOMY.

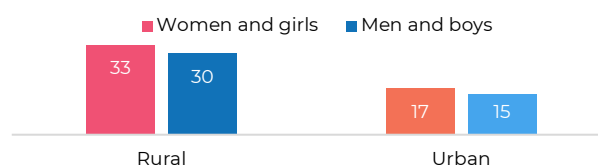
trajectories. Women aged 5 and above remain more likely than men to have never attended school, with wider gender gaps in rural areas, reinforcing intergenerational cycles of poverty and exclusion (Figure 3). Nearly 4 in 10 women aged 20-24 are married compared with 17 per cent of men, limiting their chances to continue education.

In Baucau,

90% of married women aged 20-24 are not currently attending school compared with **51 per cent of never-married women**.

FIGURE 3.

People aged 5+ who never attended school, by sex (percentage)



Source: Timor-Leste Population and Housing Census 2022.

¹For the purpose of this Gender Profile, only the population living in private households is considered. The population living in collective living quarters represents less than 0.06 per cent of the total population in Timor-Leste. All data is based on the 2022 Timor-Leste Population and Housing Census 2022, unless otherwise stated.

Older women face very high illiteracy rates, particularly in rural areas, limiting their participation in social, economic and political life (Figure 4). Women's longer life expectancy also means they are more likely to reach older age widowed and economically insecure, facing heightened risks of poverty, isolation, and poor health.

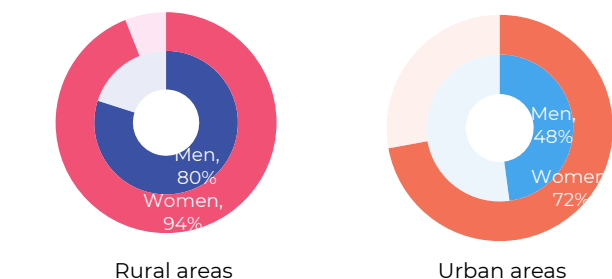
In Baucau,

41% of women aged 65+ are widowed compared **with 19 per cent of men.**

Structural barriers limit women's access to the labour market. In Baucau, more women than men are outside the labour force (Figure 5), with **44 per cent of working-age women outside the labour force citing care responsibilities as the main reason** - more than double the share of men (Figure 6). Gender disadvantages are more pronounced **among women in rural areas and those in their prime working years.** Women aged 30-44 are the most likely to be outside the labour force due to caregiving (Figure 7), coinciding with peak childcare responsibilities.

FIGURE 4.

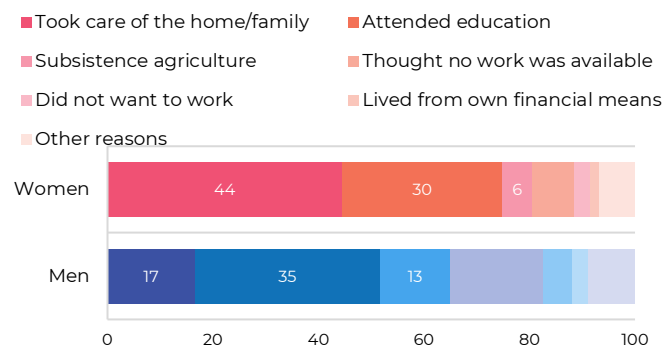
Illiteracy rates among people aged 65+, by sex and location (percentage)



Source: Timor-Leste Population and Housing Census 2022.

FIGURE 6.

Main reason for being outside the labour force, by sex (percentage)²



Source: Timor-Leste Population and Housing Census 2022.

Women's labour force participation remains well below men's (30 versus 43 per cent, respectively), with the widest gender gap among those aged 30-44 years (20 percentage points). While more women in absolute terms are in the labour force in rural areas (9.7 thousand) than in urban areas (1.8 thousand), **labour force participation remains lower in rural settings** (30 compared with 32 per cent), reinforcing the economic vulnerability of rural women.

Care responsibilities intersect with marital status in ways that shape women's labour market outcomes across the life course. The widest gender gap in the employment-to-population ratio is among married individuals, with 38 per cent of women in employment compared with 60 per cent of men. While more married women are in employment compared with those who never married, this partly reflects higher participation in education among the latter.

More than **6 in 10 never-married women cite education** as the main reason for being outside the labour force, whereas more than **7 in 10 married women cite caregiving.**

FIGURE 5.

Labour force status among people aged 15-64, by sex (percentage)

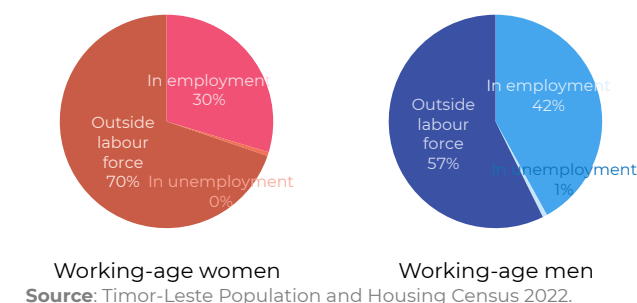
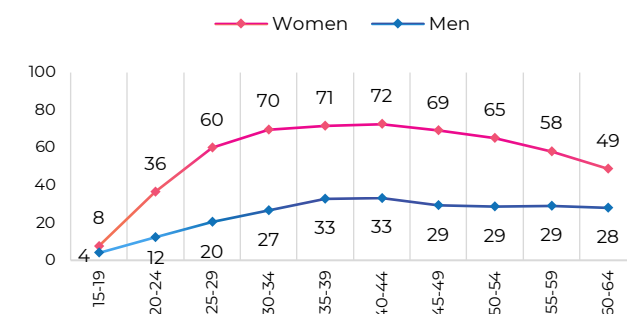


FIGURE 7.

Care responsibilities as the main reason for being outside the labour force, by sex and age groups (percentage)



Source: Timor-Leste Population and Housing Census 2022.

² 'Other reasons' here includes 'was a seasonal worker', 'was disabled, ill, in bad health', 'was pensioner/retired/old age', and 'other reason'.

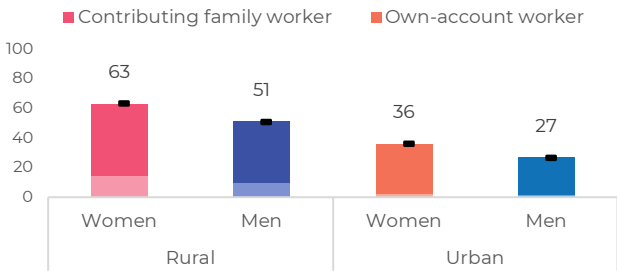
Even when women enter the workforce, structural barriers restrict women’s access to decent work.

Women’s continued overrepresentation in vulnerable employment exposes them to greater risks and vulnerabilities across their life cycle, with limited income stability, job protections, and access to social safety nets. Significant urban-rural disparities continue to pose challenges, with more women in rural areas being contributing family workers or own account workers (Figure 8).

In Bacau,
59% of employed working-age women are in vulnerable forms of employment compared with **47 per cent of 10 men**

ECONOMIES THAT PRIORITIZE DECENT WORK ACT AS CATALYSTS FOR WOMEN’S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT, STIMULATING JOB GROWTH BOTH WITHIN THE SECTOR AND BEYOND.

FIGURE 8.
Vulnerable employment, by sex and location (percentage)



Source: Timor-Leste Population and Housing Census 2022.

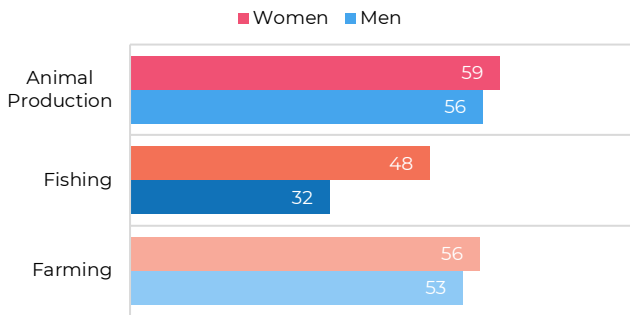
Overall, these patterns reflect structural inequalities that **constrain women’s access to income-generating opportunities** while concentrating their work in subsistence activities and unpaid care. This underscores the need for targeted employment policies that recognize and address unpaid responsibilities, particularly for rural women and those balancing early family formation with economic aspirations.

Subsistence agriculture remains a crucial, yet often overlooked, pillar of women’s economic contributions.

Agriculture remains a key livelihood in Baucau, with **3 in 10 working-age people engaged in agricultural activities**, whether for sale or self-consumption. While women are less likely than men to participate overall, those who do are more concentrated in own-use production³ (58 versus 54 per cent). This is particularly evident in fishing, where women’s participation in own-use production significantly exceeds that of men (48 versus 32 per cent) (Figure 9).

Engagement in subsistence production increases with age, reaching 69 per cent among older women, underscoring the role of own-use production as a livelihood strategy across the life course. Among working-age women engaged in agriculture, own-use production is more prevalent in urban than rural areas (78 per cent compared with 57 per cent), although rural women outside the labour force remain more than twice as likely as urban women to engage in own-use agricultural production (15 per cent compared with 7 per cent). Their contributions often fall outside conventional labour market measures, yet remain central to agricultural production and household food security.

FIGURE 9.
People aged 15-64 engaged in subsistence production, by sex and type (percentage)



Source: Timor-Leste Population and Housing Census 2022.

TO HARNESS DEMOGRAPHIC OPPORTUNITIES, IT IS CRUCIAL TO DISMANTLE STRUCTURAL BARRIERS TO WOMEN’S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT.

Baucau’s declining dependency ratio signals a window of economic opportunity, but only if matched by sustained investments in care systems, decent jobs and inclusive policies. The **dependency ratio**, a demographic indicator measuring the number of care dependents relative to the working-

³ Subsistence production is here defined as production undertaken only or mainly for own-family consumption; production for sale is defined as production undertaken only or mainly for sale.

age population, **declined from 88 to 75 dependents per 100 working-age people** between 2015 and 2022. This trend points to the potential for a demographic dividend, whereby a relatively larger working-age population can support accelerated economic growth. With sustained investments, **gender-responsive care systems can serve as the cornerstone of inclusive and resilient economies,**

improving outcomes for all while ensuring dignity and equity for both caregivers and care recipients. Expanding access to affordable and quality care services, particularly in rural areas, would reduce women's care responsibilities but also stimulate job growth, boost GDP, and contribute to a more gender-equal world.

Disabilities affect women and men differently, with women often facing intersecting forms of disadvantage that compound across the life course.

In Baucau, **women are slightly more likely than men to experience one or multiple disabilities in older age**, with 12 per cent of women aged 65 and over living with disabilities compared with 11 per cent of men (Figure 10).

Women and girls with disabilities face significant educational disadvantages, including stigma, lack of inclusive infrastructure, and limited access to assistive devices. These challenges lead to lower educational attendance and higher rates of never having attended school (Figure 11), with long-term implications for skills development, economic independence, and wellbeing. **Limited access to education may, in turn, reduce future employment prospects and reinforce cycles of poverty.**

These compounded disadvantages continue into adulthood. **Fewer women with disabilities participate in the labour market compared with men with disabilities** (Figure 12), highlighting how the intersection of disability, gender, and economic vulnerability increases the risk of marginalization and poverty.

FIGURE 10.

People with disabilities, by sex and age groups (percentage)

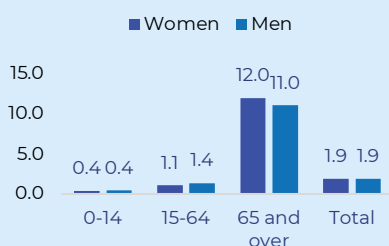


FIGURE 11.

People with disabilities aged 5+ who never attended school, by sex (percentage)

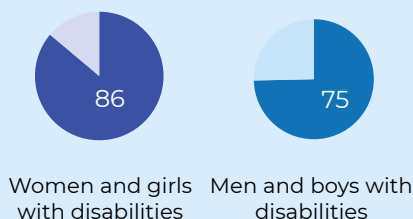
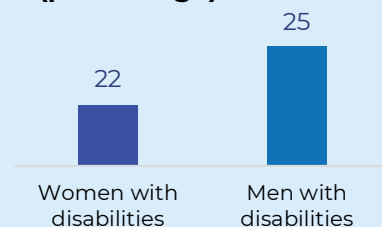


FIGURE 12.

Labour force participation rate of people with disabilities, by sex (percentage)



Source: Timor-Leste Population and Housing Census 2022.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ADVANCING WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT IN BAUCAU

Recognize, reduce, and redistribute unpaid care and subsistence work, especially in rural areas. Strengthen policies and services that acknowledge women's unpaid work and promote a more equal distribution of care responsibilities within households and communities. Prioritize the development of accessible, affordable, and quality care services, including childcare and long-term care, particularly in rural areas, where care responsibilities reinforce women's economic insecurity.

Support rural women's productive livelihoods. Improve women's access to and control over productive resources so that agricultural activities can better contribute to women's incomes, food security and economic resilience.

Promote pathways to decent work, especially in rural areas. Target skilling and employment policies and frameworks to support women's transition from subsistence and vulnerable forms of employment into decent work.

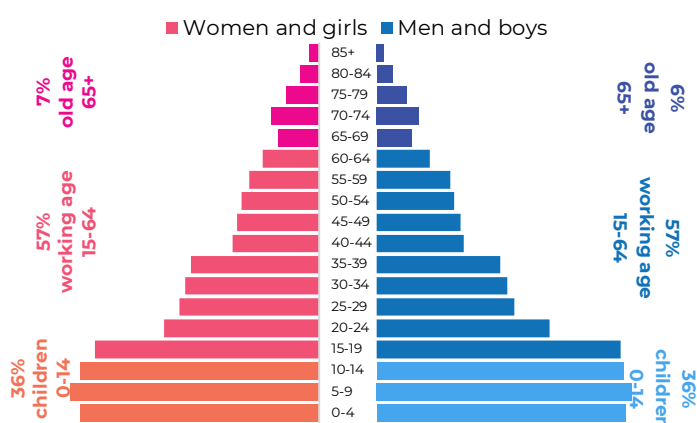
Municipality Gender Profile: Bobonaro

Bobonaro is home to 106,526 people¹, representing 8 per cent of Timor Leste's population. Bobonaro's population is evenly split between women and girls and men and boys, with each accounting for 50 per cent. The municipality is **predominantly rural**, with 88 per cent of residents residing in rural areas, well above the national average of 71 per cent.

Bobonaro's age structure reflects a **feminization of ageing**, with a larger share of women aged 65 and above. At the same time, its demographic profile points to a notably higher demand for childcare

FIGURE 1.

Population, by sex and age groups



Source: Timor-Leste Population and Housing Census 2022.

Gender inequalities begin early in life and accumulate across the life course.

Gender inequalities are rooted in **discriminatory social norms and practices** that influence women's lives from childhood to old age, restricting autonomy, limiting access to education and employment, and reinforcing unequal expectations around caregiving and family formation. In Bobonaro, child marriage remains a significant barrier to gender equality, with **6.7 per cent of women aged 20 to 24 married before age 18**. Between 2015 and 2022, Bobonaro recorded a 2 percentage point decline in child marriage, matching the decline recorded nationally. Child marriage often channels women into early domestic roles, curtailing their opportunities for education and future economic opportunities.



Almost **7% young women** in Bobonaro were **married before age 18**

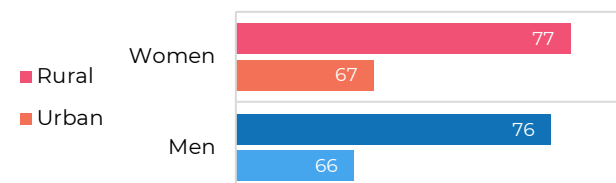
Gender norms around caregiving and early marriage continue to shape young women's trajectories. Women aged 5 and above remain more

services, as **36 per cent of the residents are under 15 years of age** (Figure 1).

For every 100 people in working-age (aged 15-64) in Bobonaro, there are 63 children (aged 0-14) and 12 older persons (aged 65 and above), placing sustained pressure on care systems, particularly childcare. Yet, the demand for care falls unevenly: **women in rural areas support the highest number of dependents**, highlighting persistent gender and geographic inequalities in care responsibilities (Figure 2).

FIGURE 2.

Dependency ratio, by sex and location



Source: Timor-Leste Population and Housing Census 2022.

BOBONARO'S POPULATION STRUCTURE POINTS TO A SUBSTANTIAL DEMAND FOR CARE SERVICES, WITH IMPLICATIONS FOR WOMEN'S ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES BOTH WITHIN THE CARE SECTOR AND ACROSS THE BROADER ECONOMY.

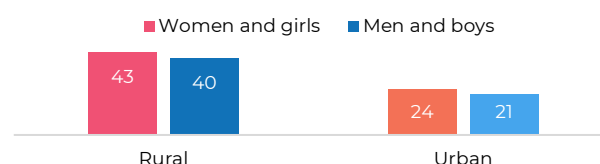
likely than men to have never attended school, especially in rural areas, reinforcing intergenerational cycles of poverty and exclusion (Figure 3). In Bobonaro, 36 per cent of women aged 20-24 are married compared with 13 per cent of men, limiting their chances to continue education.

In Bobonaro,

93% of married women aged 20-24 are not currently attending school compared with **58 per cent of never-married women**.

FIGURE 3.

People aged 5+ who never attended school, by sex (percentage)



Source: Timor-Leste Population and Housing Census 2022.

Older women in Bobonaro, particularly in rural areas, have among the lowest literacy rates in the country,

¹For the purpose of this Gender Profile, only the population living in private households is considered. The population living in collective living quarters represents less than 0.06 per cent of the total population in Timor-Leste. All data is based on the 2022 Timor-Leste Population and Housing Census 2022, unless otherwise stated.

limiting their participation in social, economic and political life (Figure 4). Women's longer life expectancy also means they are more likely to reach older age widowed and economically insecure, facing heightened risks of poverty, isolation, and poor health.

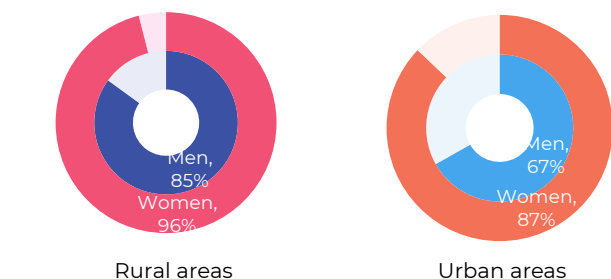
In Bobonaro,

47% of women aged 65+ are widowed compared with 17 per cent of men.

Structural barriers limit women's access to the labour market. In Bobonaro, more women than men are outside the labour force (Figure 5), with over **half of working-age women outside the labour force citing care responsibilities as the main reason** - more than double the share of men (Figure 6). Gender disadvantages are more pronounced **among women in rural areas and those in their prime working years.** Women aged 30-39 are the most likely to be outside the labour force due to caregiving (Figure 7), coinciding with peak childcare responsibilities.

FIGURE 4.

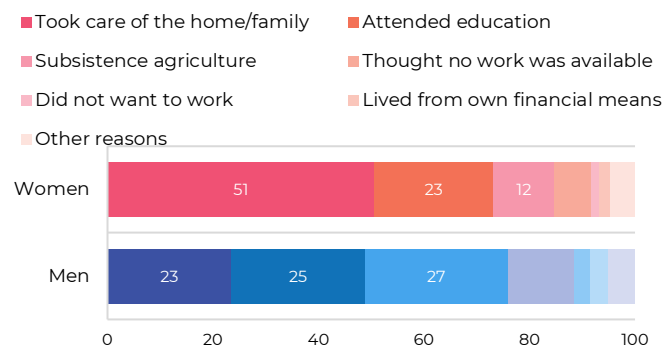
Illiteracy rates among people aged 65+, by sex and location (percentage)



Source: Timor-Leste Population and Housing Census 2022.

FIGURE 6.

Main reason for being outside the labour force, by sex (percentage)²



Source: Timor-Leste Population and Housing Census 2022.

Women's labour force participation remains well below men's (27 versus 38 per cent, respectively), with the widest gender gap among those aged 45-49 years (18 percentage points). While more women in absolute terms are in the labour force in rural areas (6.9 thousand) than in urban areas (1.3 thousand), **labour force participation remains lower in rural settings** (27 compared with 32 per cent), reinforcing the economic vulnerability of rural women.

Care responsibilities intersect with marital status in ways that shape women's labour market outcomes across the life course. The widest gender gap in the employment-to-population ratio is among married individuals, with 33 per cent of women in employment compared with 51 per cent of men. While more married women are in employment compared with those who never married, this partly reflects higher participation in education among the latter.

5 in 10 never-married women cite education as the main reason for being outside the labour force, whereas more than **7 in 10 married women cite caregiving.**

FIGURE 5.

Labour force status among people aged 15-64, by sex (percentage)

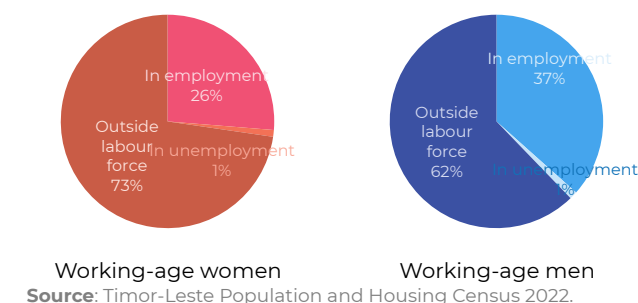
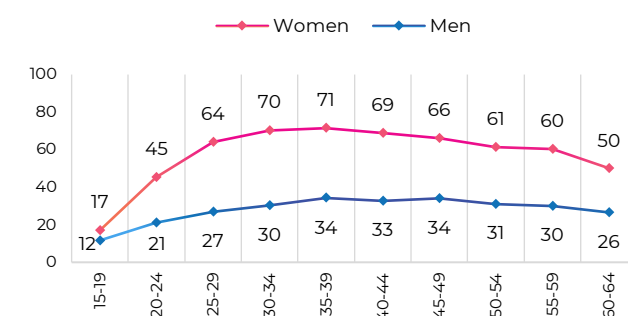


FIGURE 7.

Care responsibilities as the main reason for being outside the labour force, by sex and age groups (percentage)



Source: Timor-Leste Population and Housing Census 2022.

² 'Other reasons' here includes 'was a seasonal worker', 'was disabled, ill, in bad health', 'was pensioner/retired/old age', and 'other reason'.

Even when women enter the workforce, structural barriers restrict women’s access to decent work.

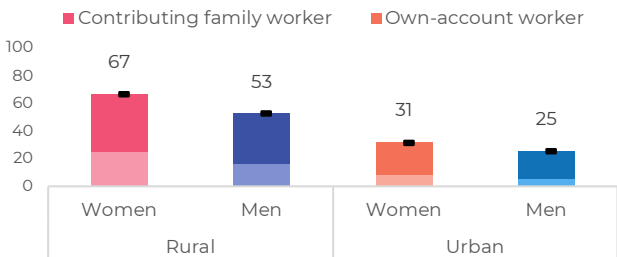
Bobonaro records **one of the highest rates of vulnerable employment among working-age women** and **one of the widest gender gaps in the country**. Women’s continued overrepresentation in vulnerable employment exposes them to greater risks and vulnerabilities over the life cycle, with limited income stability, job protections, and access to social safety nets. Gender disadvantages are more pronounced in rural areas, with Bobonaro having **the highest rate of vulnerable employment among rural women**, alongside the highest share of contributing family workers in the country (Figure 8).

In Bobonaro,

62% of employed working-age women are in vulnerable forms of employment compared with **48 per cent of 10 men**

ECONOMIES THAT PRIORITIZE DECENT WORK ACT AS CATALYSTS FOR WOMEN’S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT, STIMULATING JOB GROWTH BOTH WITHIN THE SECTOR AND BEYOND.

FIGURE 8.
Vulnerable employment, by sex and location (percentage)



Source: Timor-Leste Population and Housing Census 2022.

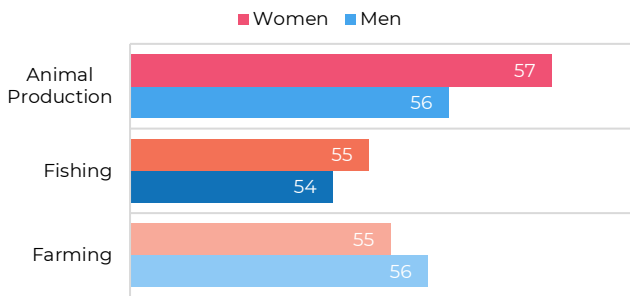
Overall, these patterns reflect structural inequalities that **constrain women’s access to income-generating opportunities** while concentrating their work in subsistence activities and unpaid care. This underscores the need for targeted employment policies that recognize and address unpaid responsibilities, particularly for rural women and those balancing early family formation with economic aspirations.

Subsistence agriculture remains a crucial, yet often overlooked, pillar of women’s economic contributions.

Agriculture remains a key livelihood in Bobonaro, with **27 per cent of working-age people engaged in agricultural activities**, whether for sale or self-consumption. Among those who participate in agriculture, both women and men are more concentrated in own-use production³ (57 per cent of each). However, women’s participation in own-use production exceeds that of men in activities such as fishing and animal production (Figure 9).

Unlike in many other municipalities, engagement in subsistence production does not increase with age, remaining at 56 per cent among older women. Among working-age women engaged in agriculture, own-use production is slightly more prevalent in rural (57 per cent) than urban areas (54 per cent). This pattern partly explains the lower labour force participation in rural areas: women classified as outside the labour force are more likely than their urban counterparts to engage in own-use agricultural production (13 versus 4 per cent). Their contributions often fall outside conventional labour market measures, yet remain central to agricultural production and household food security.

FIGURE 9.
People aged 15-64 engaged in subsistence production, by sex and type (percentage)



Source: Timor-Leste Population and Housing Census 2022.

TO HARNESS DEMOGRAPHIC OPPORTUNITIES, IT IS CRUCIAL TO DISMANTLE STRUCTURAL BARRIERS TO WOMEN’S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT.

Bobonaro’s declining dependency ratio signals a window of economic opportunity, but only if matched by sustained investments in care systems, decent jobs and inclusive policies. The **dependency ratio**, a demographic indicator measuring the number of care dependents relative to the working-age population, **declined from 94 to 75 dependents per 100 working-age people** between 2015 and

³ Subsistence production is here defined as production undertaken only or mainly for own-family consumption; production for sale is defined as production undertaken only or mainly for sale.

2022. This trend points to the potential for a demographic dividend, whereby a relatively larger working-age population can support accelerated economic growth. With sustained investments, **gender-responsive care systems can serve as the cornerstone of inclusive and resilient economies**, improving outcomes for all while ensuring dignity and

equity for both caregivers and care recipients. Expanding access to affordable and quality care services, particularly in rural areas, would reduce women's care responsibilities but also stimulate job growth, boost GDP, and contribute to a more gender-equal world.

Disabilities affect women and men differently, with women often facing intersecting forms of disadvantage that compound across the life course.

In Bobonaro, the prevalence of disability is similar for women and men, and increases substantially with age, where 10.9 per cent of both women and men aged 65 and over live with one or multiple disabilities (Figure 10).

Women and girls with disabilities face significant educational disadvantages, including stigma, lack of inclusive infrastructure, and limited access to assistive devices. These challenges lead to lower educational attendance and higher rates of never having attended school (Figure 11), with long-term implications for skills development, economic independence, and wellbeing. **Limited access to education may, in turn, reduce future employment prospects and reinforce cycles of poverty.**

These compounded disadvantages continue into adulthood. **Fewer women with disabilities participate in the labour market compared with men with disabilities** (Figure 12), highlighting how the intersection of disability, gender, and economic vulnerability increases the risk of marginalization and poverty.

FIGURE 10.

People with disabilities, by sex and age groups (percentage)

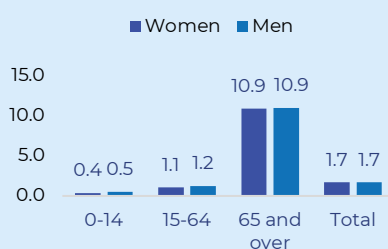


FIGURE 11.

People with disabilities aged 5+ who never attended school, by sex (percentage)

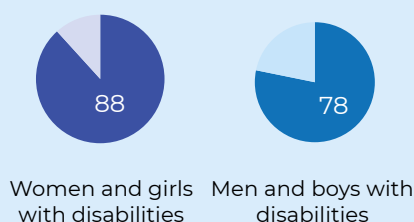
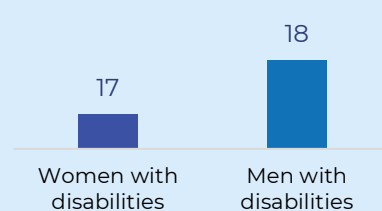


FIGURE 12.

Labour force participation rate of people with disabilities, by sex (percentage)



Source: Timor-Leste Population and Housing Census 2022.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ADVANCING WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT IN BOBONARO

Strengthen women's and girls' education retention and opportunities. Invest in measures that support women's and girls' school retention and progression, especially for girls and young women affected by early marriage, older women, women living in rural areas, and women and girls with disabilities.

Recognize, reduce, and redistribute unpaid care and subsistence work, especially in rural areas. Prioritize the development of accessible, affordable, and quality care services, including childcare and long-term care, particularly in rural areas, where care responsibilities reinforce women's economic insecurity.

Promote pathways to decent work, especially for women in rural areas. Target skilling and employment policies and frameworks to support women's transition from unpaid work and vulnerable forms of employment into decent work.

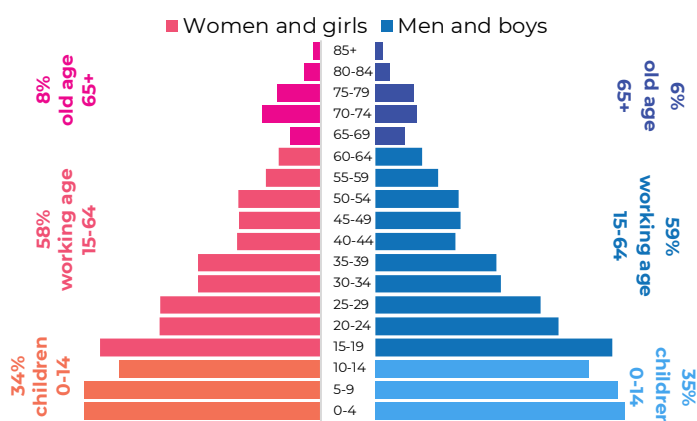
Municipality Gender Profile: Covalima

Covalima is home to 73,799 people¹, representing 6 per cent of Timor-Leste's population. Women and girls account for 49 per cent of Covalima's population, compared with 51 per cent of men and boys. The municipality is **predominantly rural**, with 86 per cent of residents residing in rural areas, well above the national average of 71 per cent.

Covalima's age structure reflects a **feminization of ageing**, with a larger share of women aged 65 and above. At the same time, its demographic profile points to a notably higher demand for childcare

FIGURE 1.

Population, by sex and age groups



Source: Timor-Leste Population and Housing Census 2022.

Gender inequalities begin early in life and accumulate across the life course.

Gender inequalities are rooted in **discriminatory social norms and practices** that influence women's lives from childhood to old age, restricting autonomy, limiting access to education and employment, and reinforcing unequal expectations around caregiving and family formation. In Covalima, child marriage remains a significant barrier to gender equality. The municipality has **the second-highest rate in Timor-Leste, with 9 per cent of women aged 20 to 24 married before age 18**. While the national rate declined by nearly 2 percentage points between 2015 and 2022, progress in Covalima has been marginal (a 0.1 percentage point decline). Child marriage often channels women into early domestic roles, curtailing their opportunities for education and future economic opportunities.



Almost **1 in 10 young women** in Covalima were **married before age 18**

services, as **35 per cent of the residents are under 15 years of age** (Figure 1).

For every 100 people in working-age (aged 15-64) in Covalima, there are 59 children (aged 0-14) and 12 older persons (aged 65 and above), placing sustained pressure on care systems, particularly childcare. Yet, the demand for care falls unevenly: **women in rural areas support the highest number of dependents**, highlighting persistent gender and geographic inequalities in care responsibilities (Figure 2).

FIGURE 2.

Dependency ratio, by sex and location



Source: Timor-Leste Population and Housing Census 2022.

COVALIMA'S POPULATION STRUCTURE POINTS TO A SUBSTANTIAL DEMAND FOR CARE SERVICES, WITH IMPLICATIONS FOR WOMEN'S ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES BOTH WITHIN THE CARE SECTOR AND ACROSS THE BROADER ECONOMY.

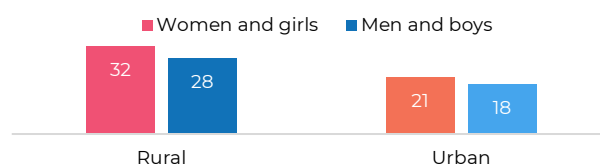
Gender norms around caregiving and early marriage continue to shape young women's trajectories. Women aged 5 and above remain more likely than men to have never attended school, with wider gender gaps in rural areas, reinforcing intergenerational cycles of poverty and exclusion (Figure 3). Nearly half of women aged 20-24 are married compared with 18 per cent of men, limiting their chances to continue education.

In Covalima,

96% of married women aged 20-24 are not currently attending school compared with **69 per cent of never-married women**.

FIGURE 3.

People aged 5+ who never attended school, by sex (percentage)



Source: Timor-Leste Population and Housing Census 2022.

¹For the purpose of this Gender Profile, only the population living in private households is considered. The population living in collective living quarters represents less than 0.06 per cent of the total population in Timor-Leste. All data is based on the 2022 Timor-Leste Population and Housing Census 2022, unless otherwise stated.

Older women in Covalima, particularly in rural areas, have among the lowest literacy rates in the country, limiting their participation in social, economic and political life (Figure 4). Women's longer life expectancy also means they are more likely to reach older age widowed and economically insecure, facing heightened risks of poverty, isolation, and poor health.

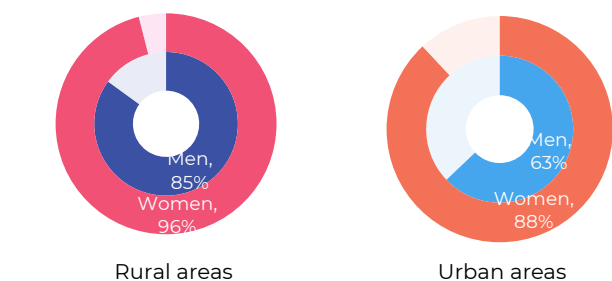
In Covalima,

50% of women aged 65+ are widowed compared **with 17 per cent of men.**

Structural barriers limit women's access to the labour market. In Covalima, more women than men are outside the labour force (Figure 5), with over **half of working-age women outside the labour force citing care responsibilities as the main reason** - more than double the share of men (Figure 6). Gender disadvantages are more pronounced **among women in rural areas and those in their prime working years.** Women aged 30-34 are the most likely to be outside the labour force due to caregiving (Figure 7), coinciding with peak childcare responsibilities.

FIGURE 4.

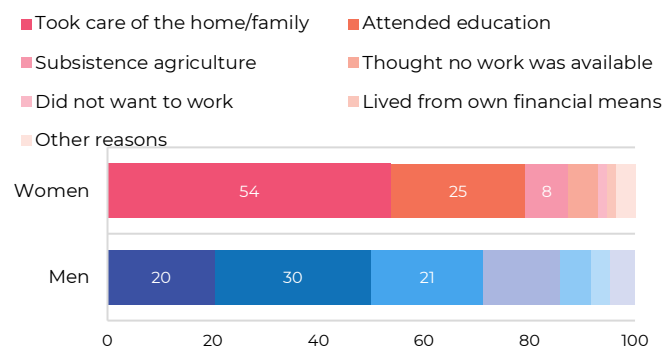
Illiteracy rates among people aged 65+, by sex and location (percentage)



Source: Timor-Leste Population and Housing Census 2022.

FIGURE 6.

Main reason for being outside the labour force, by sex (percentage)²



Source: Timor-Leste Population and Housing Census 2022.

Women's labour force participation remains well below men's (27 versus 41 per cent, respectively), with the widest gender gap among those aged 55-59 years (27 percentage points). While more women in absolute terms are in the labour force in rural areas (4.6 thousand) than in urban areas (1.2 thousand), **labour force participation remains lower in rural settings** (26 compared with 36 per cent), reinforcing the economic vulnerability of rural women.

Care responsibilities intersect with marital status in ways that shape women's labour market outcomes across the life course. The widest gender gap in the employment-to-population ratio is among married individuals, with 34 per cent of women in employment compared with 57 per cent of men. While more married women are in employment compared with those who never married, this partly reflects higher participation in education among the latter.

More than **6 in 10 never-married women cite education** as the main reason for being outside the labour force, whereas nearly **8 in 10 married women cite caregiving.**

FIGURE 5.

Labour force status among people aged 15-64, by sex (percentage)

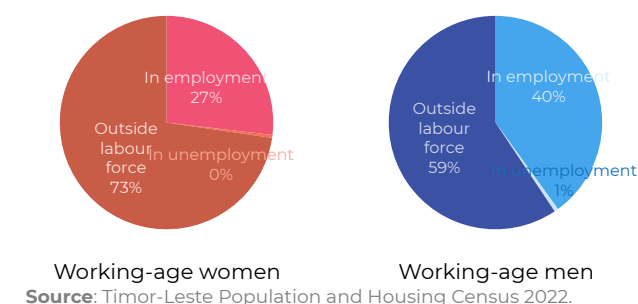
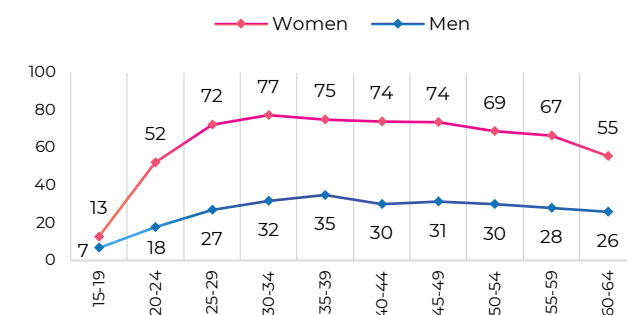


FIGURE 7.

Care responsibilities as the main reason for being outside the labour force, by sex and age groups (percentage)



Source: Timor-Leste Population and Housing Census 2022.

² 'Other reasons' here includes 'was a seasonal worker', 'was disabled, ill, in bad health', 'was pensioner/retired/old age', and 'other reason'.

Even when women enter the workforce, structural barriers restrict women’s access to decent work.

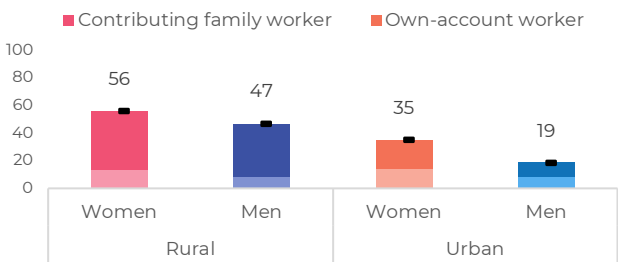
Women’s continued overrepresentation in vulnerable employment exposes them to greater risks and vulnerabilities across their life cycle, with limited income stability, job protections, and access to social safety nets. Significant urban-rural disparities continue to pose challenges, with more women in rural areas being contributing family workers or own account workers (Figure 8).

In Covalima,

52% of employed working-age women are in vulnerable forms of employment compared with **41 per cent of 10 men**

ECONOMIES THAT PRIORITIZE DECENT WORK ACT AS CATALYSTS FOR WOMEN’S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT, STIMULATING JOB GROWTH BOTH WITHIN THE SECTOR AND BEYOND.

FIGURE 8. Vulnerable employment, by sex and location (percentage)



Source: Timor-Leste Population and Housing Census 2022.

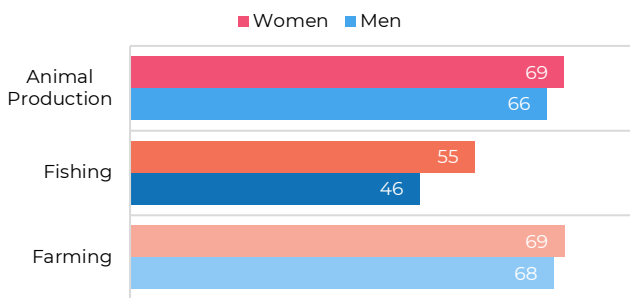
Overall, these patterns reflect structural inequalities that **constrain women’s access to income-generating opportunities** while concentrating their work in subsistence activities and unpaid care. This underscores the need for targeted employment policies that recognize and address unpaid responsibilities, particularly for rural women and those balancing early family formation with economic aspirations.

Subsistence agriculture remains a crucial, yet often overlooked, pillar of women’s economic contributions.

Agriculture is a key livelihood in Covalima, with **nearly 4 in 10 working-age people engaged in agricultural activities**, whether for sale or self-consumption. While women are less likely than men to participate overall, those who do are more concentrated in own-use production³ (70 per cent of women compared with 67 per cent of men). This is particularly evident in activities such as fishing and animal production, where women’s participation in own-use production exceeds that of men (Figure 9).

Engagement in subsistence production increases with age, particularly among women in old age (76 per cent), underscoring the role of own-use production as a livelihood strategy across the life course. Among working-age women engaged in agriculture, it is also more prevalent in rural (71 per cent) than urban areas (66 per cent). This pattern partly explains the lower labour force participation in rural areas: women classified as outside the labour force are more likely than their urban counterparts to engage in own-use agricultural production (19 versus 15 per cent). Their contributions often fall outside conventional labour market measures, yet remain central to agricultural production and household food security.

FIGURE 9. People aged 15-64 engaged in subsistence production, by sex and type (percentage)



Source: Timor-Leste Population and Housing Census 2022.

TO HARNESS DEMOGRAPHIC OPPORTUNITIES, IT IS CRUCIAL TO DISMANTLE STRUCTURAL BARRIERS TO WOMEN’S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT.

Covalima’s declining dependency ratio signals a window of economic opportunity, but only if matched by sustained investments in care systems, decent jobs and inclusive policies. The **dependency ratio**, a demographic indicator measuring the number of care dependents relative to the working-

³ Subsistence production is here defined as production undertaken only or mainly for own-family consumption; production for sale is defined as production undertaken only or mainly for sale.

age population, **declined from 86 to 72 dependents per 100 working-age people** between 2015 and 2022. This trend points to the potential for a demographic dividend, whereby a relatively larger working-age population can support accelerated economic growth. With sustained investments, **gender-responsive care systems can serve as the cornerstone of inclusive and resilient economies,**

improving outcomes for all while ensuring dignity and equity for both caregivers and care recipients. Expanding access to affordable and quality care services, particularly in rural areas, would reduce women's care responsibilities but also stimulate job growth, boost GDP, and contribute to a more gender-equal world.

Disabilities affect women and men differently, with women often facing intersecting forms of disadvantage that compound across the life course.

In Covalima, **women are slightly more likely than men to experience one or multiple disabilities in older age**, with 11 per cent of women aged 65 and over living with disabilities compared with 10 per cent of men (Figure 10).

Women and girls with disabilities face significant educational disadvantages, including stigma, lack of inclusive infrastructure, and limited access to assistive devices. These challenges lead to lower educational attendance and higher rates of never having attended school (Figure 11), with long-term implications for skills development, economic independence, and wellbeing. **Limited access to education may, in turn, reduce future employment prospects and reinforce cycles of poverty.**

These compounded disadvantages continue into adulthood. **Fewer women with disabilities participate in the labour market compared with men with disabilities** (Figure 12) – the lowest labour force participation rate among women with disabilities in the country - highlighting how the intersection of disability, gender, and economic vulnerability increases the risk of marginalization and poverty.

FIGURE 10.

People with disabilities, by sex and age groups (percentage)

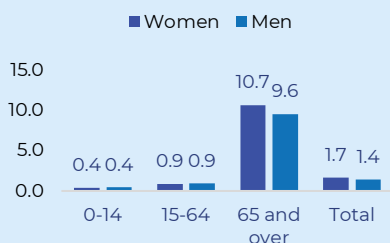


FIGURE 11.

People with disabilities aged 5+ who never attended school, by sex (percentage)

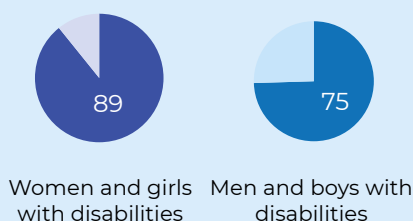
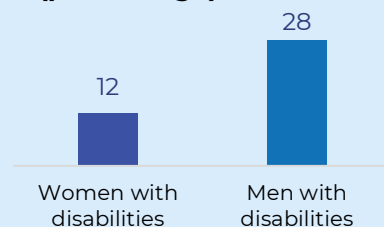


FIGURE 12.

Labour force participation rate of people with disabilities, by sex (percentage)



Source: Timor-Leste Population and Housing Census 2022.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ADVANCING WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT IN COVALIMA

Support women's and girls' education. Invest in measures that protect and support women's and girls' school retention and progression and prevention of early marriage.

Recognize, reduce, and redistribute unpaid care and subsistence work, especially in rural areas. Prioritize the development of accessible, affordable, and quality care services, including childcare and long-term care, particularly in rural areas, where care responsibilities reinforce women's economic insecurity.

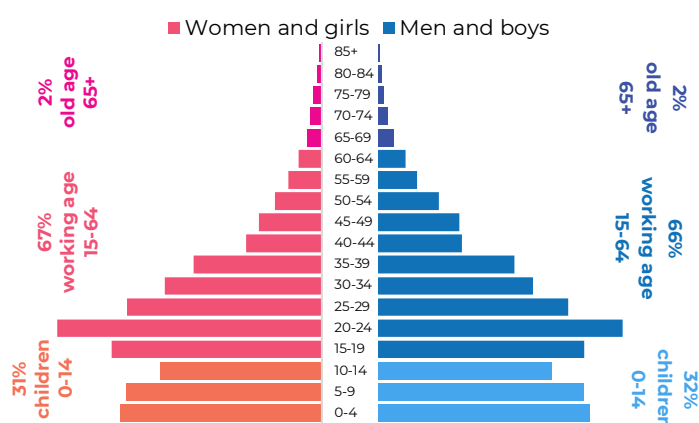
Promote pathways to decent work, especially in rural areas. Target skilling and employment policies and frameworks to support women's transition from subsistence and vulnerable forms of employment into decent work.

Municipality Gender Profile: Dili

Dili is the municipality with the largest population (324,738¹), representing 24 per cent of Timor-Leste's population and making it by far the most populous municipality in the country. Women and girls account for 49 per cent of Dili's population, compared with 51 per cent of men and boys. The municipality is **predominantly urban**, with 82 per cent of residents residing in urban areas, in stark contrast to the national distribution.

FIGURE 1.

Population, by sex and age groups



Source: Timor-Leste Population and Housing Census 2022.

Gender inequalities begin early in life and accumulate across the life course.

Gender inequalities are rooted in **discriminatory social norms and practices** that influence women's lives from childhood to old age, restricting autonomy, limiting access to education and employment, and reinforcing unequal expectations around caregiving and family formation. Despite Dili having the lowest rate in Timor-Leste, child marriage remains a significant barrier to gender equality, with **2.3 per cent of women aged 20 to 24 married before age 18**. While the national rate declined by nearly 2 percentage points between 2015 and 2022, progress in Dili has been more limited (a 0.7 percentage point decline). Child marriage often channels women into early domestic roles, curtailing their opportunities for education and future economic opportunities.



In Dili **2.3% of young women** were **married before age 18**

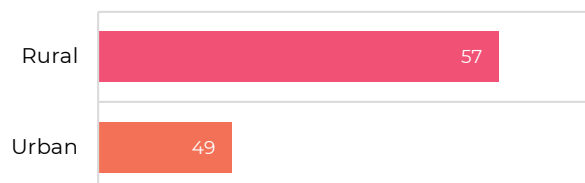
Gender norms around caregiving and early marriage continue to shape young women's trajectories. While levels of school exclusion are

Dili's demographic profile points to a notably higher demand for childcare services, as **31 per cent of the residents are under 15 years of age** (Figure 1).

For every 100 people in working-age (aged 15-64) in Dili, there are 47 children (aged 0-14) and 3 older persons (aged 65 and above). While this reflects more moderate pressure on care systems relative to other municipalities, there pressures remain more acute in rural areas, pointing to persistent geographic inequalities in care demands (Figure 2).

FIGURE 2.

Dependency ratio, by location



Source: Timor-Leste Population and Housing Census 2022.

DILI'S POPULATION STRUCTURE POINTS TO A SUBSTANTIAL DEMAND FOR CARE SERVICES, WITH IMPLICATIONS FOR WOMEN'S ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES BOTH WITHIN THE CARE SECTOR AND ACROSS THE BROADER ECONOMY.

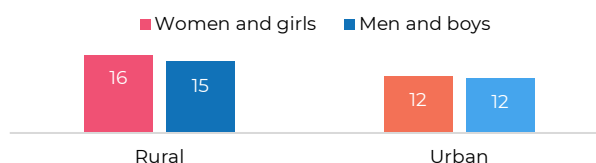
relatively lower compared to other municipalities, women aged 5 and above remain more likely than men to have never attended school, with wider gender gaps in rural areas, reinforcing intergenerational cycles of poverty and exclusion (Figure 3). More women aged 20-24 are married compared with men (18 versus 9 per cent, respectively) limiting their chances to continue education.

In Dili,

78% of married women aged 20-24 are not currently attending school compared with **31 per cent of never-married women**.

FIGURE 3.

People aged 5+ who never attended school, by sex (percentage)



Source: Timor-Leste Population and Housing Census 2022.

¹For the purpose of this Gender Profile, only the population living in private households is considered. The population living in collective living quarters represents less than 0.06 per cent of the total population in Timor-Leste. All data is based on the 2022 Timor-Leste Population and Housing Census 2022, unless otherwise stated.

Older women in Dili face literacy disadvantages in later life, particularly in rural areas (Figure 4). While Dili presents the lowest illiteracy rates across municipalities for both sexes, gender gaps remain pronounced, limiting older women's participation in social, economic and political life. Women's longer life expectancy also means they are more likely to reach older age widowed and economically insecure, facing heightened risks of poverty, isolation, and poor health.

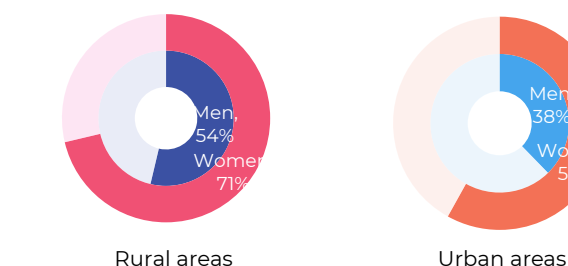
In Dili,

44% of women aged 65+ are widowed compared with **14 per cent of men**.

Structural barriers limit women's access to the labour market. In Dili, more women than men are outside the labour force (Figure 5). Unlike most municipalities, working-age women who are outside the labour force are almost as likely to cite education as caregiving. Yet **42 per cent of working-age women outside the labour force continue to cite care responsibilities as the main reason** - more than double the share of men (Figure 6). Gender gaps are more pronounced **among women in their prime working years**. Women aged 35-39 are the most likely to be outside the labour force due to caregiving

FIGURE 4.

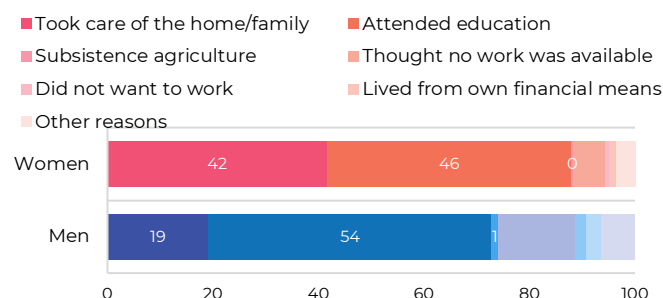
Illiteracy rates among people aged 65+, by sex and location (percentage)



Source: Timor-Leste Population and Housing Census 2022.

FIGURE 6.

Main reason for being outside the labour force, by sex (percentage)²



Source: Timor-Leste Population and Housing Census 2022.

(Figure 7), coinciding with peak childcare responsibilities.

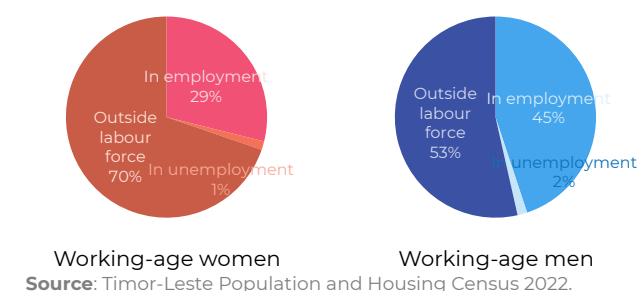
Women's labour force participation remains well below men's (30 versus 46 per cent, respectively), leaving Dili with one of the widest gender gaps across municipalities. In particular, those aged 55-59 years record the widest gender gap (27 percentage points). Labour force participation is slightly lower in urban than rural areas (30 compared with 32 per cent), suggesting that urban concentration alone does not remove barriers to women's economic participation.

Care responsibilities intersect with marital status in ways that shape women's labour market outcomes across the life course. The widest gender gap in the employment-to-population ratio is among married individuals, where Dili records the largest gap across municipalities: 39 per cent of married women are in employment compared with 71 per cent of married men. While more married women are in employment compared with those who never married, this partly reflects higher participation in education among the latter.

Almost **8 in 10 never-married women cite education** as the main reason for being outside the labour force, whereas more than **8 in 10 married women cite caregiving**.

FIGURE 5.

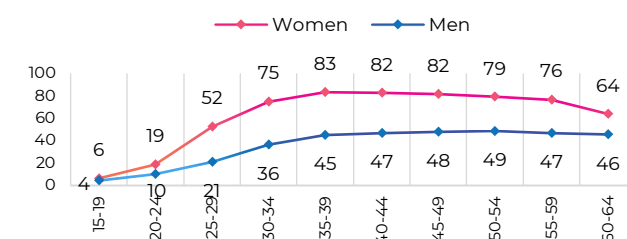
Labour force status among people aged 15-64, by sex (percentage)



Source: Timor-Leste Population and Housing Census 2022.

FIGURE 7.

Care responsibilities as the main reason for being outside the labour force, by sex and age groups (percentage)



Source: Timor-Leste Population and Housing Census 2022.

² 'Other reasons' here includes 'was a seasonal worker', 'was disabled, ill, in bad health', 'was pensioner/retired/old age', and 'other reason'.

Even when women enter the workforce, structural barriers restrict women's access to decent work.

While Dili has the lowest rate for vulnerable employment for both women and men across municipalities, women are still more likely than men to be in vulnerable employment, heightening their risks and vulnerabilities across their life cycle, with limited income stability, job protections, and access to social safety nets. Urban-rural disparities continue to pose challenges, with more women in rural areas being contributing family workers or own account workers (Figure 8).

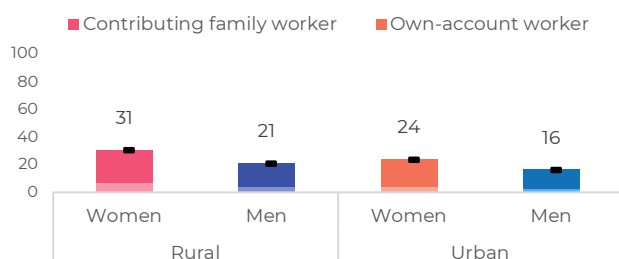
In Dili,

25% of employed working-age women are in vulnerable forms of employment compared with **17 per cent of 10 men**

ECONOMIES THAT PRIORITIZE DECENT WORK ACT AS CATALYSTS FOR WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT, STIMULATING JOB GROWTH BOTH WITHIN THE SECTOR AND BEYOND.

FIGURE 8.

Vulnerable employment, by sex and location (percentage)



Source: Timor-Leste Population and Housing Census 2022.

Overall, these patterns reflect structural inequalities that **constrain women's access to income-generating opportunities** while concentrating their work in subsistence activities and unpaid care. This underscores the need for targeted employment policies that recognize and address unpaid responsibilities, particularly for rural women and those balancing early family formation with economic aspirations.

TO HARNESS DEMOGRAPHIC OPPORTUNITIES, IT IS CRUCIAL TO DISMANTLE STRUCTURAL BARRIERS TO WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT.

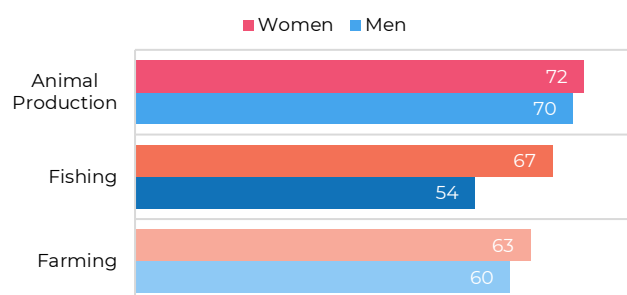
Subsistence agriculture remains a crucial, yet often overlooked, pillar of women's economic contributions.

In Dili, **8 per cent of working-age people are engaged in agricultural activities**, whether for sale or self-consumption, reaching 16 per cent in rural areas – the lowest share in the country. While women are less likely than men to participate overall, those who do are more concentrated in own-use production³ (69 versus 66 per cent, respectively). This is particularly evident in fishing, where women's participation in own-use production significantly exceeds that of men (67 versus 54 per cent, respectively) (Figure 9).

Engagement in subsistence production increases with age, reaching 74 per cent among older women, underscoring the role of own-use production as a livelihood strategy across the life course. Among working-age women engaged in agriculture, own-use production is also more prevalent in rural (70 per cent) than urban areas (68 per cent). Although smaller in scale, these contributions remain central to agricultural production and household food security, while often falling outside conventional labour market measures.

FIGURE 9.

People aged 15-64 engaged in subsistence production, by sex and type (percentage)



Source: Timor-Leste Population and Housing Census 2022.

Dili's declining dependency ratio signals a window of economic opportunity, but only if matched by sustained investments in care systems, decent jobs and inclusive policies. The **dependency ratio**, a demographic indicator measuring the number of care dependents relative to the working-age population, **declined from 57 to 51 dependents per 100 working-age people** between 2015 and 2022. This trend points to the potential for a demographic dividend, whereby a relatively larger working-age population can support accelerated economic growth. With sustained investments, **gender-responsive care systems can serve as the**

³ Subsistence production is here defined as production undertaken only or mainly for own-family consumption; production for sale is defined as production undertaken only or mainly for sale.

cornerstone of inclusive and resilient economies, improving outcomes for all while ensuring dignity and equity for both caregivers and care recipients. Expanding access to affordable and quality care

services, particularly in rural areas, would reduce women's care responsibilities but also stimulate job growth, boost GDP, and contribute to a more gender-equal world.

Disabilities affect women and men differently, with women often facing intersecting forms of disadvantage that compound across the life course.

While Dili has the lowest overall disability prevalence across municipalities, **women are slightly more likely than men to experience one or multiple disabilities in older age**, with 9 per cent of women aged 65 and over living with disabilities compared with 8 per cent of men (Figure 10).

Women and girls with disabilities face significant educational disadvantages, including stigma, lack of inclusive infrastructure, and limited access to assistive devices. These challenges lead to lower educational attendance and higher rates of never having attended school (Figure 11), with long-term implications for skills development, economic independence, and wellbeing. **Limited access to education may, in turn, reduce future employment prospects and reinforce cycles of poverty.**

These compounded disadvantages continue into adulthood. **Fewer women with disabilities participate in the labour market compared with men with disabilities** (Figure 12) highlighting how the intersection of disability, gender, and economic vulnerability increases the risk of marginalization and poverty.

FIGURE 10.

People with disabilities, by sex and age groups (percentage)

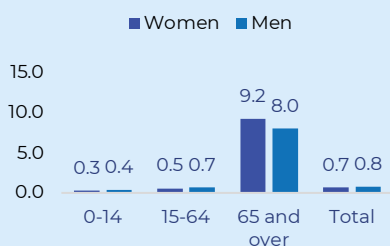


FIGURE 11.

People with disabilities aged 5+ who never attended school, by sex (percentage)

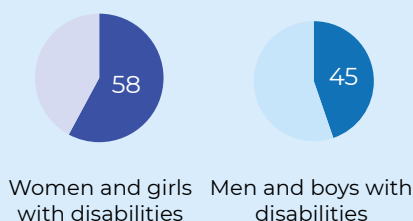
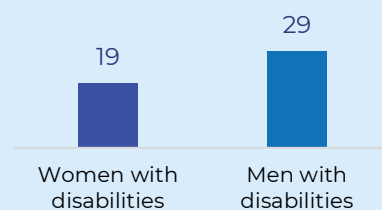


FIGURE 12.

Labour force participation rate of people with disabilities, by sex (percentage)



Source: Timor-Leste Population and Housing Census 2022.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ADVANCING WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT IN DILI

Recognize, reduce, and redistribute unpaid care work. Prioritize the development of accessible, affordable, and high-quality care services, including childcare and care-friendly employment arrangements, particularly for married women who face large employment gaps.

Strengthen women's labour force participation and re-entry. Invest in measures that strengthen women's transitions into the labour market, including support for re-entry after care-related interruptions.

Promote pathways to decent work. Target skilling and employment policies and frameworks to support women's transition from vulnerable forms of employment into decent work, including for women with disabilities.

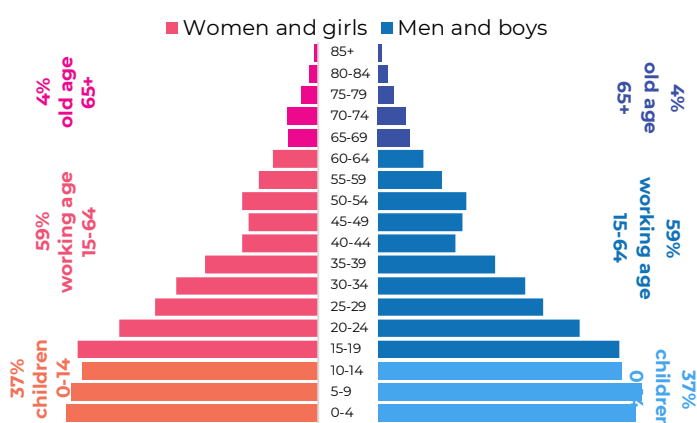
Municipality Gender Profile: Ermera

Ermera is home to 137,589 people¹, representing 10 per cent of Timor Leste's population and making it one of the largest municipalities in the country. Women and girls account for 49 per cent of Ermera's population, compared with 51 per cent of men and boys. The municipality is **almost entirely rural**, with 91 per cent of residents residing in rural areas, well above the national average of 71 per cent.

Ermera's demographic profile points to a notably higher demand for childcare services, as **37 per cent**

FIGURE 1.

Population, by sex and age groups



Source: Timor-Leste Population and Housing Census 2022.

Gender inequalities begin early in life and accumulate across the life course.

Gender inequalities are rooted in **discriminatory social norms and practices** that influence women's lives from childhood to old age, restricting autonomy, limiting access to education and employment, and reinforcing unequal expectations around caregiving and family formation. In Ermera, child marriage remains a significant barrier to gender equality, with **5 per cent of women aged 20 to 24 married before age 18**. At the same time, the municipality has seen notable progress, with the rate of child marriage declining by almost 4 percentage points between 2015 and 2022, compared with a nearly 2 percentage point decline recorded nationally. Child marriage often channels women into early domestic roles, curtailing their opportunities for education and future economic opportunities.



In Ermera **1 in 20 young women** were **married before age 18**

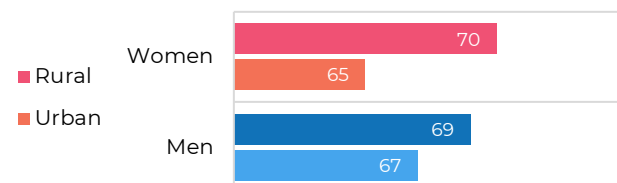
Gender norms around caregiving and early marriage continue to shape young women's

of the residents are under 15 years of age (Figure 1).

For every 100 people in working-age (aged 15-64) in Ermera, there are 62 children (aged 0-14) and 7 older persons (aged 65 and above), placing sustained pressure on care systems, particularly childcare. Yet, the demand for care falls unevenly: **women in rural areas support the highest number of dependents**, highlighting persistent gender and geographic inequalities in care responsibilities (Figure 2).

FIGURE 2.

Dependency ratio, by sex and location



Source: Timor-Leste Population and Housing Census 2022.

ERMERA'S POPULATION STRUCTURE POINTS TO A SUBSTANTIAL DEMAND FOR CARE SERVICES, WITH IMPLICATIONS FOR WOMEN'S ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES BOTH WITHIN THE CARE SECTOR AND ACROSS THE BROADER ECONOMY.

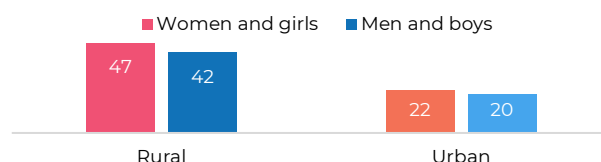
trajectories. Women aged 5 and above remain more likely than men to have never attended school, with wider gender gaps in rural areas, reinforcing intergenerational cycles of poverty and exclusion (Figure 3). In Ermera, 32 per cent of women aged 20-24 are married compared with 13 per cent of men, limiting their chances to continue education.

In Ermera,

90% of married women aged 20-24 are not currently attending school compared with **50 per cent of never-married women.**

FIGURE 3.

People aged 5+ who never attended school, by sex (percentage)



Source: Timor-Leste Population and Housing Census 2022.

Older women face very high illiteracy rates, particularly in rural areas, limiting their participation

¹For the purpose of this Gender Profile, only the population living in private households is considered. The population living in collective living quarters represents less than 0.06 per cent of the total population in Timor-Leste. All data is based on the 2022 Timor-Leste Population and Housing Census 2022, unless otherwise stated.

in social, economic and political life (Figure 4). Women's longer life expectancy also means they are more likely to reach older age widowed and economically insecure, facing heightened risks of poverty, isolation, and poor health.

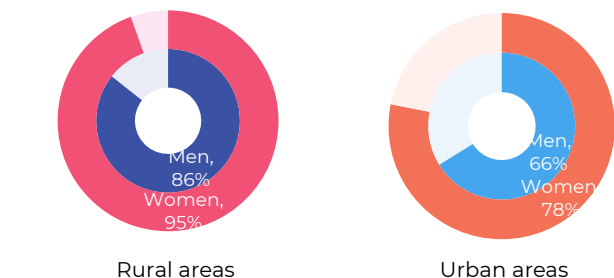
In Ermera,

50% of women aged 65+ are widowed compared with **18 per cent of men**.

Structural barriers limit women's access to the labour market. In Ermera, more women than men are outside the labour force (Figure 5) – one of the highest shares in the country. **Among working-age women outside the labour force, 44 per cent cite care responsibilities as the main reason** compared with 27 per cent of men (Figure 6). Gender gaps are more pronounced **among women in rural areas and those in their prime working years**. Women aged 30-44 are the most likely to be outside the labour force due to caregiving (Figure 7), coinciding with peak childcare responsibilities.

Women's labour force participation remains well below men's (26 versus 35 per cent, respectively), **FIGURE 4.**

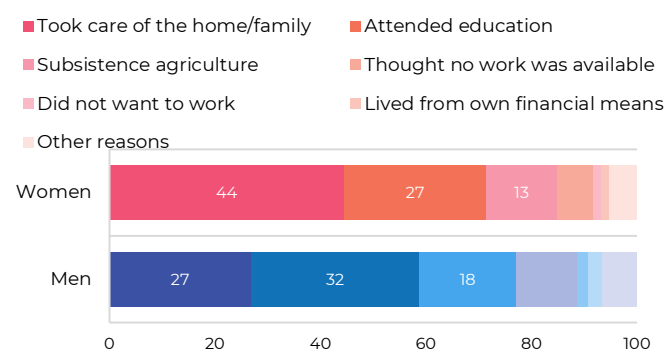
Illiteracy rates among people aged 65+, by sex and location (percentage)



Source: Timor-Leste Population and Housing Census 2022.

FIGURE 6.

Main reason for being outside the labour force, by sex (percentage)²



Source: Timor-Leste Population and Housing Census 2022.

with the widest gender gap among those aged 30-39 years (14 percentage points). While more women in absolute terms are in the labour force in rural areas (9 thousand) than in urban areas (1.3 thousand), **labour force participation remains lower in rural settings** (25 compared with 33 per cent), reinforcing the economic vulnerability of rural women.

Care responsibilities intersect with marital status in ways that shape women's labour market outcomes across the life course. The widest gender gap in the employment-to-population ratio is among married individuals, with 31 per cent of women in employment compared with 44 per cent of men. While more married women are in employment compared with those who never married, this partly reflects higher participation in education among the latter.

More than **5 in 10 never-married women cite education** as the main reason for being outside the labour force, whereas nearly **7 in 10 married women cite caregiving**.

FIGURE 5.

Labour force status among people aged 15-64, by sex (percentage)

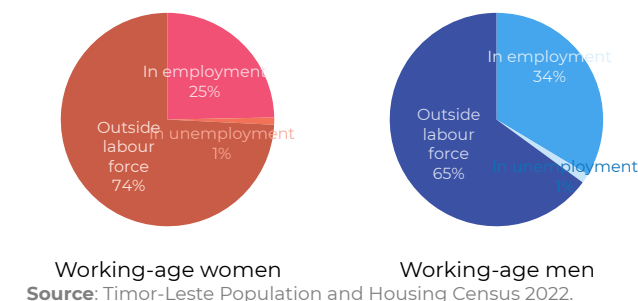
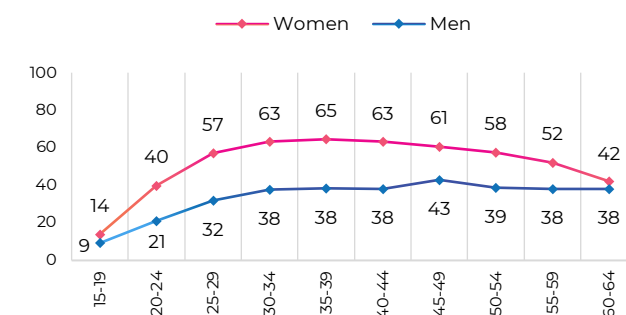


FIGURE 7.

Care responsibilities as the main reason for being outside the labour force, by sex and age groups (percentage)



Source: Timor-Leste Population and Housing Census 2022.

² 'Other reasons' here includes 'was a seasonal worker', 'was disabled, ill, in bad health', 'was pensioner/retired/old age', and 'other reason'.

Even when women enter the workforce, structural barriers restrict women’s access to decent work.

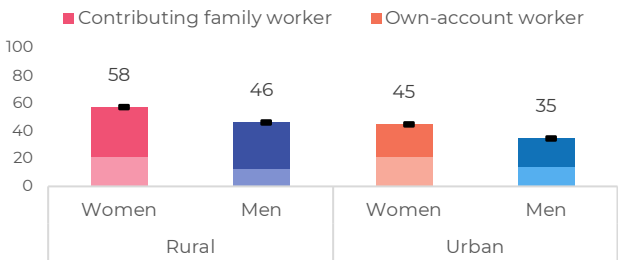
Women’s continued overrepresentation in vulnerable employment exposes them to greater risks and vulnerabilities across their life cycle, with limited income stability, job protections, and access to social safety nets. Urban-rural disparities continue to pose challenges, with more women in rural areas being contributing family workers or own account workers (Figure 8).

In Ermera,

56% of employed working-age women are in vulnerable forms of employment compared with **45 per cent of 10 men**

ECONOMIES THAT PRIORITIZE DECENT WORK ACT AS CATALYSTS FOR WOMEN’S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT, STIMULATING JOB GROWTH BOTH WITHIN THE SECTOR AND BEYOND.

FIGURE 8.
Vulnerable employment, by sex and location (percentage)



Source: Timor-Leste Population and Housing Census 2022.

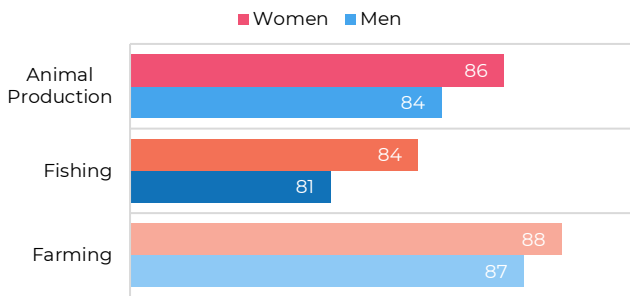
Overall, these patterns reflect structural inequalities that **constrain women’s access to income-generating opportunities** while concentrating their work in subsistence activities and unpaid care. This underscores the need for targeted employment policies that recognize and address unpaid responsibilities, particularly for rural women and those balancing early family formation with economic aspirations.

Subsistence agriculture remains a crucial, yet often overlooked, pillar of women’s economic contributions.

Agriculture remains a key livelihood in Ermera, with **38 per cent of working-age people engaged in agricultural activities**, whether for sale or self-consumption. While women are less likely than men to participate overall, those who do are slightly more concentrated in own-use production³ (87 versus 86 per cent, respectively) – the highest share in the country. This pattern is also evident across farming, fishing and animal production, where women’s own-use shares are consistently higher than men’s (Figure 9).

Engagement in subsistence production increases with age, reaching 89 per cent among older women, underscoring the role of own-use production as a livelihood strategy across the life course. Among working-age women engaged in agriculture, own-use production is also more prevalent in rural (88 per cent) than urban areas (77 per cent). This pattern partly explains the lower labour force participation in rural areas: women classified as outside the labour force are more likely than their urban counterparts to engage in own-use agricultural production (28 versus 15 per cent). Their contributions often fall outside conventional labour market measures, yet remain central to agricultural production and household food security.

FIGURE 9.
People aged 15-64 engaged in subsistence production, by sex and type (percentage)



Source: Timor-Leste Population and Housing Census 2022.

TO HARNESS DEMOGRAPHIC OPPORTUNITIES, IT IS CRUCIAL TO DISMANTLE STRUCTURAL BARRIERS TO WOMEN’S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT.

Ermera’s declining dependency ratio signals a window of economic opportunity, but only if matched by sustained investments in care systems, decent jobs and inclusive policies. The **dependency ratio**, a demographic indicator measuring the

³ Subsistence production is here defined as production undertaken only or mainly for own-family consumption; production for sale is defined as production undertaken only or mainly for sale.

number of care dependents relative to the working-age population, **declined from 87 to 69 dependents per 100 working-age people** between 2015 and 2022. This trend points to the potential for a demographic dividend, whereby a relatively larger working-age population can support accelerated economic growth. With sustained investments, **gender-responsive care systems can serve as the**

cornerstone of inclusive and resilient economies, improving outcomes for all while ensuring dignity and equity for both caregivers and care recipients. Expanding access to affordable and quality care services, particularly in rural areas, would reduce women's care responsibilities but also stimulate job growth, boost GDP, and contribute to a more gender-equal world.

Disabilities affect women and men differently, with women often facing intersecting forms of disadvantage that compound across the life course.

In Ermera, disability prevalence is broadly similar for women and men overall but rises sharply in older age, with **women being more likely than men to experience one or multiple disabilities in older age** (Figure 10).

Women and girls with disabilities face significant educational disadvantages, including stigma, lack of inclusive infrastructure, and limited access to assistive devices. These challenges lead to lower educational attendance and higher rates of never having attended school (Figure 9), with long-term implications for skills development, economic independence, and wellbeing. **Limited access to education may, in turn, reduce future employment prospects and reinforce cycles of poverty.**

These compounded disadvantages continue into adulthood. **Fewer women with disabilities participate in the labour market compared with men with disabilities** (Figure 10), highlighting how the intersection of disability, gender, and economic vulnerability increases the risk of marginalization and poverty.

FIGURE 10.

People with disabilities, by sex and age groups (percentage)

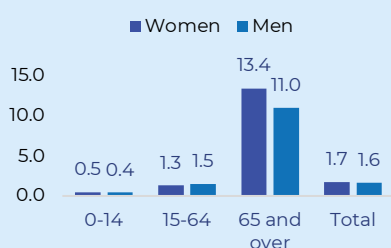


FIGURE 11.

People with disabilities aged 5+ who never attended school, by sex (percentage)

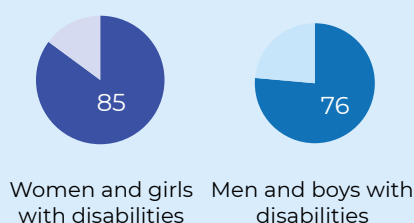
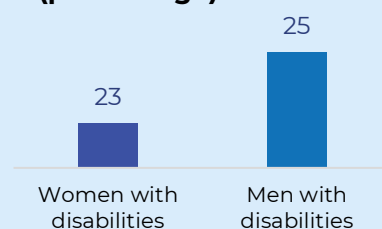


FIGURE 12.

Labour force participation rate of people with disabilities, by sex (percentage)



Source: Timor-Leste Population and Housing Census 2022.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ADVANCING WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT IN ERMERA

Support and promote women's and girls' education. Invest in measures that support women's and girls' school progression and retention, particularly for women living in rural areas, married young women, and women and girls with disabilities.

Recognize, reduce, and redistribute unpaid care and subsistence work. Strengthen policies and services that acknowledge women's unpaid work and promote a more equal distribution of care responsibilities within households and communities. Prioritize the development of accessible, affordable, and high-quality care services, including childcare and long-term care.

Support rural women's productive livelihoods. Improve women's access to and control over productive resources so that agricultural activities can better contribute to women's incomes, food security and economic resilience.

Promote pathways to decent work. Target skilling and employment policies and frameworks to support women's transition from subsistence and vulnerable forms of employment into decent work.

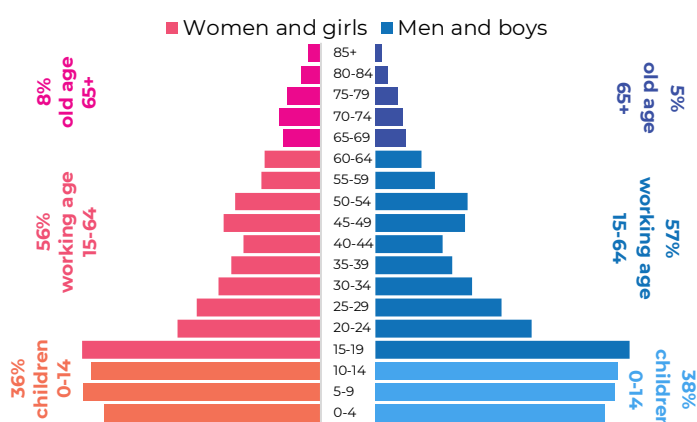
Municipality Gender Profile: Lautém

Lautém is home to 69,870 people¹, representing 5 per cent of Timor Leste's population. Lautém's population is evenly split between women and girls and men and boys, with each accounting for 50 per cent. The municipality is **predominantly rural**, with 82 per cent of residents residing in rural areas, well above the national average of 71 per cent. Yet, it has a relatively higher urban share compared to most municipalities.

Lautém's age structure reflects a **feminization of ageing**, with a larger share of women aged 65 and above. At the same time, its demographic profile

FIGURE 1.

Population, by sex and age groups



Source: Timor-Leste Population and Housing Census 2022.

Gender inequalities begin early in life and accumulate across the life course.

Gender inequalities are rooted in **discriminatory social norms and practices** that influence women's lives from childhood to old age, restricting autonomy, limiting access to education and employment, and reinforcing unequal expectations around caregiving and family formation. In Lautém, child marriage remains a significant barrier to gender equality, with **5.9 per cent of women aged 20 to 24 married before age 18**. While the national rate declined by nearly 2 percentage points between 2015 and 2022, progress in Lautém has been marginal (0.2 percentage point decline). Child marriage often channels women into early domestic roles, curtailing their opportunities for education and future economic opportunities.



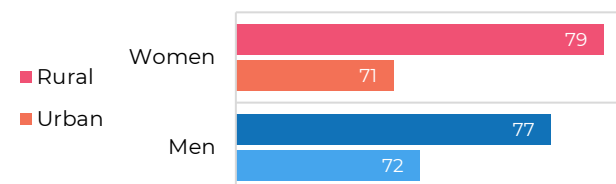
More than **1 in 20 young women** in Lautém were **married before age 18**

points to a notably higher demand for childcare services, as **37 per cent of the residents are under 15 years of age** (Figure 1).

For every 100 people in working-age (aged 15-64) in Lautém, there are 65 children (aged 0-14) and 11 older persons (aged 65 and above), placing sustained pressure on care systems, particularly childcare. Yet, the demand for care falls unevenly: **women in rural areas support the highest number of dependents**, highlighting persistent gender and geographic inequalities in care responsibilities (Figure 2).

FIGURE 2.

Dependency ratio, by sex and location



Source: Timor-Leste Population and Housing Census 2022.

LAUTÉM'S POPULATION STRUCTURE POINTS TO A SUBSTANTIAL DEMAND FOR CARE SERVICES, WITH IMPLICATIONS FOR WOMEN'S ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES BOTH WITHIN THE CARE SECTOR AND ACROSS THE BROADER ECONOMY.

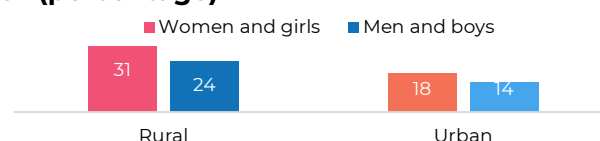
Gender norms around caregiving and early marriage continue to shape young women's trajectories. Women aged 5 and above remain more likely than men to have never attended school, with wider gender gaps in rural areas, reinforcing intergenerational cycles of poverty and exclusion (Figure 3). Nearly 4 in 10 women aged 20-24 are married compared with 12 per cent of men, limiting their chances to continue education.

In Lautém,

93% of married women aged 20-24 are not currently attending school compared with **56 per cent of never-married women**.

FIGURE 3.

People aged 5+ who never attended school, by sex (percentage)



Source: Timor-Leste Population and Housing Census 2022.

¹For the purpose of this Gender Profile, only the population living in private households is considered. The population living in collective living quarters represents less than 0.06 per cent of the total population in Timor-Leste. All data is based on the 2022 Timor-Leste Population and Housing Census 2022, unless otherwise stated.

Older women face very high illiteracy rates, particularly in rural areas, limiting their participation in social, economic and political life (Figure 4). Women's longer life expectancy also means they are more likely to reach older age widowed, with Lautém having the highest widowhood rate among older women, heightening their risks of poverty, isolation, and poor health.

In Lautém,

57% of women aged 65+ are widowed compared **with 17 per cent of men.**

Structural barriers limit women's access to the labour market. In Lautém, more women than men are outside the labour force (Figure 5) – the highest share recorded for women across municipalities. **Among working-age women outside the labour force, almost half cite care responsibilities as the main reason** compared with 26 per cent of men (Figure 6). Gender gaps are more pronounced **among women in their prime working years.** Women aged 30-39 are the most likely to be outside the labour

FIGURE 4.

Illiteracy rates among people aged 65+, by sex and location (percentage)

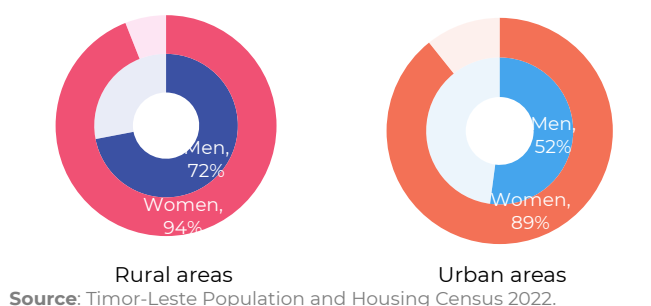
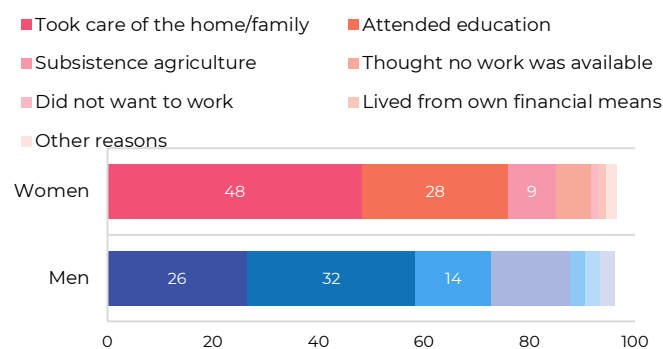


FIGURE 6.

Main reason for being outside the labour force, by sex (percentage)²



force due to caregiving (Figure 7), coinciding with peak childcare responsibilities.

Women's labour force participation remains well below men's (18 versus 27 per cent, respectively), being the lowest in the country, with the widest gender gap among those aged 30-34 years (16 percentage points).

Care responsibilities intersect with marital status in ways that shape women's labour market outcomes across the life course. The widest gender gap in the employment-to-population ratio is among married individuals, with 22 per cent of women in employment compared with 39 per cent of men. While more married women are in employment compared with those who never married, this partly reflects higher participation in education among the latter.

More than **6 in 10 never-married women cite education** as the main reason for being outside the labour force, whereas nearly **8 in 10 married women cite caregiving.**

FIGURE 5.

Labour force status among people aged 15-64, by sex (percentage)

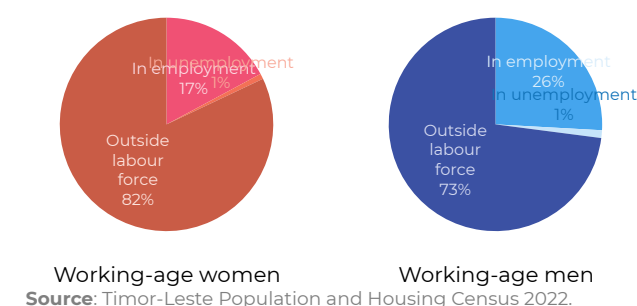
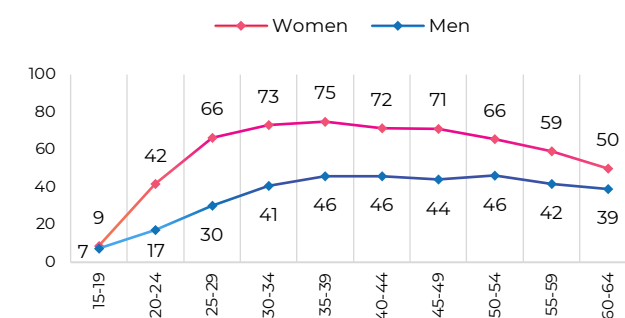


FIGURE 7.

Care responsibilities as the main reason for being outside the labour force, by sex and age groups (percentage)



² 'Other reasons' here includes 'was a seasonal worker', 'was disabled, ill, in bad health', 'was pensioner/retired/old age', and 'other reason'.

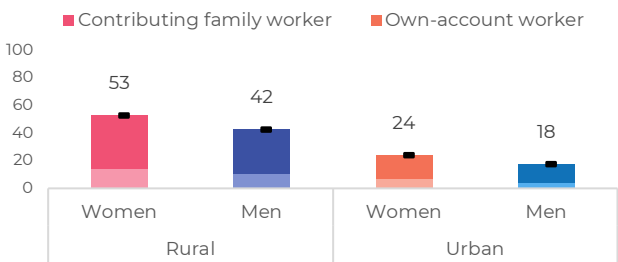
Even when women enter the workforce, structural barriers restrict women’s access to decent work.

Despite Lautém having the second lowest rate of vulnerable employment among women in the country, nearly half of working-age women remain in vulnerable employment, with wider gender gaps in rural areas (Figure 8). Women’s continued overrepresentation in vulnerable employment exposes them to greater risks and vulnerabilities across their life cycle, with limited income stability, job protections, and access to social safety nets.

In Lautém, **47% of employed working-age women are in vulnerable forms of employment** compared with **37 per cent of 10 men**

ECONOMIES THAT PRIORITIZE DECENT WORK ACT AS CATALYSTS FOR WOMEN’S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT, STIMULATING JOB GROWTH BOTH WITHIN THE SECTOR AND BEYOND.

FIGURE 8. Vulnerable employment, by sex and location (percentage)



Source: Timor-Leste Population and Housing Census 2022.

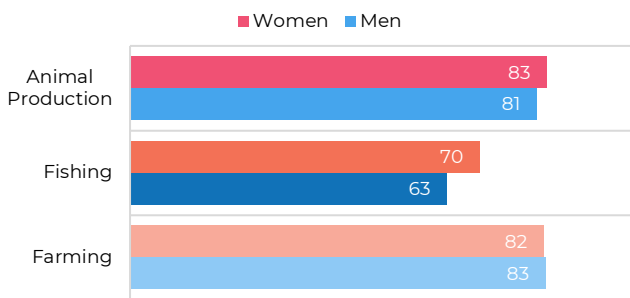
Overall, these patterns reflect structural inequalities that **constrain women’s access to income-generating opportunities** while concentrating their work in subsistence activities and unpaid care. This underscores the need for targeted employment policies that recognize and address unpaid responsibilities, particularly for rural women and those balancing early family formation with economic aspirations.

Subsistence agriculture remains a crucial, yet often overlooked, pillar of women’s economic contributions.

Agriculture remains a key livelihood in Lautém, with **23 per cent of working-age people engaged in agricultural activities**, whether for sale or self-consumption. While women are less likely than men to participate overall, those who do are more concentrated in own-use production³ (81 versus 80 per cent, respectively). This pattern is particularly evident in activities such as fishing and animal production, where women’s participation in own-use production exceeds that of men (Figure 9).

Engagement in subsistence production increases with age, particularly among women in old age (84 per cent), underscoring the role of own-use production as a livelihood strategy across the life course. Among working-age women engaged in agriculture, own-use production is also more prevalent in rural (83 per cent) than urban areas (74 per cent). This pattern partly explains the lower labour force participation in rural areas: women classified as outside the labour force are more likely than their urban counterparts to engage in own-use agricultural production (16 versus 12 per cent). Their contributions often fall outside conventional labour market measures, yet remain central to agricultural production and household food security.

FIGURE 9. People aged 15-64 engaged in subsistence production, by sex and type (percentage)



Source: Timor-Leste Population and Housing Census 2022.

TO HARNESS DEMOGRAPHIC OPPORTUNITIES, IT IS CRUCIAL TO DISMANTLE STRUCTURAL BARRIERS TO WOMEN’S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT.

Lautém’s declining dependency ratio signals a window of economic opportunity, but only if matched by sustained investments in care systems, decent jobs and inclusive policies. The **dependency ratio**, a demographic indicator measuring the number of care dependents relative to the working-

³ Subsistence production is here defined as production undertaken only or mainly for own-family consumption; production for sale is defined as production undertaken only or mainly for sale.

age population, **declined from 100 to 76 dependents per 100 working-age people** between 2015 and 2022. This trend points to the potential for a demographic dividend, whereby a relatively larger working-age population can support accelerated economic growth. With sustained investments, **gender-responsive care systems can serve as the cornerstone of inclusive and resilient economies,**

improving outcomes for all while ensuring dignity and equity for both caregivers and care recipients. Expanding access to affordable and quality care services, particularly in rural areas, would reduce women's care responsibilities but also stimulate job growth, boost GDP, and contribute to a more gender-equal world.

Disabilities affect women and men differently, with women often facing intersecting forms of disadvantage that compound across the life course.

In Lautém, **overall disability prevalence is slightly higher among women and girls** than among men and boys (1.9 per cent compared with 1.7 per cent), but in older age men are slightly more likely than women to live with one or multiple disabilities (Figure 10).

Women and girls with disabilities face significant educational disadvantages, including stigma, lack of inclusive infrastructure, and limited access to assistive devices. These challenges lead to lower educational attendance and higher rates of never having attended school (Figure 11), with long-term implications for skills development, economic independence, and wellbeing. **Limited access to education may, in turn, reduce future employment prospects and reinforce cycles of poverty.**

These compounded disadvantages continue into adulthood. Labour force participation among women and men with disabilities is equal at 23 per cent, but remains low for both (Figure 12), highlighting how the intersection of disability, gender, and economic vulnerability increases the risk of marginalization and poverty.

FIGURE 10.

People with disabilities, by sex and age groups (percentage)

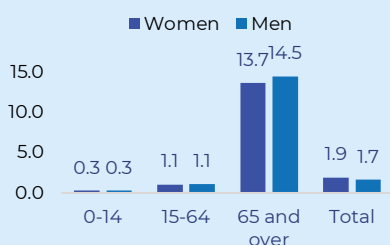


FIGURE 11.

People with disabilities aged 5+ who never attended school, by sex (percentage)

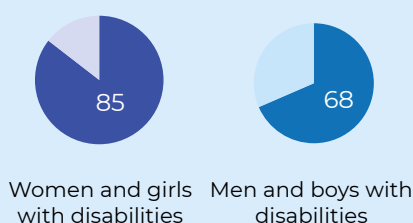
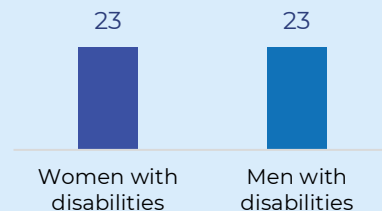


FIGURE 12.

Labour force participation rate of people with disabilities, by sex (percentage)



Source: Timor-Leste Population and Housing Census 2022.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ADVANCING WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT IN LAUTÉM

Strengthen women's capacities through education and training. Invest in measures that support women's and girls' progression through education, including for married women, women living in rural areas, and women and girls with disabilities.

Recognize, reduce, and redistribute unpaid care work, especially in rural areas. Prioritize the development of accessible, affordable, and quality care services, including childcare and long-term care, particularly in rural areas, where care responsibilities reinforce women's economic insecurity.

Support women's labour force activation and access to decent work. Target skilling and employment policies and frameworks to support women's labour force participation and transition from vulnerable forms of employment into decent work.

Expand gender-responsive and inclusive social protection systems. Strengthen and scale up social protection schemes to better reach older women, widows, and women with disabilities. Ensure simplified access for rural communities to improve accessibility and coverage.

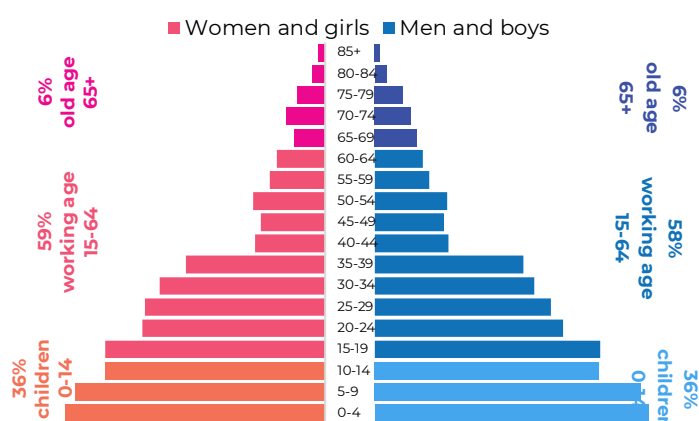
Municipality Gender Profile: Liquiça

Liquiçais home to 83,567 people¹, representing 6 per cent of Timor-Leste's population. Women and girls account for 49 per cent of Liquiça's population, compared with 51 per cent of men and boys. The municipality is **almost entirely rural**, with 95 per cent of residents residing in rural areas, well above the national average of 71 per cent.

Liquiça's demographic profile points to a notably higher demand for childcare services, as **36 per cent**

FIGURE 1.

Population, by sex and age groups



Source: Timor-Leste Population and Housing Census 2022.

Gender inequalities begin early in life and accumulate across the life course.

Gender inequalities are rooted in **discriminatory social norms and practices** that influence women's lives from childhood to old age, restricting autonomy, limiting access to education and employment, and reinforcing unequal expectations around caregiving and family formation. In Liquiça, child marriage remains a significant barrier to gender equality, with **4.3 per cent of women aged 20 to 24 married before age 18**. While the national rate declined by nearly 2 percentage points between 2015 and 2022, progress in Liquiça has been more limited (a 1.6 percentage point decline). Child marriage often channels women into early domestic roles, curtailing their opportunities for education and future economic opportunities.



Almost **1 in 20 young women** in Liquiça were married before age 18

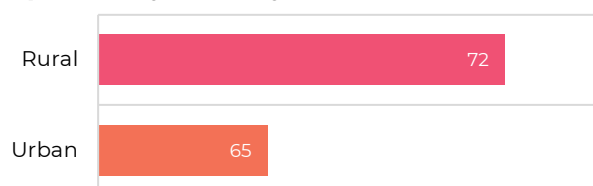
Gender norms around caregiving and early marriage continue to shape young women's trajectories. Women aged 5 and above remain more

of the residents are under 15 years of age (Figure 1).

For every 100 people in working-age (aged 15-64) in Liquiça, there are 62 children (aged 0-14) and 10 older persons (aged 65 and above), placing sustained pressure on care systems, particularly childcare. Yet, dependency is significantly higher in rural areas for both women and men, highlighting persistent geographic inequalities in care demands (Figure 2).

FIGURE 2.

Dependency ratio, by location



Source: Timor-Leste Population and Housing Census 2022.

LIQUIÇA'S POPULATION STRUCTURE POINTS TO A SUBSTANTIAL DEMAND FOR CARE SERVICES, WITH IMPLICATIONS FOR WOMEN'S ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES BOTH WITHIN THE CARE SECTOR AND ACROSS THE BROADER ECONOMY.

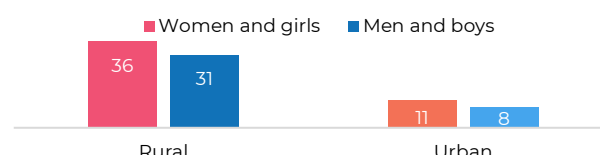
likely than men to have never attended school, with wider gender gaps in rural areas, reinforcing intergenerational cycles of poverty and exclusion (Figure 3). In Liquiça, 36 per cent of women aged 20-24 are married compared with 16 per cent of men, limiting their chances to continue education.

In Liquiça,

89% of married women aged 20-24 are not currently attending school compared with **54 per cent of never-married women**.

FIGURE 3.

People aged 5+ who never attended school, by sex (percentage)



Source: Timor-Leste Population and Housing Census 2022.

Older women face very high illiteracy rates, particularly in rural areas, limiting their participation in social, economic and political life (Figure 4).

¹For the purpose of this Gender Profile, only the population living in private households is considered. The population living in collective living quarters represents less than 0.06 per cent of the total population in Timor-Leste. All data is based on the 2022 Timor-Leste Population and Housing Census 2022, unless otherwise stated.

Women's longer life expectancy also means they are more likely to reach older age widowed and economically insecure, facing heightened risks of poverty, isolation, and poor health.

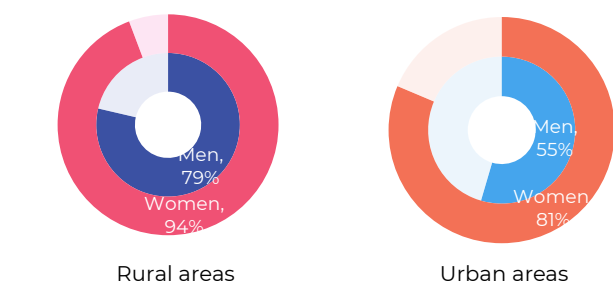
In Liquiça,

40% of women aged 65+ are widowed compared with 14 per cent of men.

Structural barriers limit women's access to the labour market. In Liquiça, more women than men are outside the labour force (Figure 5), with **43 per cent of working-age women outside the labour force citing care responsibilities as the main reason** - more than double the share of men (Figure 6). Gender disadvantages are more pronounced among women in rural areas and those in their prime working years. Women aged 30-34 are the most likely to be outside the labour force due to caregiving (Figure 7), coinciding with peak childcare responsibilities.

Although Liquiça record one of the highest women's labour force participation rates in the country, it remains well below men's (41 versus 53 per cent, **FIGURE 4.**

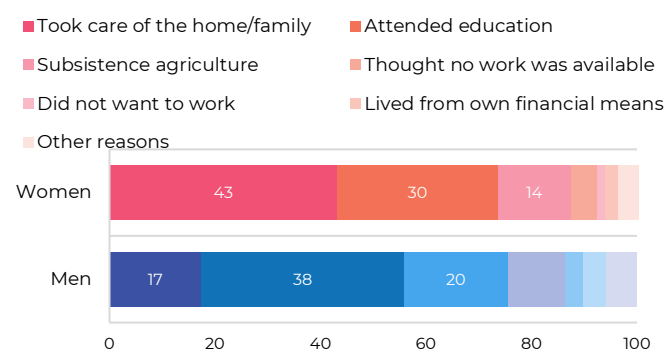
Illiteracy rates among people aged 65+, by sex and location (percentage)



Source: Timor-Leste Population and Housing Census 2022.

FIGURE 6.

Main reason for being outside the labour force, by sex (percentage)²



Source: Timor-Leste Population and Housing Census 2022.

respectively), with the widest gender gap among those aged 40-44 years (18 percentage points). While more women in absolute terms are in the labour force in rural areas (9.2 thousand) than in urban areas (0.7 thousand), **labour force participation remains lower in rural settings** (40 compared with 53 per cent), reinforcing the economic vulnerability of rural women.

Care responsibilities intersect with marital status in ways that shape women's labour market outcomes across the life course. The widest gender gap in the employment-to-population ratio is among married individuals, with 49 per cent of women in employment compared with 69 per cent of men. While more married women are in employment compared with those who never married, this partly reflects higher participation in education among the latter.

More than **6 in 10 never-married women cite education** as the main reason for being outside the labour force, whereas nearly **7 in 10 married women cite caregiving**.

FIGURE 5.

Labour force status among people aged 15-64, by sex (percentage)

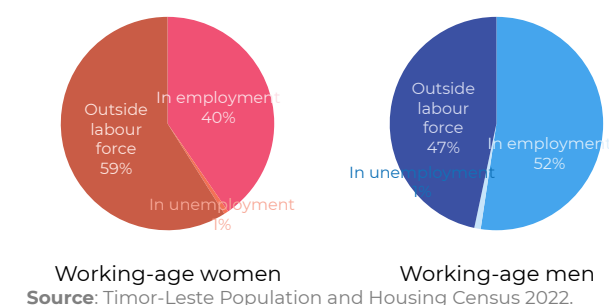
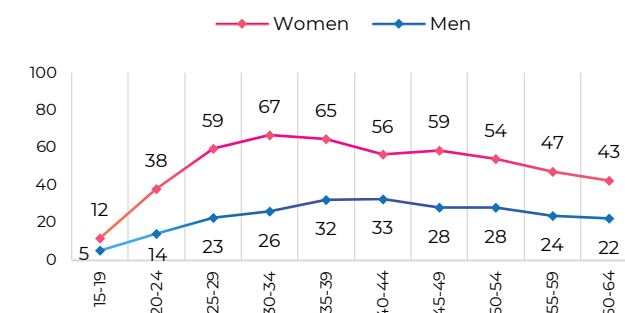


FIGURE 7.

Care responsibilities as the main reason for being outside the labour force, by sex and age groups (percentage)



Source: Timor-Leste Population and Housing Census 2022.

² 'Other reasons' here includes 'was a seasonal worker', 'was disabled, ill, in bad health', 'was pensioner/retired/old age', and 'other reason'.

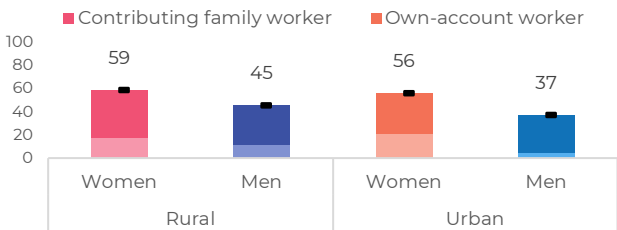
Even when women enter the workforce, structural barriers restrict women’s access to decent work.

Women’s continued overrepresentation in vulnerable employment exposes them to greater risks and vulnerabilities across their life cycle, with limited income stability, job protections, and access to social safety nets. Liquiça has **the widest gender gap in the country** (14 percentage points) and, unlike in many other municipalities, vulnerability is high in both rural and urban areas (Figure 8).

In Liquiça,
59% of employed working-age women are in vulnerable forms of employment compared with **45 per cent of 10 men**

ECONOMIES THAT PRIORITIZE DECENT WORK ACT AS CATALYSTS FOR WOMEN’S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT, STIMULATING JOB GROWTH BOTH WITHIN THE SECTOR AND BEYOND.

FIGURE 8.
Vulnerable employment, by sex and location (percentage)



Source: Timor-Leste Population and Housing Census 2022.

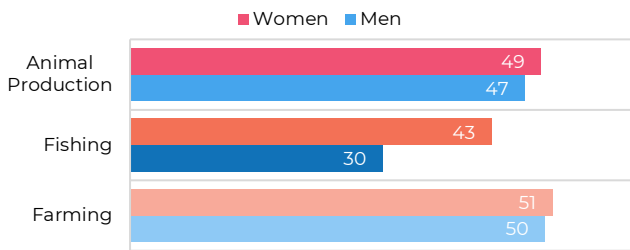
Overall, these patterns reflect structural inequalities that **constrain women’s access to income-generating opportunities** while concentrating their work in subsistence activities and unpaid care. This underscores the need for targeted employment policies that recognize and address unpaid responsibilities, particularly for rural women and those balancing early family formation with economic aspirations.

Subsistence agriculture remains a crucial, yet often overlooked, pillar of women’s economic contributions.

Agriculture remains a key livelihood in Liquiça, with **39 per cent of working-age people engaged in agricultural activities**, whether for sale or self-consumption. While there are no significant gender differences in agricultural participation overall, women who do participate are more concentrated in own-use production³ compared with men (50 per cent of women compared with 48 per cent of men). Own-use production and production for sale are almost evenly split, making Liquiça the most market-oriented in the country. Even so, women’s participation in own-use production exceeds that of men across agricultural activities (Figure 9).

Engagement in subsistence production increases with age, reaching 58 per cent among older women, underscoring the role of own-use production as a livelihood strategy across the life course. Among working-age women engaged in agriculture, own-use production is also far more prevalent in rural (52 per cent) than urban areas (22 per cent). This pattern partly explains the lower labour force participation in rural areas: women classified as outside the labour force are more likely than their urban counterparts to engage in own-use agricultural production (17 versus 5 per cent). Their contributions often fall outside conventional labour market measures, yet remain central to agricultural production and household food security.

FIGURE 9.
People aged 15-64 engaged in subsistence production, by sex and type (percentage)



Source: Timor-Leste Population and Housing Census 2022.

TO HARNESS DEMOGRAPHIC OPPORTUNITIES, IT IS CRUCIAL TO DISMANTLE STRUCTURAL BARRIERS TO WOMEN’S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT.

Liquiça’s declining dependency ratio signals a window of economic opportunity, but only if matched by sustained investments in care systems, decent jobs and inclusive policies. The **dependency**

³ Subsistence production is here defined as production undertaken only or mainly for own-family consumption; production for sale is defined as production undertaken only or mainly for sale.

ratio, a demographic indicator measuring the number of care dependents relative to the working-age population, **declined from 83 to 72 dependents per 100 working-age people** between 2015 and 2022. This trend points to the potential for a demographic dividend, whereby a relatively larger working-age population can support accelerated economic growth. With sustained investments, **gender-responsive care systems can serve as the**

cornerstone of inclusive and resilient economies, improving outcomes for all while ensuring dignity and equity for both caregivers and care recipients. Expanding access to affordable and quality care services, particularly in rural areas, would reduce women's care responsibilities but also stimulate job growth, boost GDP, and contribute to a more gender-equal world.

Disabilities affect women and men differently, with women often facing intersecting forms of disadvantage that compound across the life course.

In Liquiça, the prevalence of disability increases with age, with similar shares of women and men aged 65 and over living with one or multiple disabilities. (Figure 10).

Women and girls with disabilities face significant educational disadvantages, including stigma, lack of inclusive infrastructure, and limited access to assistive devices. These challenges lead to lower educational attendance and higher rates of never having attended school (Figure 11), with long-term implications for skills development, economic independence, and wellbeing. **Limited access to education may, in turn, reduce future employment prospects and reinforce cycles of poverty.**

These compounded disadvantages continue into adulthood. **Fewer women with disabilities participate in the labour market compared with men with disabilities** (Figure 12), highlighting how the intersection of disability, gender, and economic vulnerability increases the risk of marginalization and poverty.

FIGURE 10.

People with disabilities, by sex and age groups (percentage)

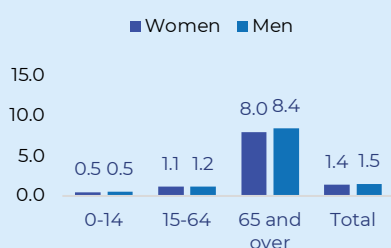


FIGURE 11.

People with disabilities aged 5+ who never attended school, by sex (percentage)

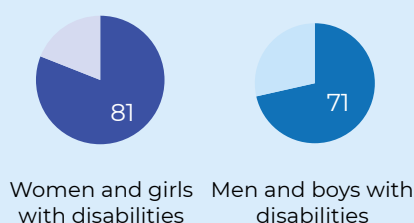
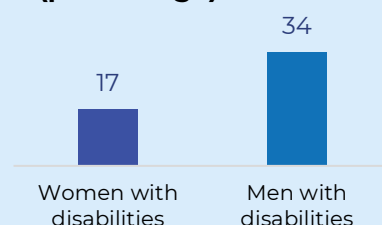


FIGURE 12.

Labour force participation rate of people with disabilities, by sex (percentage)



Source: Timor-Leste Population and Housing Census 2022.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ADVANCING WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT IN LIQUIÇA

Recognize, reduce, and redistribute unpaid care and subsistence work, especially in rural areas. Strengthen policies and services that acknowledge women's unpaid work and promote a more equal distribution of care responsibilities within households and communities. Prioritize the development of accessible, affordable, and high-quality care services, including childcare and long-term care, particularly in rural areas.

Support rural women's productive livelihoods. Improve women's access to and control over productive resources so that agricultural activities can better contribute to women's incomes, food security and economic resilience.

Promote pathways to decent work. Target skilling and employment policies and frameworks to support women's transition from subsistence and vulnerable forms of employment into decent work. Strengthen women's access to value chains, enterprise support and markets.

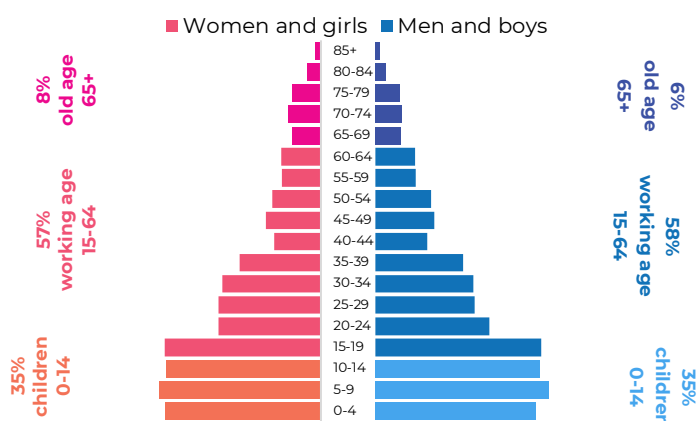
Municipality Gender Profile: Manatuto

Manatuto is home to 50,859 people¹, representing 4 per cent of Timor Leste's population. Women and girls account for 49 per cent of Manatuto's population, compared with 51 per cent of men and boys. The municipality is **almost entirely rural**, with 91 per cent of residents residing in rural areas, well above the national average of 71 per cent.

Manatuto's age structure reflects a **feminization of ageing**, with a larger share of women aged 65 and above. At the same time, its demographic profile points to a notably higher demand for childcare

FIGURE 1.

Population, by sex and age groups



Source: Timor-Leste Population and Housing Census 2022.

Gender inequalities begin early in life and accumulate across the life course.

Gender inequalities are rooted in **discriminatory social norms and practices** that influence women's lives from childhood to old age, restricting autonomy, limiting access to education and employment, and reinforcing unequal expectations around caregiving and family formation. In Manatuto, child marriage remains a significant barrier to gender equality, with **7.2 per cent of women aged 20 to 24 married before age 18**. While the national rate declined by nearly 2 percentage points between 2015 and 2022, progress in Manatuto has been more limited (a 1.5 percentage point decline). Child marriage often channels women into early domestic roles, curtailing their opportunities for education and future economic opportunities.



More than **7.2% of young women** in Manatuto were **married before age 18**

Gender norms around caregiving and early marriage continue to shape young women's

services, as **35 per cent of the residents are under 15 years of age** (Figure 1).

For every 100 people in working-age (aged 15-64) in Manatuto, there are 61 children (aged 0-14) and 13 older persons (aged 65 and above), placing sustained pressure on care systems, particularly childcare. Yet, the demand for care falls unevenly: **women in rural areas support the highest number of dependents**, highlighting persistent gender and geographic inequalities in care responsibilities (Figure 2).

FIGURE 2.

Dependency ratio, by sex and location



Source: Timor-Leste Population and Housing Census 2022.

MANATUTO'S POPULATION STRUCTURE POINTS TO A SUBSTANTIAL DEMAND FOR CARE SERVICES, WITH IMPLICATIONS FOR WOMEN'S ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES BOTH WITHIN THE CARE SECTOR AND ACROSS THE BROADER ECONOMY.

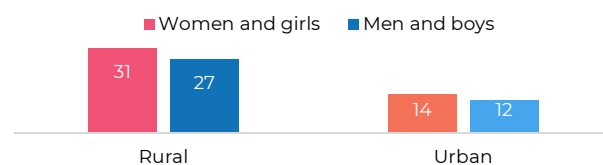
trajectories. Women aged 5 and above remain more likely than men to have never attended school, with wider gender gaps in rural areas, reinforcing intergenerational cycles of poverty and exclusion (Figure 3). Nearly 4 in 10 women aged 20-24 are married compared with 16 per cent of men, limiting their chances to continue education.

In Manatuto,

92% of married women aged 20-24 are not currently attending school compared with **44 per cent of never-married women.**

FIGURE 3.

People aged 5+ who never attended school, by sex (percentage)



Source: Timor-Leste Population and Housing Census 2022.

¹For the purpose of this Gender Profile, only the population living in private households is considered. The population living in collective living quarters represents less than 0.06 per cent of the total population in Timor-Leste. All data is based on the 2022 Timor-Leste Population and Housing Census 2022, unless otherwise stated.

Older women face very high illiteracy rates, particularly in rural areas, limiting their participation in social, economic and political life (Figure 4). Women's longer life expectancy also means they are more likely to reach older age widowed and economically insecure, facing heightened risks of poverty, isolation, and poor health.

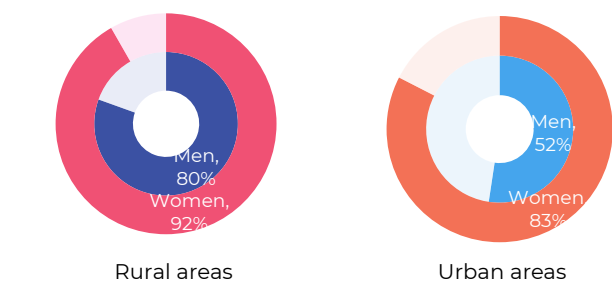
In Manatuto,

41% of women aged 65+ are widowed compared **with 15 per cent of men.**

Structural barriers limit women's access to the labour market. In Manatuto, more women than men are outside the labour force (Figure 5), with almost **half of working-age women outside the labour force citing care responsibilities as the main reason** - double the share of men (Figure 6). Gender disadvantages are more pronounced **among women in rural areas and those in their prime working years.** Women aged 35-44 are the most likely to be outside the labour force due to caregiving (Figure 7), coinciding with peak childcare responsibilities.

Women's labour force participation remains well below men's (34 versus 49 per cent, respectively), **FIGURE 4.**

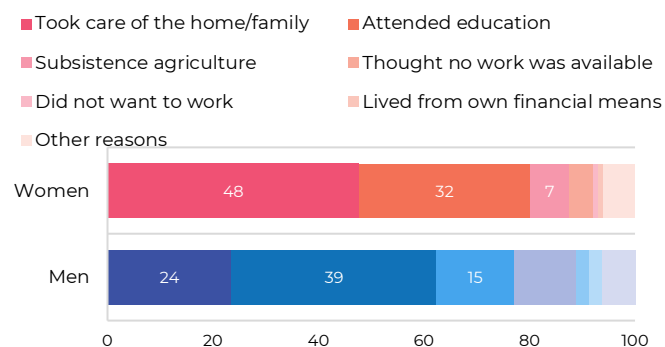
Illiteracy rates among people aged 65+, by sex and location (percentage)



Source: Timor-Leste Population and Housing Census 2022.

FIGURE 6.

Main reason for being outside the labour force, by sex (percentage)²



Source: Timor-Leste Population and Housing Census 2022.

with the widest gender gap among those aged 35-39 and 55-59 years (21 percentage points). While more women in absolute terms are in the labour force in rural areas (4.2 thousand) than in urban areas (0.6 thousand), **labour force participation remains lower in rural settings** (33 compared with 42 per cent), reinforcing the economic vulnerability of rural women.

Care responsibilities intersect with marital status in ways that shape women's labour market outcomes across the life course. The widest gender gap in the employment-to-population ratio is among married individuals, with 42 per cent of women in employment compared with 64 per cent of men. While more married women are in employment compared with those who never married, this partly reflects higher participation in education among the latter.

Almost **7 in 10 never-married women cite education** as the main reason for being outside the labour force, whereas nearly **8 in 10 married women cite caregiving.**

FIGURE 5.

Labour force status among people aged 15-64, by sex (percentage)

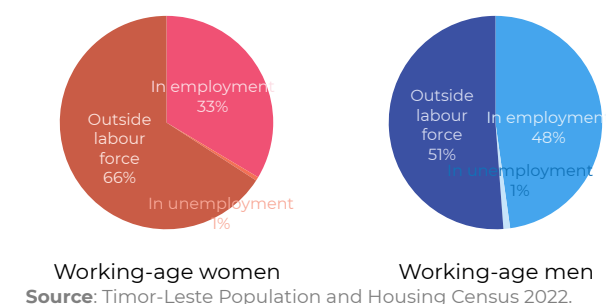
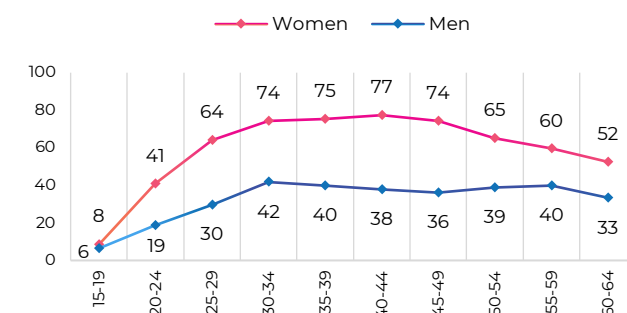


FIGURE 7.

Care responsibilities as the main reason for being outside the labour force, by sex and age groups (percentage)



Source: Timor-Leste Population and Housing Census 2022.

² 'Other reasons' here includes 'was a seasonal worker', 'was disabled, ill, in bad health', 'was pensioner/retired/old age', and 'other reason'.

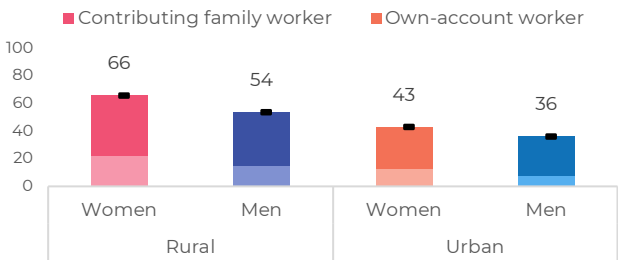
Even when women enter the workforce, structural barriers restrict women’s access to decent work.

Manatuto has the **second-highest rate for vulnerable employment among working-age women** in the country. Significant urban-rural disparities continue to pose challenges, with women in rural areas being especially exposed (Figure 8). Women’s continued overrepresentation in vulnerable employment exposes them to greater risks and vulnerabilities across their life cycle, with limited income stability, job protections, and access to social safety nets.

In Manatuto, **63% of employed working-age women are in vulnerable forms of employment** compared with **52 per cent of 10 men**

ECONOMIES THAT PRIORITIZE DECENT WORK ACT AS CATALYSTS FOR WOMEN’S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT, STIMULATING JOB GROWTH BOTH WITHIN THE SECTOR AND BEYOND.

FIGURE 8. Vulnerable employment, by sex and location (percentage)



Source: Timor-Leste Population and Housing Census 2022.

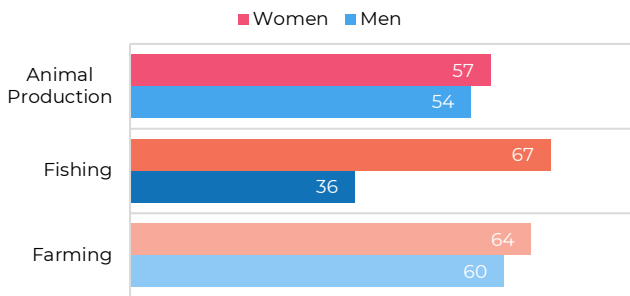
Overall, these patterns reflect structural inequalities that **constrain women’s access to income-generating opportunities** while concentrating their work in subsistence activities and unpaid care. This underscores the need for targeted employment policies that recognize and address unpaid responsibilities, particularly for rural women and those balancing early family formation with economic aspirations.

Subsistence agriculture remains a crucial, yet often overlooked, pillar of women’s economic contributions.

Agriculture remains a key livelihood in Manatuto, with **36 per cent of working-age people engaged in agricultural activities**, whether for sale or self-consumption. While women are less likely than men to participate overall, those who do are more concentrated in own-use production³ (60 versus 54 per cent, respectively). This is particularly evident in fishing, where women’s participation in own-use production significantly exceeds that of men (67 versus 36 per cent, respectively) (Figure 9).

Engagement in subsistence production increases with age, particularly among women in old age (67 per cent), underscoring the role of own-use production as a livelihood strategy across the life course. Among working-age women engaged in agriculture, own-use production is also more prevalent in rural (61 per cent) than urban areas (41 per cent). This pattern partly explains the lower labour force participation in rural areas: women classified as outside the labour force are more likely than their urban counterparts to engage in own-use agricultural production (18 versus 5 per cent). Their contributions often fall outside conventional labour market measures, yet remain central to agricultural production and household food security.

FIGURE 9. People aged 15-64 engaged in subsistence production, by sex and type (percentage)



Source: Timor-Leste Population and Housing Census 2022.

TO HARNESS DEMOGRAPHIC OPPORTUNITIES, IT IS CRUCIAL TO DISMANTLE STRUCTURAL BARRIERS TO WOMEN’S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT.

Manatuto’s declining dependency ratio signals a window of economic opportunity, but only if matched by sustained investments in care systems, decent jobs and inclusive policies. The **dependency ratio**, a demographic indicator measuring the number of care dependents relative to the working-

³ Subsistence production is here defined as production undertaken only or mainly for own-family consumption; production for sale is defined as production undertaken only or mainly for sale.

age population, **declined from 91 to 74 dependents per 100 working-age people** between 2015 and 2022. This trend points to the potential for a demographic dividend, whereby a relatively larger working-age population can support accelerated economic growth. With sustained investments, **gender-responsive care systems can serve as the cornerstone of inclusive and resilient economies,**

improving outcomes for all while ensuring dignity and equity for both caregivers and care recipients. Expanding access to affordable and quality care services, particularly in rural areas, would reduce women's care responsibilities but also stimulate job growth, boost GDP, and contribute to a more gender-equal world.

Disabilities affect women and men differently, with women often facing intersecting forms of disadvantage that compound across the life course.

In Manatuto, **women are slightly more likely than men to experience one or multiple disabilities.** This is particularly evident in older age, with 11.8 per cent of women aged 65 and over living with disabilities compared with 10.3 per cent of men (Figure 10).

Women and girls with disabilities face significant educational disadvantages, including stigma, lack of inclusive infrastructure, and limited access to assistive devices. These challenges lead to lower educational attendance and higher rates of never having attended school (Figure 11), with long-term implications for skills development, economic independence, and wellbeing. **Limited access to education may, in turn, reduce future employment prospects and reinforce cycles of poverty.**

These compounded disadvantages continue into adulthood. **Fewer women with disabilities participate in the labour market compared with men with disabilities** (Figure 12), highlighting how the intersection of disability, gender, and economic vulnerability increases the risk of marginalization and poverty.

FIGURE 10.

People with disabilities, by sex and age groups (percentage)

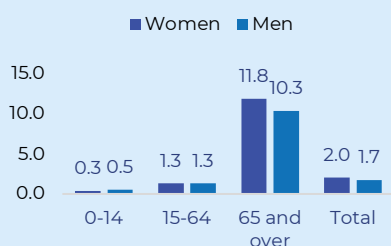


FIGURE 11.

People with disabilities aged 5+ who never attended school, by sex (percentage)

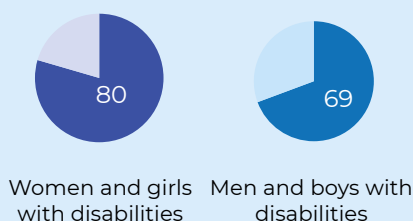
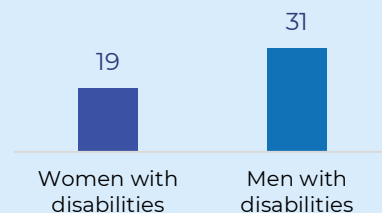


FIGURE 12.

Labour force participation rate of people with disabilities, by sex (percentage)



Source: Timor-Leste Population and Housing Census 2022.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ADVANCING WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT IN MANATUTO

Recognize, reduce, and redistribute unpaid care and subsistence work, especially in rural areas. Strengthen policies and services that acknowledge women's unpaid work and promote a more equal distribution of care responsibilities within households and communities. Prioritize the development of accessible, affordable, and high-quality care services, including childcare and long-term care, particularly in rural areas.

Support rural women's productive livelihoods. Improve women's access to and control over productive resources so that agricultural activities can better contribute to women's incomes, food security and economic resilience.

Promote pathways to decent work. Target skilling and employment policies and frameworks to support women's transition from vulnerable forms of employment into decent work, especially in rural areas.

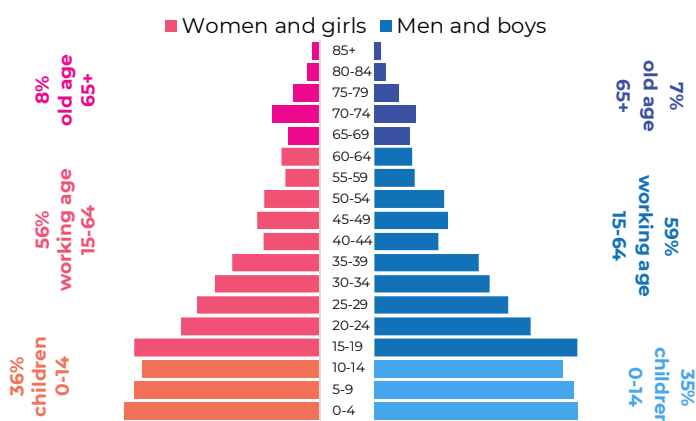
Municipality Gender Profile: Manufahi

Covalima is home to 60,665 people¹, representing 5 per cent of Timor Leste's population. Women and girls account for 48 per cent of Manufahi's population, compared with 52 per cent of men and boys. The municipality is **predominantly rural**, with 88 per cent of residents residing in rural areas, well above the national average of 71 per cent.

Manufahi's age structure reflects a **feminization of ageing**, with a larger share of women aged 65 and above. At the same time, its demographic profile points to a notably higher demand for childcare

FIGURE 1.

Population, by sex and age groups



Source: Timor-Leste Population and Housing Census 2022.

Gender inequalities begin early in life and accumulate across the life course.

Gender inequalities are rooted in **discriminatory social norms and practices** that influence women's lives from childhood to old age, restricting autonomy, limiting access to education and employment, and reinforcing unequal expectations around caregiving and family formation. In Manufahi, child marriage remains a significant barrier to gender equality, with **7.4 per cent of women aged 20 to 24 married before age 18**. Child marriage often channels women into early domestic roles, curtailing their opportunities for education and future economic opportunities.



In Manufahi **7.4% of young women** were married before age 18

Gender norms around caregiving and early marriage continue to shape young women's trajectories. Women aged 5 and above remain more likely than men to have never attended school, with wider gender gaps in rural areas, reinforcing

services, as **35 per cent of the residents are under 15 years of age** (Figure 1).

For every 100 people in working-age (aged 15-64) in Manufahi, there are 61 children (aged 0-14) and 13 older persons (aged 65 and above), placing sustained pressure on care systems, particularly childcare. Yet, the demand for care falls unevenly: **women in rural areas support the highest number of dependents**, highlighting persistent gender and geographic inequalities in care responsibilities (Figure 2).

FIGURE 2.

Dependency ratio, by sex and location



Source: Timor-Leste Population and Housing Census 2022.

MANUFAHI'S POPULATION STRUCTURE POINTS TO A SUBSTANTIAL DEMAND FOR CARE SERVICES, WITH IMPLICATIONS FOR WOMEN'S ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES BOTH WITHIN THE CARE SECTOR AND ACROSS THE BROADER ECONOMY.

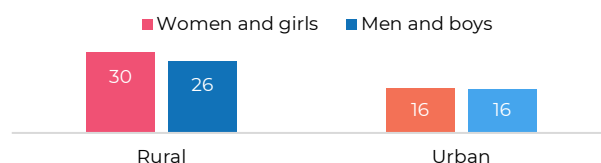
intergenerational cycles of poverty and exclusion (Figure 3). Nearly half of women aged 20-24 are married compared with 18 per cent of men, limiting their chances to continue education.

In Manufahi,

91% of married women aged 20-24 are not currently attending school compared with **52 per cent of never-married women**.

FIGURE 3.

People aged 5+ who never attended school, by sex (percentage)



Source: Timor-Leste Population and Housing Census 2022.

Although the municipality records one of the lowest rates outside Dili, older women continue to face very high illiteracy rates, particularly in rural areas, limiting their participation in social, economic and

¹For the purpose of this Gender Profile, only the population living in private households is considered. The population living in collective living quarters represents less than 0.06 per cent of the total population in Timor-Leste. All data is based on the 2022 Timor-Leste Population and Housing Census 2022, unless otherwise stated.

political life (Figure 4). Women's longer life expectancy also means they are more likely to reach older age widowed and economically insecure, facing heightened risks of poverty, isolation, and poor health.

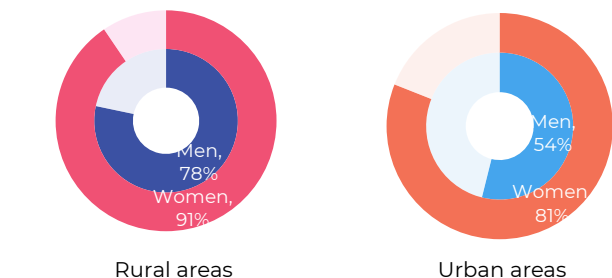
In Manufahi,

45% of women aged 65+ are widowed compared with **16 per cent of men**.

Structural barriers limit women's access to the labour market. In Manufahi, more women than men are outside the labour force (Figure 5), with almost **half of working-age women outside the labour force citing care responsibilities as the main reason** compared with 26 per cent of men (Figure 6). Gender disadvantages are more pronounced **among women in rural areas and those in their prime working years**. Women aged 30-44 are the most likely to be outside the labour force due to caregiving (Figure 7), coinciding with peak childcare responsibilities.

Women's labour force participation remains well below men's (26 versus 38 per cent, respectively), **FIGURE 4.**

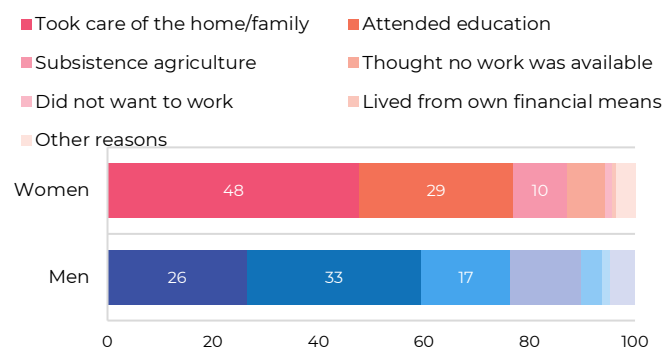
Illiteracy rates among people aged 65+, by sex and location (percentage)



Source: Timor-Leste Population and Housing Census 2022.

FIGURE 6.

Main reason for being outside the labour force, by sex (percentage)²



Source: Timor-Leste Population and Housing Census 2022.

with the widest gender gap among those aged 55-59 years (24 percentage points). While more women in absolute terms are in the labour force in rural areas (3.7 thousand) than in urban areas (0.6 thousand), **labour force participation remains lower in rural settings** (26 compared with 30 per cent), reinforcing the economic vulnerability of rural women.

Care responsibilities intersect with marital status in ways that shape women's labour market outcomes across the life course. The widest gender gap in the employment-to-population ratio is among married individuals, with 33 per cent of women in employment compared with 52 per cent of men. While more married women are in employment compared with those who never married, this partly reflects higher participation in education among the latter.

Almost **7 in 10 never-married women cite education** as the main reason for being outside the labour force, whereas more than **7 in 10 married women cite caregiving**.

FIGURE 5.

Labour force status among people aged 15-64, by sex (percentage)

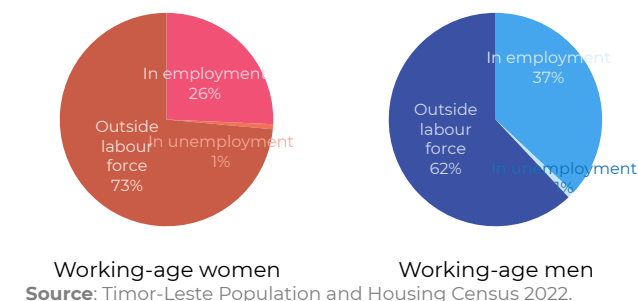
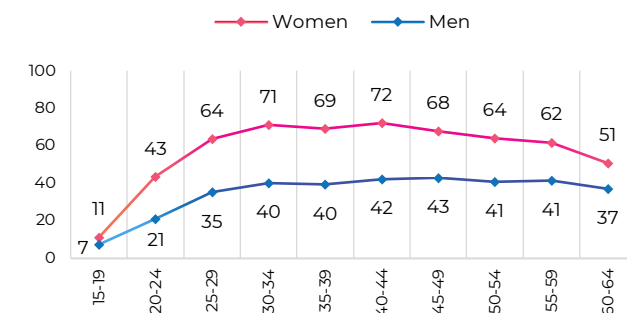


FIGURE 7.

Care responsibilities as the main reason for being outside the labour force, by sex and age groups (percentage)



Source: Timor-Leste Population and Housing Census 2022.

² 'Other reasons' here includes 'was a seasonal worker', 'was disabled, ill, in bad health', 'was pensioner/retired/old age', and 'other reason'.

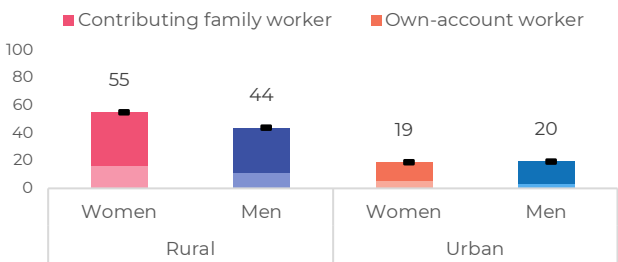
Even when women enter the workforce, structural barriers restrict women’s access to decent work.

Women’s continued overrepresentation in vulnerable employment exposes them to greater risks and vulnerabilities across their life cycle, with limited income stability, job protections, and access to social safety nets. In Manufahi, women’s vulnerable employment is driven primarily by rural labour market conditions. While rural women are much more likely than urban women to be in vulnerable work, urban rates are relatively low and broadly similar for women and men, pointing to strong urban-rural disadvantages (Figure 8).

In Manufahi,
50% of employed working-age women are in vulnerable forms of employment compared with **40 per cent of 10 men**

ECONOMIES THAT PRIORITIZE DECENT WORK ACT AS CATALYSTS FOR WOMEN’S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT, STIMULATING JOB GROWTH BOTH WITHIN THE SECTOR AND BEYOND.

FIGURE 8.
Vulnerable employment, by sex and location (percentage)



Source: Timor-Leste Population and Housing Census 2022.

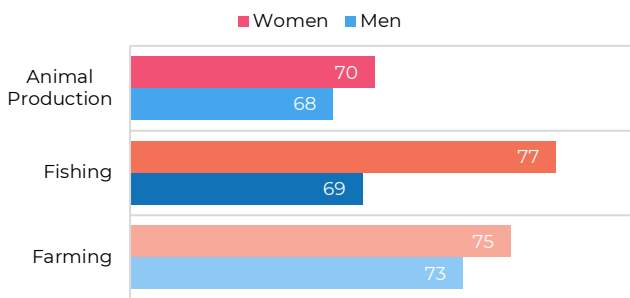
Overall, these patterns reflect structural inequalities that **constrain women’s access to income-generating opportunities** while concentrating their work in subsistence activities and unpaid care. This underscores the need for targeted employment policies that recognize and address unpaid responsibilities, particularly for rural women and those balancing early family formation with economic aspirations.

Subsistence agriculture remains a crucial, yet often overlooked, pillar of women’s economic contributions.

Agriculture remains a key livelihood in Manufahi, with **34 per cent of working-age people engaged in agricultural activities**, whether for sale or self-consumption. While women are less likely than men to participate overall, those who do are more concentrated in own-use production³ (72 versus 71 per cent, respectively). This is particularly evident in fishing, where women’s participation in own-use production significantly exceeds that of men (77 versus 69 per cent, respectively) (Figure 9).

Engagement in subsistence production increases with age, reaching 75 per cent among older women, underscoring the role of own-use production as a livelihood strategy across the life course. Among working-age women engaged in agriculture, own-use production is also more prevalent in rural (72 per cent) than urban areas (62 per cent). This pattern partly explains the lower labour force participation in rural areas: women classified as outside the labour force are more likely than their urban counterparts to engage in own-use agricultural production (20 versus 9 per cent). Their contributions often fall outside conventional labour market measures, yet remain central to agricultural production and household food security.

FIGURE 9.
People aged 15-64 engaged in subsistence production, by sex and type (percentage)



Source: Timor-Leste Population and Housing Census 2022.

TO HARNESS DEMOGRAPHIC OPPORTUNITIES, IT IS CRUCIAL TO DISMANTLE STRUCTURAL BARRIERS TO WOMEN’S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT.

Manufahi’s declining dependency ratio signals a window of economic opportunity, but only if matched by sustained investments in care systems, decent jobs and inclusive policies. The **dependency ratio**, a demographic indicator measuring the number of care dependents relative to the working-

³ Subsistence production is here defined as production undertaken only or mainly for own-family consumption; production for sale is defined as production undertaken only or mainly for sale.

age population, **declined from 88 to 74 dependents per 100 working-age people** between 2015 and 2022. This trend points to the potential for a demographic dividend, whereby a relatively larger working-age population can support accelerated economic growth. With sustained investments, **gender-responsive care systems can serve as the cornerstone of inclusive and resilient economies,**

improving outcomes for all while ensuring dignity and equity for both caregivers and care recipients. Expanding access to affordable and quality care services, particularly in rural areas, would reduce women's care responsibilities but also stimulate job growth, boost GDP, and contribute to a more gender-equal world.

Disabilities affect women and men differently, with women often facing intersecting forms of disadvantage that compound across the life course.

In Manufahi, **women are slightly more likely than men to experience one or multiple disabilities.** This is particularly evident in older age, where almost 10.5 per cent of women aged 65 and over live with disabilities compared with 9.5 per cent of men (Figure 10).

Women and girls with disabilities face significant educational disadvantages, including stigma, lack of inclusive infrastructure, and limited access to assistive devices. These challenges lead to lower educational attendance and higher rates of never having attended school (Figure 11), with long-term implications for skills development, economic independence, and wellbeing. **Limited access to education may, in turn, reduce future employment prospects and reinforce cycles of poverty.**

These compounded disadvantages continue into adulthood. **Fewer women with disabilities participate in the labour market compared with men with disabilities** (Figure 12), highlighting how the intersection of disability, gender, and economic vulnerability increases the risk of marginalization and poverty.

FIGURE 10.

People with disabilities, by sex and age groups (percentage)

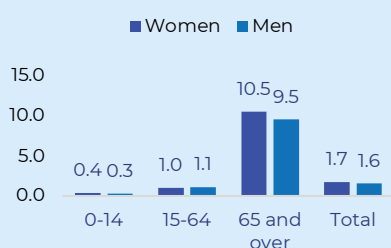


FIGURE 11.

People with disabilities aged 5+ who never attended school, by sex (percentage)

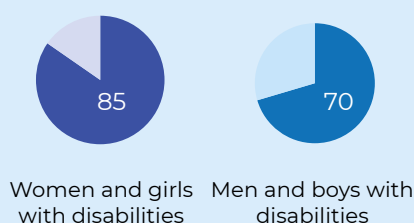
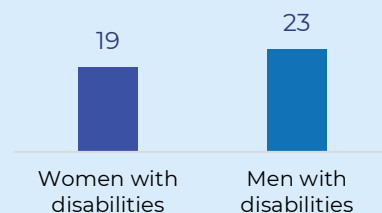


FIGURE 12.

Labour force participation rate of people with disabilities, by sex (percentage)



Source: Timor-Leste Population and Housing Census 2022.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ADVANCING WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT IN MANUFAHI

Strengthen women's and girls' school retention, progression and re-entry. Invest in measures that prevent early marriage and support women's and girls' school progression, retention and re-entry, including for married young women, rural women, and women and girls with disabilities.

Recognize, reduce, and redistribute unpaid care and subsistence work, especially in rural areas. Prioritize the development of accessible, affordable, and high-quality care services, including childcare and long-term care, particularly in rural areas, where care responsibilities reinforce women's economic insecurity.

Support rural women's productive livelihoods. Improve women's access to and control over productive resources so that agricultural activities can better contribute to women's incomes, food security and economic resilience.

Promote pathways to decent work. Target skilling and employment policies and frameworks to support women's transition from subsistence and vulnerable forms of employment into decent work.

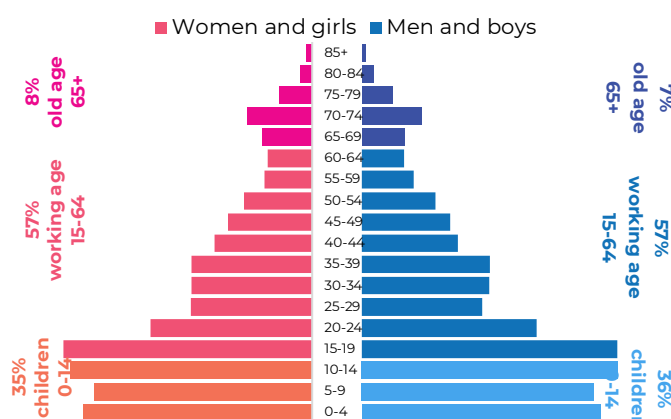
Municipality Gender Profile: Oe-Cusse

Oe-Cusse is home to 80,685 people¹, representing 6 per cent of Timor-Leste's population. Women and girls account for 49 per cent of Oe-Cusse's population, compared with 51 per cent of men and boys. The municipality is **predominantly rural**, with 81 per cent of residents residing in rural areas, well above the national average of 71 per cent. Yet, it has a relatively higher urban share compared to most municipalities.

Oe-Cusse's age structure reflects a **feminization of ageing**, with a larger share of women aged 65 and above. At the same time, its demographic profile points to a notably higher demand for childcare

FIGURE 1.

Population, by sex and age groups



Source: Timor-Leste Population and Housing Census 2022.

Gender inequalities begin early in life and accumulate across the life course.

Gender inequalities are rooted in **discriminatory social norms and practices** that influence women's lives from childhood to old age, restricting autonomy, limiting access to education and employment, and reinforcing unequal expectations around caregiving and family formation. In Oe-Cusse, child marriage remains a significant barrier to gender equality. While the municipality has recorded a notable progress since 2015 (a 6.2 percentage point decline), there remains **the highest rate in Timor-Leste, with 9.2 per cent of women aged 20 to 24 married before age 18**. Child marriage often channels women into early domestic roles, curtailing their opportunities for education and future economic opportunities.



Almost **1 in 10 young women** in Oe-Cusse were **married before age 18**

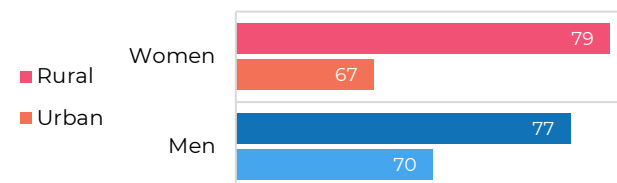
Gender norms around caregiving and early marriage continue to shape young women's

services, as **35 per cent of the residents are under 15 years of age** (Figure 1).

For every 100 people in working-age (aged 15-64) in Oe-Cusse, there are 62 children (aged 0-14) and 14 older persons (aged 65 and above), placing sustained pressure on care systems, particularly childcare. Yet, the demand for care falls unevenly: **women in rural areas support the highest number of dependents**, highlighting persistent gender and geographic inequalities in care responsibilities (Figure 2).

FIGURE 2.

Dependency ratio, by sex and location



Source: Timor-Leste Population and Housing Census 2022.

OE-CUSSE'S POPULATION STRUCTURE POINTS TO A SUBSTANTIAL DEMAND FOR CARE SERVICES, WITH IMPLICATIONS FOR WOMEN'S ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES BOTH WITHIN THE CARE SECTOR AND ACROSS THE BROADER ECONOMY.

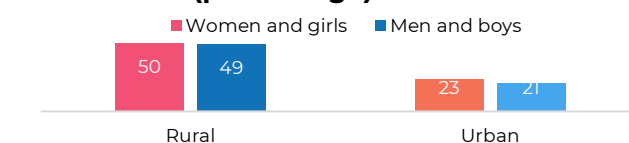
trajectories. Gender differences in illiteracy rates remain significant, especially in rural areas, where half of women aged 5 and above are unable to read or write – the highest rate among municipalities - reinforcing intergenerational cycles of poverty and exclusion (Figure 3). In Oe-Cusse, 43 per cent of women aged 20-24 are married compared with 14 per cent of men, limiting their chances to continue education.

In Oe-Cusse,

93% of married women aged 20-24 are not currently attending school compared with **48 per cent of never-married women.**

FIGURE 3.

Illiteracy rate among people aged 5+, by sex and location (percentage)



Source: Timor-Leste Population and Housing Census 2022.

¹For the purpose of this Gender Profile, only the population living in private households is considered. The population living in collective living quarters represents less than 0.06 per cent of the total population in Timor-Leste. All data is based on the 2022 Timor-Leste Population and Housing Census 2022, unless otherwise stated.

Older women in Oe-Cusse, particularly in rural areas, have among the lowest literacy rates, limiting their participation in social, economic and political life (Figure 4). Women's longer life expectancy also means they are more likely to reach older age widowed and economically insecure, facing heightened risks of poverty, isolation, and poor health.

In Oe-Cusse,

37% of women aged 65+ are widowed compared **with 9 per cent of men.**

Structural barriers limit women's access to the labour market. In Oe-Cusse, more women than men are outside the labour force (Figure 5), with almost **half of working-age women outside the labour force citing care responsibilities as the main reason** - more than double the share of men (Figure 6). Gender gaps are more pronounced **among women in their prime working years.** Women aged 30-44 are the most likely to be outside the labour

force due to caregiving (Figure 7), coinciding with peak childcare responsibilities.

Although Oe-Cusse record the highest rate of women's labour force participation, it remains below men's (43 versus 49 per cent, respectively), with the widest gender gap among those aged 55-59 years (14 percentage points).

Care responsibilities intersect with marital status in ways that shape women's labour market outcomes across the life course. The widest gender gap in the employment-to-population ratio is among married individuals, with 52 per cent of women in employment compared with 63 per cent of men. While more married women are in employment compared with those who never married, this partly reflects higher participation in education among the latter.

More than **6 in 10 never-married women cite education** as the main reason for being outside the labour force, whereas nearly **7 in 10 married women cite caregiving.**

FIGURE 4.

Illiteracy rates among people aged 65+, by sex and location (percentage)

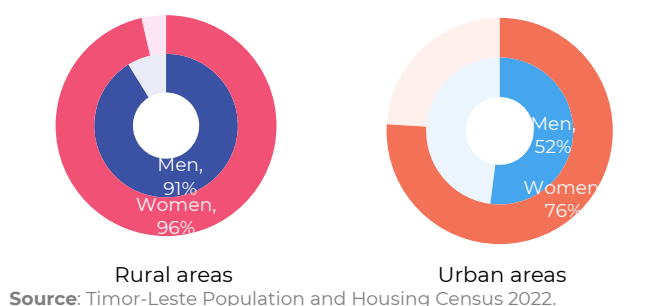


FIGURE 6.

Main reason for being outside the labour force, by sex (percentage)²

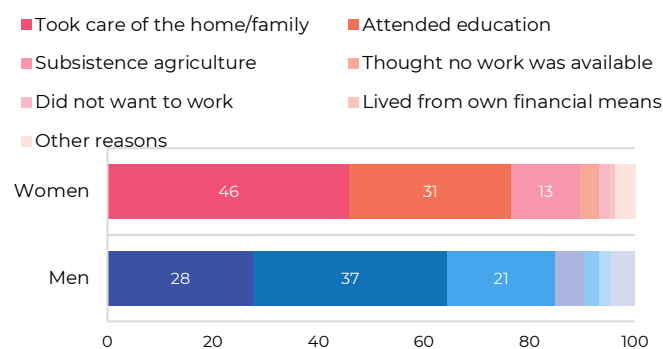


FIGURE 5.

Labour force status among people aged 15-64, by sex (percentage)

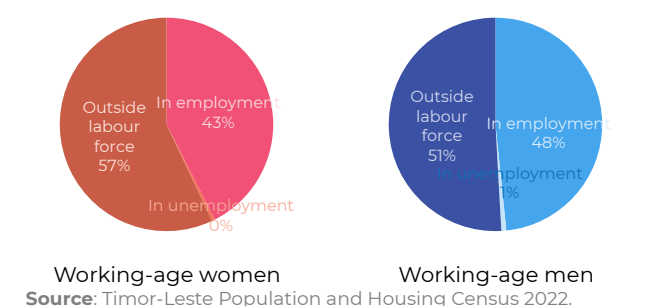
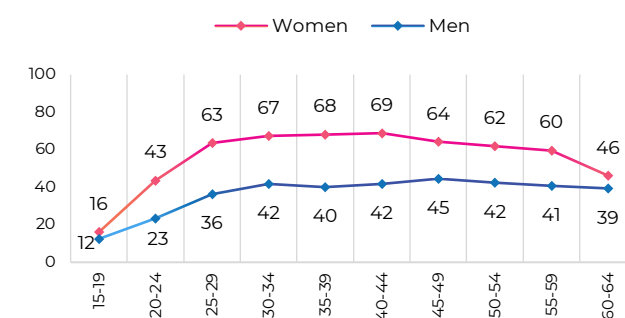


FIGURE 7.

Care responsibilities as the main reason for being outside the labour force, by sex and age groups (percentage)



² 'Other reasons' here includes 'was a seasonal worker', 'was disabled, ill, in bad health', 'was pensioner/retired/old age', and 'other reason'.

Even when women enter the workforce, structural barriers restrict women's access to decent work.

Women's continued overrepresentation in vulnerable employment exposes them to greater risks and vulnerabilities across their life cycle, with limited income stability, job protections, and access to social safety nets. In Oe-Cusse, own-account work is particularly prominent and significant urban-rural disparities continue to pose challenges, with more women in rural areas being contributing family workers or own account workers (Figure 8).

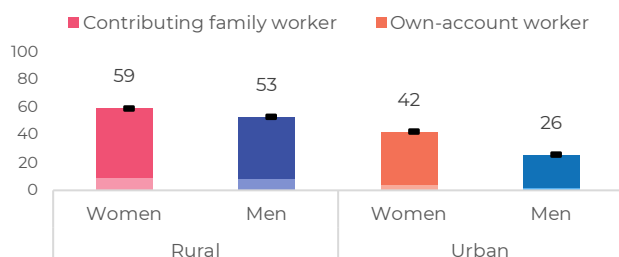
In Oe-Cusse,

56% of employed working-age women are in vulnerable forms of employment compared with **47 per cent of 10 men**

ECONOMIES THAT PRIORITIZE DECENT WORK ACT AS CATALYSTS FOR WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT, STIMULATING JOB GROWTH BOTH WITHIN THE SECTOR AND BEYOND.

FIGURE 8.

Vulnerable employment, by sex and location (percentage)



Source: Timor-Leste Population and Housing Census 2022.

Overall, these patterns reflect structural inequalities that **constrain women's access to income-generating opportunities** while concentrating their work in subsistence activities and unpaid care. This underscores the need for targeted employment policies that recognize and address unpaid responsibilities, particularly for rural women and those balancing early family formation with economic aspirations.

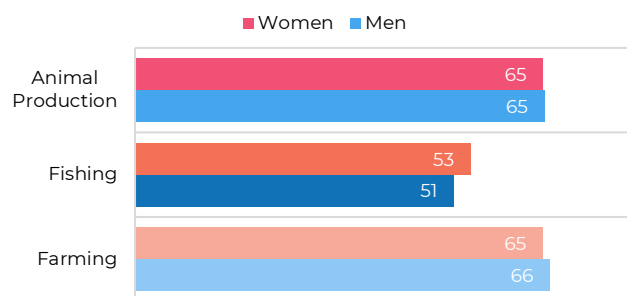
Subsistence agriculture remains a crucial, yet often overlooked, pillar of women's economic contributions.

Agriculture remains a key livelihood in Oe-Cusse, with **41 per cent of working-age people engaged in agricultural activities**, whether for sale or self-consumption. Among those who participate in agriculture, both women and men are highly concentrated in own-use production³ (65 versus 66 per cent, respectively). Yet, women's participation in own-use production exceeds that of men in fishing (53 versus 51 per cent, respectively) (Figure 9).

Engagement in subsistence production increases with age, reaching 71 per cent among older women, underscoring the role of own-use production as a livelihood strategy across the life course. Among working-age women engaged in agriculture, own-use production is slightly more prevalent in urban (67 per cent) than rural areas (65 per cent). Even so, rural women outside the labour force are much more likely than their urban counterparts to engage in own-use agricultural production (20 versus 6 per cent). This points to the continued importance of rural subsistence work in sustaining household livelihoods, even when it falls outside conventional labour market measures.

FIGURE 9.

People aged 15-64 engaged in subsistence production, by sex and type (percentage)



Source: Timor-Leste Population and Housing Census 2022.

TO HARNESS DEMOGRAPHIC OPPORTUNITIES, IT IS CRUCIAL TO DISMANTLE STRUCTURAL BARRIERS TO WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT.

Oe-Cusse's declining dependency ratio signals a window of economic opportunity, but only if matched by sustained investments in care systems, decent jobs and inclusive policies. The **dependency ratio**, a demographic indicator measuring the number of care dependents relative to the working-age population, **declined from 94 to 76 dependents per 100 working-age people** between 2015 and

³ Subsistence production is here defined as production undertaken only or mainly for own-family consumption; production for sale is defined as production undertaken only or mainly for sale.

2022. This trend points to the potential for a demographic dividend, whereby a relatively larger working-age population can support accelerated economic growth. With sustained investments, **gender-responsive care systems can serve as the cornerstone of inclusive and resilient economies**, improving outcomes for all while ensuring dignity and

equity for both caregivers and care recipients. Expanding access to affordable and quality care services, particularly in rural areas, would reduce women's care responsibilities but also stimulate job growth, boost GDP, and contribute to a more gender-equal world.

Disabilities affect women and men differently, with women often facing intersecting forms of disadvantage that compound across the life course.

In Oe-Cusse, **women are slightly more likely than men to experience one or multiple disabilities in older age**, with 6 per cent of women aged 65 and over living with disabilities compared with 5.1 per cent of men (Figure 10).

Women and girls with disabilities face significant educational disadvantages, including stigma, lack of inclusive infrastructure, and limited access to assistive devices. These challenges lead to lower educational attendance and higher rates of never having attended school (Figure 11), with long-term implications for skills development, economic independence, and wellbeing. **Limited access to education may, in turn, reduce future employment prospects and reinforce cycles of poverty.**

These compounded disadvantages continue into adulthood. **Fewer women with disabilities participate in the labour market compared with men with disabilities** (Figure 12), highlighting how the intersection of disability, gender, and economic vulnerability increases the risk of marginalization and poverty.

FIGURE 10.

People with disabilities, by sex and age groups (percentage)

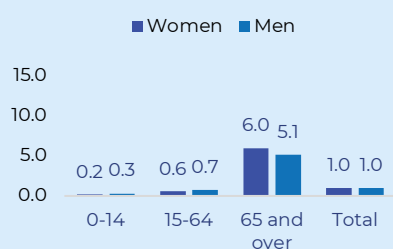


FIGURE 11.

People with disabilities aged 5+ who never attended school, by sex (percentage)

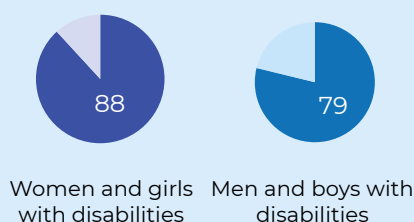
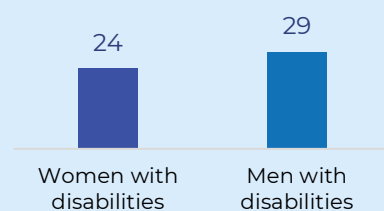


FIGURE 12.

Labour force participation rate of people with disabilities, by sex (percentage)



Source: Timor-Leste Population and Housing Census 2022.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ADVANCING WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT IN OE-CUSSE

Strengthen women's education progression and retention. Prioritize prevention of child marriage and invest in measures that support women's and girls' school progression, retention, and re-entry, including for married women, women living in rural areas, and women and girls with disabilities.

Support women's productive livelihoods and pathways to decent work. Improve the quality and security of women's work through stronger access to and control over land and other productive assets. Target skilling and employment policies and frameworks to support women's transition from vulnerable forms of employment into decent work. Strengthen the financial inclusion of women farmers and producers to support their transition from subsistence activities towards more secure and income-generating livelihoods.

Expand gender-responsive and inclusive social protection systems. Strengthen and scale up social protection schemes to better reach women living in poverty, including widows, older women and women with disabilities.

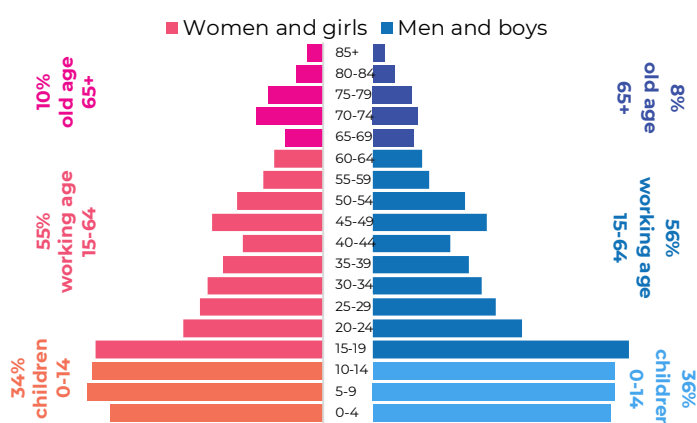
Municipality Gender Profile: Viqueque

Viqueque is home to 80,176 people¹, representing 6 per cent of Timor Leste's population. Viqueque's population is evenly split between women and girls and men and boys, with each accounting for 50 per cent. The municipality is **almost entirely rural**, with 94 per cent of residents residing in rural areas, well above the national average of 71 per cent.

Viqueque's age structure reflects a **feminization of ageing**, with a larger share of women aged 65 and above. At the same time, its demographic profile points to a notably higher demand for childcare

FIGURE 1.

Population, by sex and age groups



Source: Timor-Leste Population and Housing Census 2022.

Gender inequalities begin early in life and accumulate across the life course.

Gender inequalities are rooted in **discriminatory social norms and practices** that influence women's lives from childhood to old age, restricting autonomy, limiting access to education and employment, and reinforcing unequal expectations around caregiving and family formation. In Viqueque, child marriage remains a significant barrier to gender equality, with **8.3 per cent of women aged 20 to 24 married before age 18**. At the same time, the municipality has seen notable progress, with the rate of child marriage declining by 2.4 percentage points between 2015 and 2022, compared with a nearly 2 percentage point decline recorded nationally. Child marriage often channels women into early domestic roles, curtailing their opportunities for education and future economic opportunities.



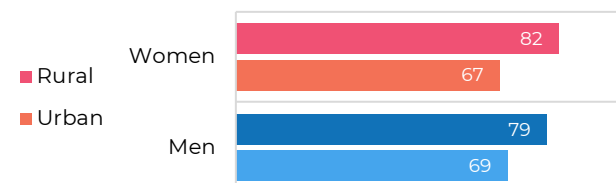
In Viqueque **8.3% of young women** were married before age 18

services, as **35 per cent of the residents are under 15 years of age** (Figure 1).

For every 100 people in working-age (aged 15-64) in Viqueque, there are 63 children (aged 0-14) and 16 older persons (aged 65 and above), placing sustained pressure on care systems, particularly childcare. Yet, the demand for care falls unevenly: **women in rural areas support the highest number of dependents**, highlighting persistent gender and geographic inequalities in care responsibilities (Figure 2).

FIGURE 2.

Dependency ratio, by sex and location



Source: Timor-Leste Population and Housing Census 2022.

VIQUEQUE'S POPULATION STRUCTURE POINTS TO A SUBSTANTIAL DEMAND FOR CARE SERVICES, WITH IMPLICATIONS FOR WOMEN'S ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES BOTH WITHIN THE CARE SECTOR AND ACROSS THE BROADER ECONOMY.

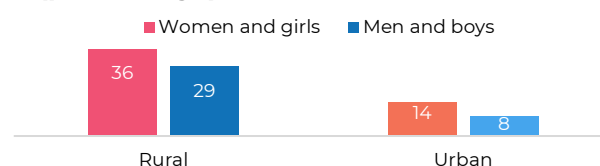
Gender norms around caregiving and early marriage continue to shape young women's trajectories. Women aged 5 and above remain more likely than men to have never attended school, with wider gender gaps in rural areas, reinforcing intergenerational cycles of poverty and exclusion (Figure 3). In Viqueque, 45 per cent of women aged 20-24 are married compared with 22 per cent of men, limiting their chances to continue education.

In Viqueque,

92% of married women aged 20-24 are not currently attending school compared with **61 per cent of never-married women**.

FIGURE 3.

People aged 5+ who never attended school, by sex (percentage)



Source: Timor-Leste Population and Housing Census 2022.

¹For the purpose of this Gender Profile, only the population living in private households is considered. The population living in collective living quarters represents less than 0.06 per cent of the total population in Timor-Leste. All data is based on the 2022 Timor-Leste Population and Housing Census 2022, unless otherwise stated.

Older women in Viqueque, particularly in rural areas, have among the lowest literacy rates, limiting their participation in social, economic and political life (Figure 4). Women's longer life expectancy also means they are more likely to reach older age widowed and economically insecure, facing heightened risks of poverty, isolation, and poor health.

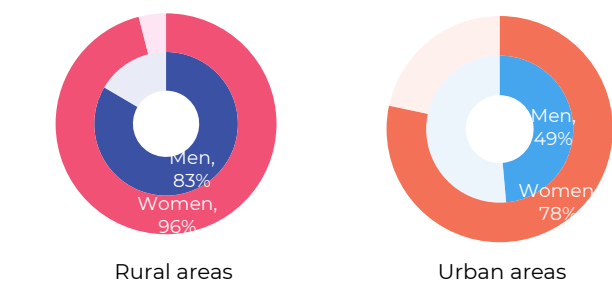
In Viqueque,

42% of women aged 65+ are widowed compared with **17 per cent of men**.

Structural barriers limit women's access to the labour market. In Viqueque, more women than men are outside the labour force (Figure 5), with **43 per cent of working-age women outside the labour force citing care responsibilities as the main reason** compared with 23 per cent of men (Figure 6). Gender disadvantages are more pronounced among women in rural areas and those in their prime working years. Women aged 30-34 are the most likely to be outside the labour force due to caregiving (Figure 7), coinciding with peak childcare responsibilities.

FIGURE 4.

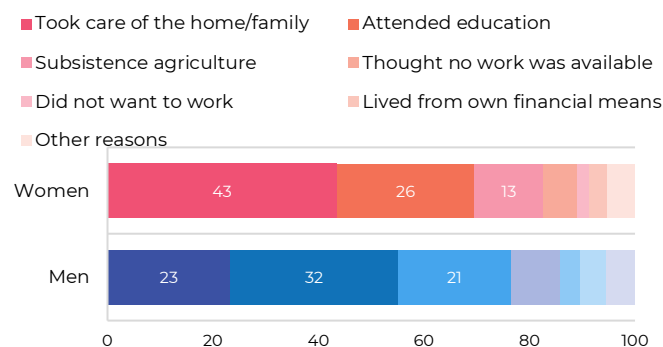
Illiteracy rates among people aged 65+, by sex and location (percentage)



Source: Timor-Leste Population and Housing Census 2022.

FIGURE 6.

Main reason for being outside the labour force, by sex (percentage)²



Source: Timor-Leste Population and Housing Census 2022.

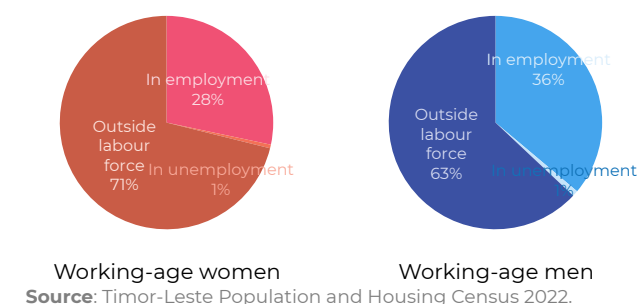
Women's labour force participation remains well below men's (29 versus 37 per cent, respectively), with the widest gender gap among those aged 35-39 years (15 percentage points). While more women in absolute terms are in the labour force in rural areas (6 thousand) than in urban areas (0.4 thousand), **labour force participation remains lower in rural settings** (29 compared with 31 per cent), reinforcing the economic vulnerability of rural women.

Care responsibilities intersect with marital status in ways that shape women's labour market outcomes across the life course. The widest gender gap in the employment-to-population ratio is among married individuals, with 35 per cent of women in employment compared with 50 per cent of men. While more married women are in employment compared with those who never married, this partly reflects higher participation in education among the latter.

Almost **6 in 10 never-married women cite education** as the main reason for being outside the labour force, whereas more than **6 in 10 married women cite caregiving**.

FIGURE 5.

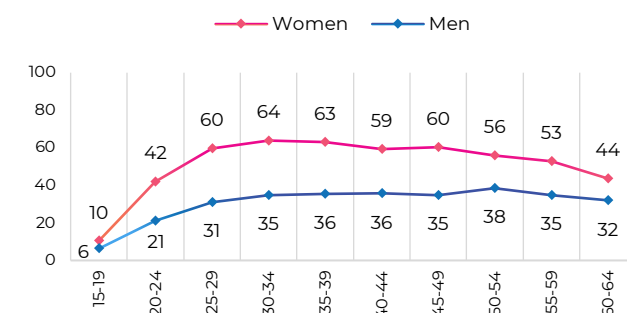
Labour force status among people aged 15-64, by sex (percentage)



Source: Timor-Leste Population and Housing Census 2022.

FIGURE 7.

Care responsibilities as the main reason for being outside the labour force, by sex and age groups (percentage)



Source: Timor-Leste Population and Housing Census 2022.

² 'Other reasons' here includes 'was a seasonal worker', 'was disabled, ill, in bad health', 'was pensioner/retired/old age', and 'other reason'.

Even when women enter the workforce, structural barriers restrict women's access to decent work.

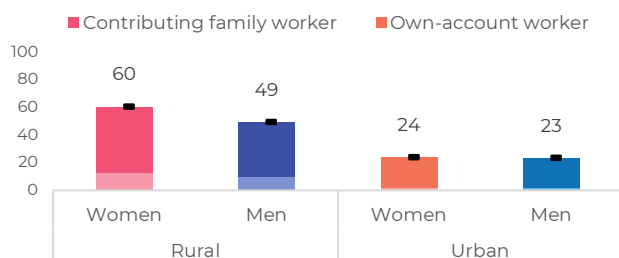
Women's continued overrepresentation in vulnerable employment exposes them to greater risks and vulnerabilities across their life cycle, with limited income stability, job protections, and access to social safety nets. Urban-rural disparities continue to pose challenges, with rural women being much more likely than their urban counterparts to be in vulnerable employment (Figure 8).

In Viqueque,

58% of employed working-age women are in vulnerable forms of employment compared with **48 per cent of 10 men**

ECONOMIES THAT PRIORITIZE DECENT WORK ACT AS CATALYSTS FOR WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT, STIMULATING JOB GROWTH BOTH WITHIN THE SECTOR AND BEYOND.

FIGURE 8.
Vulnerable employment, by sex and location (percentage)



Source: Timor-Leste Population and Housing Census 2022.

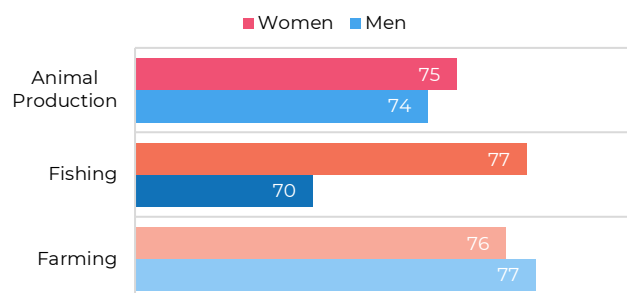
Overall, these patterns reflect structural inequalities that **constrain women's access to income-generating opportunities** while concentrating their work in subsistence activities and unpaid care. This underscores the need for targeted employment policies that recognize and address unpaid responsibilities, particularly for rural women and those balancing early family formation with economic aspirations.

Subsistence agriculture remains a crucial, yet often overlooked, pillar of women's economic contributions.

Agriculture remains a key livelihood in Viqueque, with **4 in 10 working-age people engaged in agricultural activities**, whether for sale or self-consumption. Among those who participate in agriculture, both women and men are mostly concentrated in own-use production³, with 75 per cent of each engaged only or mainly for self-consumption. Yet, women's participation in own-use production exceeds that of men in activities such as fishing and animal production (Figure 9).

Engagement in subsistence production increases with age, reaching 81 per cent among older women – one of the highest shares across municipalities. This underscores the role of own-use production as a livelihood strategy across the life course. Among working-age women engaged in agriculture, own-use production is slightly higher in urban (77 per cent) than rural areas (75 per cent). Even so, rural women outside the labour force are markedly more likely than urban women to engage in own-use agricultural production (26 versus 14 per cent). Their contributions remain central to rural livelihood and household food security, even when they fall outside conventional labour market measures.

FIGURE 9.
People aged 15-64 engaged in subsistence production, by sex and type (percentage)



Source: Timor-Leste Population and Housing Census 2022.

TO HARNESS DEMOGRAPHIC OPPORTUNITIES, IT IS CRUCIAL TO DISMANTLE STRUCTURAL BARRIERS TO WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT.

Viqueque's declining dependency ratio signals a window of economic opportunity, but only if matched by sustained investments in care systems, decent jobs and inclusive policies. The **dependency ratio**, a demographic indicator measuring the number of care dependents relative to the working-age population, **declined from 100 to 80**

³ Subsistence production is here defined as production undertaken only or mainly for own-family consumption; production for sale is defined as production undertaken only or mainly for sale.

dependents per 100 working-age people between 2015 and 2022. This trend points to the potential for a demographic dividend, whereby a relatively larger working-age population can support accelerated economic growth. With sustained investments, **gender-responsive care systems can serve as the cornerstone of inclusive and resilient economies,**

improving outcomes for all while ensuring dignity and equity for both caregivers and care recipients. Expanding access to affordable and quality care services, particularly in rural areas, would reduce women's care responsibilities but also stimulate job growth, boost GDP, and contribute to a more gender-equal world.

Disabilities affect women and men differently, with women often facing intersecting forms of disadvantage that compound across the life course.

Viqueque has one of the highest disability prevalence rates in the country, with **women being slightly more likely than men to experience one or multiple disabilities.** This is particularly evident in older age, with 14.2 per cent of women aged 65 and over living with disabilities compared with 13.3 per cent of men (Figure 10).

Women and girls with disabilities face significant educational disadvantages, including stigma, lack of inclusive infrastructure, and limited access to assistive devices. These challenges lead to lower educational attendance and higher rates of never having attended school (Figure 11), with long-term implications for skills development, economic independence, and wellbeing. **Limited access to education may, in turn, reduce future employment prospects and reinforce cycles of poverty.**

These compounded disadvantages continue into adulthood. **Fewer women with disabilities participate in the labour market compared with men with disabilities** (Figure 12), highlighting how the intersection of disability, gender, and economic vulnerability increases the risk of marginalization and poverty.

FIGURE 10.

People with disabilities, by sex and age groups (percentage)

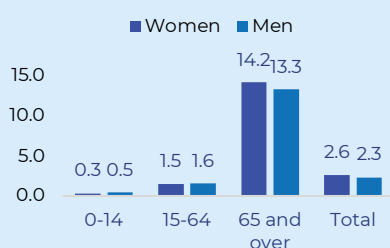


FIGURE 11.

People with disabilities aged 5+ who never attended school, by sex (percentage)

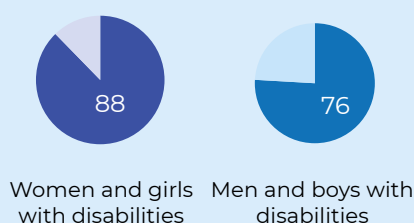
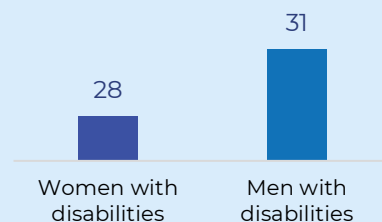


FIGURE 12.

Labour force participation rate of people with disabilities, by sex (percentage)



Source: Timor-Leste Population and Housing Census 2022.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ADVANCING WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT IN VIQUEQUE

Strengthen women's capacities through education and training. Invest in measures that prevent early marriage and support women's and girls' progression through education, including for married women, women living in rural areas, and women and girls with disabilities.

Recognize, reduce, and redistribute unpaid care and subsistence work, especially in rural areas. Strengthen policies and services that acknowledge women's unpaid work and promote a more equal distribution of care responsibilities within households and communities. Prioritize the development of accessible, affordable, and high-quality care services.

Promote pathways to decent work. Target skilling and employment policies and frameworks to support women's transition from subsistence and vulnerable forms of employment into decent work.

Expand gender-responsive and inclusive social protection systems. Strengthen and scale up social protection schemes to better reach women living in poverty, including widows, older women, and women with disabilities.