

Gender Integration in Multilateral Development Banks' COVID-19 Response Efforts

SHELBY BOURGAULT · MEGAN O'DONNELL · MIA GRIFFIN

Abstract

Research demonstrates that the COVID-19 pandemic has had differential effects by gender, with women experiencing higher job and income loss, increased rates of domestic violence, and mounting care burdens globally. While governments and civil society organizations were pivotal to mitigating the impacts of the pandemic, international institutions, and multilateral development banks (MDBs) in particular, also played a role in financing and informing the design and implementation of COVID-19 response programs. MDBs are institutions with significant financial resources and policy leverage, but relatively little is known about their impact on narrowing gender gaps in their partner countries, especially during the COVID-19 crisis.

This paper examines the extent to which MDB COVID response projects incorporated gender elements. Using project data from the World Bank, African Development Bank, Asian Development Bank, and Inter-American Development Bank, this paper presents descriptive statistics on the presence of gender-related indicators and gender-dedicated projects across MDBs in projects focused on health, social protection, and other areas of COVID response and recovery. We analyze data across institutions, geographies, and project sectors—and highlight the main gaps in MDB response efforts.

Gender Integration in Multilateral Development Banks' COVID-19 Response Efforts

Shelby Bourgault, Megan O'Donnell, Mia Griffin

Center for Global Development

The dataset of projects included in this paper's analysis is available here.

The Center for Global Development is grateful for contributions from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation in support of this work.

Shelby Bourgault, Megan O'Donnell, and Mia Griffin. 2023. "Gender Integration in Multilateral Development Banks' COVID-19 Response Efforts." CGD Policy Paper 293. Washington, DC: Center for Global Development. <https://www.cgdev.org/publication/gender-integration-multilateral-development-banks-covid-19-response-efforts>

CENTER FOR GLOBAL DEVELOPMENT

2055 L Street, NW Fifth Floor
Washington, DC 20036

1 Abbey Gardens
Great College Street
London
SW1P 3SE

www.cgdev.org

Center for Global Development. 2023.

The Center for Global Development works to reduce global poverty and improve lives through innovative economic research that drives better policy and practice by the world's top decision makers. Use and dissemination of this Policy Paper is encouraged; however, reproduced copies may not be used for commercial purposes. Further usage is permitted under the terms of the Creative Commons License.

The views expressed in CGD Policy Papers are those of the authors and should not be attributed to the board of directors, funders of the Center for Global Development, or the authors' respective organizations.

Contents

Introduction	1
Methodology	2
Results	4
Number and financing levels of COVID-19 response projects by MDB	4
Geography	10
Timeline	13
Sector	15
Intersectionality	18
Limitations and next steps	19
Conclusion	20

List of Figures

1. Number of projects identified through search and screening strategy.....	5
2. Number of COVID response projects by MDB	6
3. Amount of funding to COVID response projects by MDB (billions USD)	7
4. Number of COVID response projects with gender indicators by MDB.....	7
5. Gender-dedicated COVID response projects by MDB.....	10
6. Percent of all COVID response projects by region	11
7. Percent of funding to all COVID response projects by region	11
8. Number of COVID response projects with gender indicators by region.....	12
9. Geographic spread of all COVID response projects	12
10. Geographic spread of COVID response projects with gender indicators.....	13
11. Number of COVID response projects with gender indicators over time	14
12. Number of gender-dedicated COVID response projects over time	14
13. Percentage of COVID response projects with gender indicators	15
14. Number of gender-dedicated COVID response projects by sector	18
15. Number of projects with intersectional indicators	18
16. Number of projects with intersectional indicators by MDB.....	19

List of Table

1. Percentage of COVID response projects with gender indicators by sector and MDB	16
--	----

Introduction

From the earliest days of the COVID-19 pandemic, evidence demonstrated that the crisis has been gendered in its consequences. Synthesis analysis from the Center for Global Development's COVID-19 Gender and Development Initiative has shown that women have been disproportionately impacted in a number of key areas.¹ Women have experienced increased domestic violence and increased the time spent on unpaid care work in the face of school and childcare center closures, as well as stay-at-home orders.^{2,3,4} Women were more likely to lose jobs and income, and women entrepreneurs experienced higher business closure rates.^{5,6,7,8} Progress towards gender equality made in the years leading up to 2020 has unraveled. These setbacks will be long-lasting unless efforts are made to narrow the gender gaps we have seen exacerbated during the COVID-19 crisis.

The multilateral development banks (MDBs) played a role in designing, financing, and implementing COVID-19 response projects. MDBs are institutions with significant financial resources and policy leverage, but relatively little is known about their impact on narrowing gender gaps in their partner countries. With clear evidence that the pandemic widened gender gaps globally, including through studies conducted by researchers at the MDBs, we pose the question: did the MDBs consider and seeks to address gender gaps in their pandemic response projects?^{9,10,11} Using project data from the World Bank, African Development Bank, Asian Development Bank, and Inter-American Development

- 1 See Center for Global Development's COVID-19 Gender and Development Initiative here: <https://www.cgdev.org/project/covid-gender-initiative>.
- 2 Bourgault, S., Peterman, A., and O'Donnell, M. (2021) Violence against women and children during COVID-19—One year on and 100 papers in: A fourth research round up. Center for Global Development. Retrieved from <https://www.cgdev.org/publication/violence-against-women-and-children-during-covid-19-one-year-and-100-papers-fourth>.
- 3 UN Women. (2021) Measuring the shadow pandemic: violence against women during COVID-19. UN Women. Retrieved from <https://data.unwomen.org/publications/vaw-rga>.
- 4 Kenny, C. and Yang, G. (2021) The global childcare workload from school and preschool closures during the COVID-19 pandemic. Retrieved from <https://www.cgdev.org/publication/global-childcare-workload-school-and-preschool-closures-during-covid-19-pandemic>.
- 5 Bourgault et al. (2021) The social and economic gendered impacts of COVID-19: The problems are clear, now what's next? Center for Global Development and EMERGE. Retrieved from <https://www.cgdev.org/blog/social-and-economic-gendered-impacts-covid-19-problems-are-clear-now-whats-next>.
- 6 O'Donnell, M. et al. (2021) The impacts of COVID-19 on women's social and economic outcomes: an updated review of the evidence. Retrieved from <https://www.cgdev.org/publication/impacts-covid-19-womens-social-and-economic-outcomes-updated-review-evidence>.
- 7 Goldstein, M., Gonzalez Martinez, P. Papineni, S., and Wimpey, J. (2020) The global state of small business during COVID-19: gender inequalities. World Bank. Retrieved from <https://blogs.worldbank.org/developmenttalk/global-state-small-business-during-covid-19-gender-inequalities>.
- 8 Oxfam International. (2021) Women's lost income in 2020 totaled the combined wealth of 98 countries. Oxfam International. Retrieved from <https://www.oxfam.org/en/press-releases/covid-19-cost-women-globally-over-800-billion-lost-income-one-year#main-content>.
- 9 De Paz Nieves, C., Gaddis, I., and Muller, M. (2021) Gender and COVID-19: what have we learnt, one year later? World Bank Policy Research Working Paper No. 9709. World Bank. Retrieved from <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/35829>.
- 10 Cucagna, E. and Romero, J. (2021) The gendered impacts of COVID-19 on labor markets in Latin America and the Caribbean. World Bank. Retrieved from <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/35191>.
- 11 Asian Development Bank. (2022) Two years on: the lingering gendered effects of the COVID-19 pandemic in Asia and the Pacific. Asian Development Bank. Retrieved from: <https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/publication/802341/lingering-gendered-effects-covid19-asia-pacific.pdf>.

Bank, this paper presents descriptive statistics on the presence of gender-related indicators and gender-dedicated projects across MDBs in projects focused on health, social protection, and other areas of COVID response and recovery. We analyze data across institutions, geographies, and project sectors—and highlight the main gaps in MDB response efforts.

This paper follows a long tradition of examining multilateral development banks' operations with a focus on their attention to gender equality. In response to largely gender-blind operations during the structural adjustment period of the 1980s, the World Bank in particular sought to address the critiques of neoliberalism with its Gender and Development (GAD) approach.¹² The approach included a greater emphasis on utilizing the household to address social reproduction needs after the retreat of the state due to structural adjustment.¹³ One notable critique of this GAD approach was an increased emphasis on connecting women to labor markets as employees and entrepreneurs as a means to reduce poverty, but providing little support to families to address the subsequent care needs previously filled by women (or the state).^{14,15} Another critique of the GAD approach centered on its treatment of gender and use of instrumentalist arguments rather than a recognition of gender equality as an ultimate end in itself.^{16,17,18,19} There are some more recent signs of a shift, however, to frame gender equality as a desirable outcome in its own right and to increase focus on previously underprioritized issues such as reproductive health, maternal mortality, and social protection.^{20,21}

Methodology

In May and June 2022, we used project databases from the World Bank, Asian Development Bank (ADB), African Development Bank (AfDB), and Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) to compile an original dataset of MDB COVID-19 response projects and the extent to which they focused on and/or

12 World Bank Gender and Development Overview: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/programs/knowledge-for-change/brief/gender-and-development>.

13 Bedford, K. (2009) *Developing Partnerships: Gender, Sexuality, and the Reformed World Bank*. Univ. of Minnesota Press.

14 Bedford, K. (2009) *Developing Partnerships: Gender, Sexuality, and the Reformed World Bank*. Univ. of Minnesota Press.

15 Ferguson, L. (2010) Interrogating 'Gender' in Development Policy and Practice: The World Bank, Tourism and Microenterprise in Honduras. *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 12:1, 3–24.

16 Bedford, K. (2009) *Developing Partnerships: Gender, Sexuality, and the Reformed World Bank*. Univ. of Minnesota Press.

17 Ferguson, L. and Harmon, S. (2015) Gender and infrastructure in the World Bank. *Development Policy Review*, 33 (5). Retrieved from: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/dpr.12128>.

18 Bergeron, S. (2001) Political Economy Discourses of Globalization and Feminist Politics, *Signs*, 26 (4): 983–1006.

19 Griffin, P. (2006) *The World Bank, New Political Economy* 11(4): 571–581.

20 Razavi, S. (2012). 'World Development Report 2012: Gender Equality and Development—A Commentary' *Development and Change* 43(1): 423–437.

21 Ferguson, L. and Harmon, S. (2015) Gender and infrastructure in the World Bank. *Development Policy Review*, 33 (5). Retrieved from: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/dpr.12128>.

considered gender equality-related issues.²² We examined all projects approved within a two-year period, beginning on March 11, 2020 (the day the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a pandemic) and ending on March 10, 2022.²³ In total, we identified 3,343 projects approved within this date range.

We then screened projects to determine whether they focused on COVID-19 response/recovery, with each project title and objective or description screened for the keywords “COVID*,” “corona*,” “emergency,” “pandemic,” “crisis,” “recovery,” and “response.” We included all projects with objectives aimed either at direct pandemic response or economic recovery. Through this screening process, we eliminated 2,291 projects, leaving 1,052 projects in our final dataset. All 1,052 projects included in our dataset can be found [here](#). This screening process was used in order to identify the projects most closely tied to COVID response and recovery efforts, as nearly every project approved within this time window would have had some COVID-related component or adaptation. This made the dataset more manageable and helped us to focus on only the projects that had named COVID response as a key objective, rather than projects that may have been approved and implemented regardless of the pandemic but nonetheless included COVID-related components. A potential pitfall of this strategy is that it eliminates about two-thirds of the total sample of projects approved after March 11, 2020, and could therefore greatly underestimate or overestimate the incorporation of gender in MDB’s COVID response efforts depending on the characteristics of this sample. Rather than detracting from the statistics and analysis presented below, we believe this opens the door to future research to develop an appropriate comparison group for the sample we present.

For each MDB project, the dataset we created contains the project title, project objective, MDB funding amount, country and sector of every project, and for those with publicly available project results framework, we record any gender indicators. We define gender indicators as those that specifically mention men, women, girls, and boys, those that are sex- or gender-disaggregated, and those related to gender-focused project activities (e.g., an indicator capturing the number of gender sensitivity trainings conducted through a project).

As a final step, we screened projects for those that were dedicated to promoting gender equality by searching the projects’ title and objective or description for keywords “gender,” “sex,” “women,” “men,” “girls,” and “boys.” This helped us identify projects for which gender equality was a core element or where the project focused primarily on outcomes for women and girls. Through this final screening,

22 World Bank project database: <https://projects.worldbank.org/en/projects-operations/projects-list?os=0>.

ADB project database: <https://www.adb.org/projects>.

AfDB project database: <https://www.afdb.org/en/documents/project-operations/project-appraisal-reports>.

IDB project database: <https://www.iadb.org/en/projects>.

23 The World Bank, IDB, and ADB project databases listed all projects approved during that time period. For the African Development Bank, only projects that had public project documentation were in the database, potentially leaving out a large number of projects. Since most of our analysis relies on project documents, we do not think the omission of AfDB projects without documentation drastically skewed our findings, but any figures that reflect incomplete AfDB data are marked with “AfDB”.

we identified 69 projects primarily focused on advancing gender equality. We do not however, imply that a “gender-dedicated” approach is preferable to a “gender-mainstreamed” approach. We simply present these two groups of analysis in order to identify if there were great differences between the two.

Our focus on gender in the results frameworks and in the title and objective of projects is purposely more narrow than the MDBs themselves may define gender inclusion. Many projects that do not meet our gender criteria may have gendered components. Some MDBs include a gender tag on their project databases, but the criteria for this tag are not clear or necessarily comparable across MDBs, so we needed to define a different methodology that could be easily applied across all institutions. In doing so, we emphasize the importance of including gender in results frameworks because indicators and targets are the easiest way for projects to determine whether they are delivering on gender equality goals and activities. Other researchers have used the presence of gender indicators in projects’ results frameworks previously to analyze the level of integration, and we find value in this approach as well.²⁴

The analysis presented below follows a simple pattern to present descriptive statistics about the MDB projects approved between March 2020 and March 2022 in response to COVID-19. For each area of analysis, we present the findings for the total sample of COVID-19 projects, followed by the findings for only projects with gender-related indicators, and finally the findings for projects focused on advancing gender equality. For all analysis that pertains to gender indicators, we only examine projects with publicly available results frameworks. We see our approach as complementary to that taken by UNDP and UN Women with the COVID-19 Global Gender Response Tracker²⁵ to document government policy responses to the pandemic.²⁶

Results

Number and financing levels of COVID-19 response projects by MDB

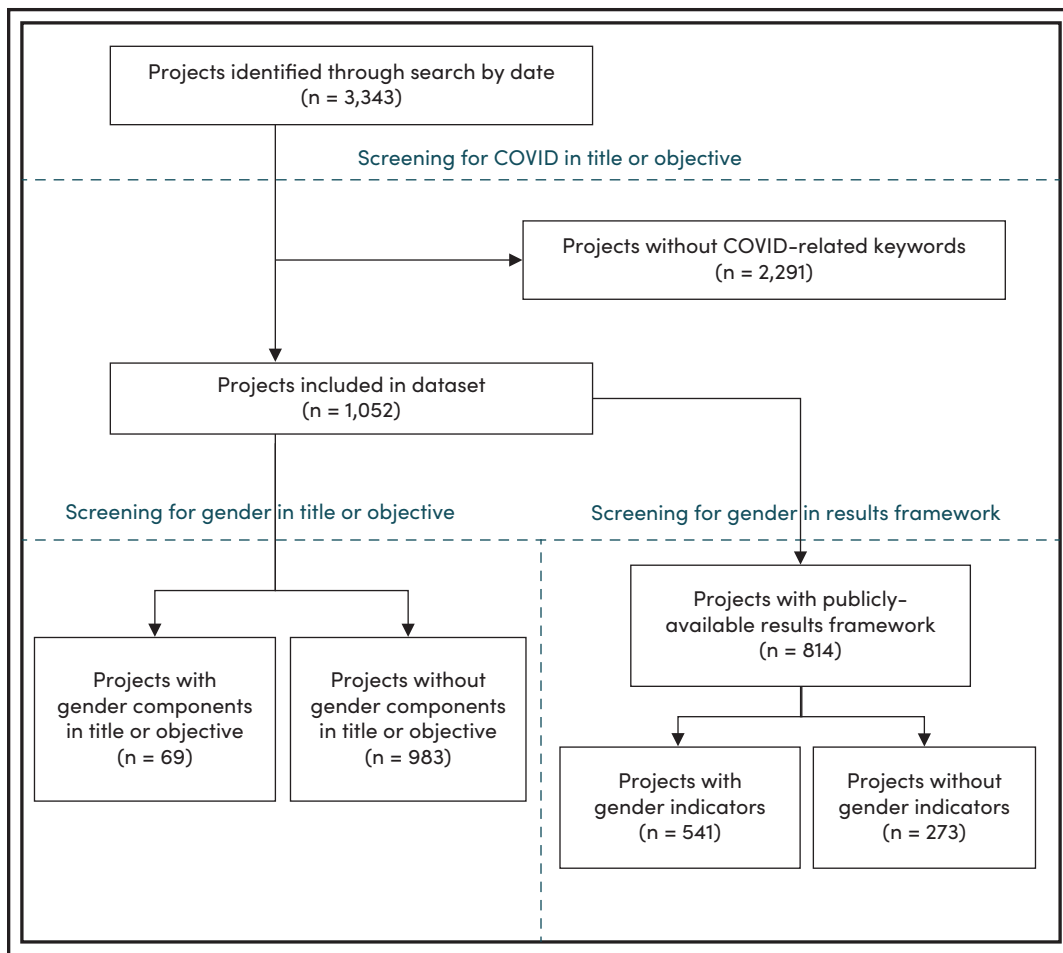
Of the 1,052 projects in our sample, 814 had publicly available results frameworks as of June 2022. Of these, two-thirds (541 projects) included gender-related indicators. However, just 69 projects (6.6 percent of all projects in our sample) included gender equality as a core project element as defined by our screening methodology above.

24 Ferguson, L. and Harmon, S. (2015) Gender and infrastructure in the World Bank. *Development Policy Review*, 33 (5). Retrieved from: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/dpr.12128>.

25 Available at <https://data.undp.org/gendert Tracker/>.

26 UNDP and UN Women. (2022) Government responses to COVID-19: Lessons on gender equality from a world in turmoil. UNDP and UN Women. Retrieved from <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2022/06/government-responses-to-covid-19-lessons-on-gender-equality-for-a-world-in-turmoil>.

FIGURE 1. Number of projects identified through search and screening strategy

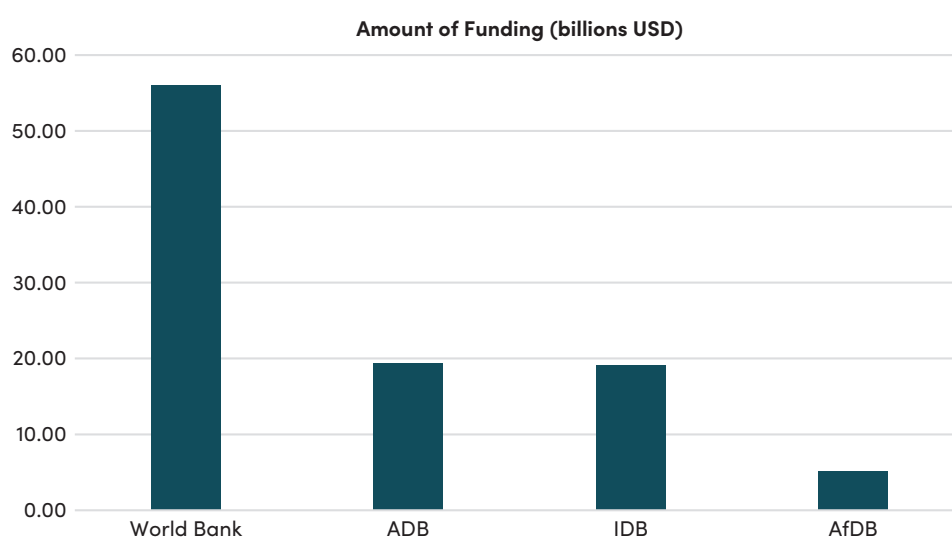


In our sample, the World Bank approved 440 COVID response projects, followed closely by the IDB with 389 projects, making up 79 percent of all COVID response projects across the four organizations. The ADB and AfDB approved 169 and 54 projects, respectively.

As a measure of comparability, we compare these figures to the totals provided by the MDBs themselves when reporting on their total COVID response efforts. The World Bank reports a total financing envelope of \$204 billion in calendar year 2020 and 2021, of which \$135 billion comes from IDA/IBRD. We totaled \$58 billion USD in World Bank funding for COVID response. Alternatively, our figures for ADB (\$19.4 billion USD) are much closer to those reported by ADB (\$33 billion in committed funds). The IDB reports \$21.6 billion USD in COVID response projects approved during 2020, about even with the total we find for IDB during both 2020 and 2021. The AfDB set up a COVID-19 Response Facility to mobilize funding, but does not report a total figure dedicated to

COVID-19 response efforts.²⁷ In all instances where it is reported, our totals are lower than those reported by the MDBs themselves. There are important differences in our methodologies to account for the vastly different totals, with the main difference being that the MDB figures include funding through projects already being implemented which were then retooled to deliver COVID relief. Our dataset only includes projects newly approved during the first two years of the crisis. Additionally, both the World Bank and ADB figures include projects approved after March 10, 2022, the end date of our dataset. This presents an important limitation to this work, as clearly a large portion of COVID response came from restructured existing projects. We decided to focus on newly approved projects because, in focusing on whether or not the project integrated gender, we did not want to penalize projects that were not newly originated in response to the clearly gendered crisis.

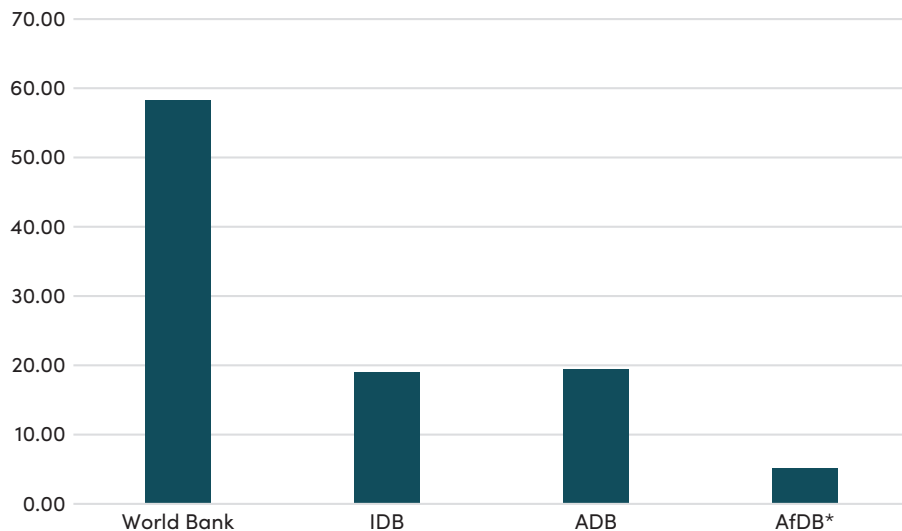
FIGURE 2. Number of COVID response projects by MDB



In terms of financing volumes, we document approximately \$100 billion USD in MDB funding to COVID response projects from March 2020–22. The World Bank is responsible for \$56 billion USD, or nearly 56 percent of the total funding in our sample, followed by the ADB (\$19.4 billion, 20 percent), the IDB (\$19 billion, 19 percent), and the AfDB (\$5.1 billion, 5 percent). The four largest projects in our sample are the ADB’s COVID-19 Active Response and Expenditure Support Programs in India, Indonesia, Thailand, and the Philippines. Notably, though the IDB ranked second in number of projects, we see that the average financing volume of IDB projects is lower than the other three institutions.

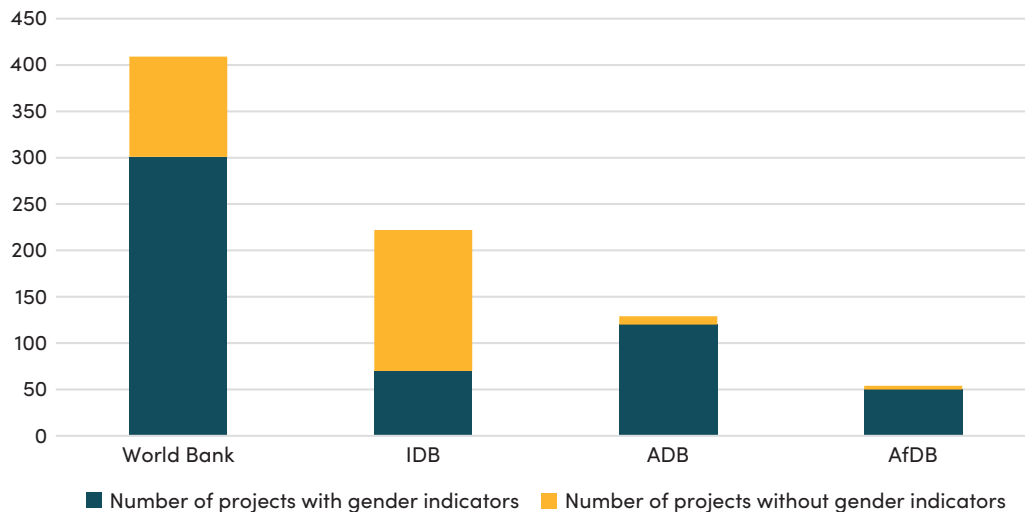
²⁷ It is important to note that the AfDB’s projects database was not filterable in the same way as the other three institutions and this analysis only includes AfDB projects which had publicly available project appraisal reports. This means that any projects without such reports available are left out of this analysis and any comparison of the total sample of projects between institutions will not be entirely fair for the AfDB.

FIGURE 3. Amount of funding to COVID response projects by MDB (billions USD)



Of the 814 projects in our sample with published results frameworks, 541 (66.5 percent) included one or more indicators related to gender. The ADB and AfDB were the high performers in this area, with both institutions including gender-related indicators in 93 and 92 percent of their COVID response projects, respectively. By contrast, the World Bank and IDB included such indicators in 74 percent and 32 percent of projects, respectively.

FIGURE 4. Number of COVID response projects with gender indicators by MDB



Example gender indicators included in MDB COVID response projects

World Bank Sierra Leone COVID-19 Emergency Preparedness and Response Project: Individuals reached with tailored information on COVID-19 (Number, total target 5,300,000, female target 2,650,000).

ADB Support for COVID-19 Vaccine Delivery in Mongolia under the Asia Pacific Vaccine Access Facility: At least 30% (989,060 people; disaggregated by sex, age, and priority group) in priority population in Mongolia vaccinated against COVID-19 in line with the national immunization strategy and plan.

AfDB Economic Recovery and Social Inclusion Support Programme (PARIÉS) in Tunisia: Number of low-income families benefiting from exceptional temporary financial assistance to cope with the effects of COVID19, of which 20% are women headed.

IDB Program to Strengthen Public Policy and Fiscal Management in Response to the Health and Economic Crisis Caused by COVID-19 In Uruguay II: Lost income of domestic workers due to unemployment covered by the special regime for unemployment benefits, with 97% of domestic workers being women and main employment sector for Afro-descendent women (target 50%).

Across all projects with results frameworks available to analyze, more than 3.5 times as much funding went to projects with gender indicators (\$77 billion USD total) than to those without (\$21 billion USD total). The average amount of funding for projects with gender indicators was \$142 million USD, compared to an average of \$80 million USD for projects without. Importantly, this says nothing about the amount of funding going specifically to gender equality-related elements of projects—a critical data point we lack because the MDBs do not consistently publish information on funding allocations aimed at promoting gender equality. In all likelihood, funding dedicated to promoting gender equality comprises a small percentage of funding allocated for the entire project.

In contrast to \$100 billion in all COVID response projects across the MDBs, the total amount of funding to gender-dedicated projects was just \$7.2 billion USD (7 percent), averaging \$105 million across 69 projects.

The IDB implemented the most gender-dedicated projects (25 projects, 6.4 percent of total projects), followed by the ADB, which had the highest ratio of gender-dedicated projects relative to all COVID projects (23 project, 13.6 percent of total projects), then the World Bank (19 projects, 4.3 percent of total projects), and the AfDB (2 projects, 3.7 percent of total projects).

Example gender-dedicated COVID response projects

World Bank Zambia Second Additional Financing for Girls' Education and Women's Empowerment and Livelihood Project—COVID 19 Scale-up of Social Cash

The project development objective is to support the Government of Zambia to increase access to livelihood support for women and access to secondary education for disadvantaged adolescent girls in extremely poor households in selected districts, and provide cash transfers for poor and vulnerable households.

ADB Vietnam COVID-19 Relief for Women-Led Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises

Objective: Businesses of eligible enterprises affected by COVID-19 revived and sustained. Eligible enterprises must also qualify as women-led or women-owned businesses by either being at least 51% owned by a woman or women or have a woman as senior or second most senior executive and at least 30% of the board members are women where a board exists.

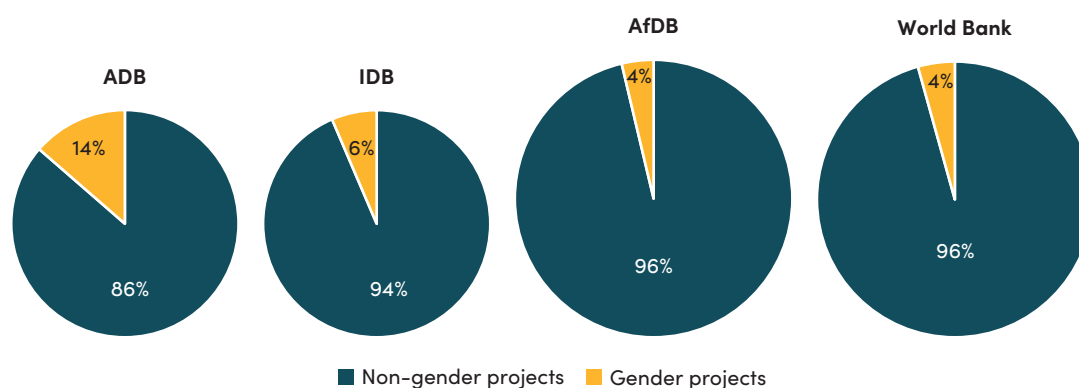
AfDB Regional Support Project for Resilience of Youth Enterprises (PAREJ)

Objective: to support recovery or expansion of the activities of youth micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises facing the impacts of COVID-19. Specifically, the project will build the technical capacity of young business leaders and improve their access to financing mechanisms so as to increase their productivity and create jobs for young people. 30–50% of youth will be women.

IDB Regional Gender Parity Accelerators: Accelerating Women's Economic Participation Phase 2

The objective of this technical cooperation is to contribute to closing the economic gender gap through the implementation of the Gender Parity Initiative (GPI). The specific objectives are to support the implementation of the IPG action plan in the countries where it exists, taking into account the new challenges created by COVID-19, promote knowledge exchange with countries interested in the regional IPG methodology, and develop and systematize interventions to promote women's leadership in the public and private sectors.

FIGURE 5. Gender-dedicated COVID response projects by MDB



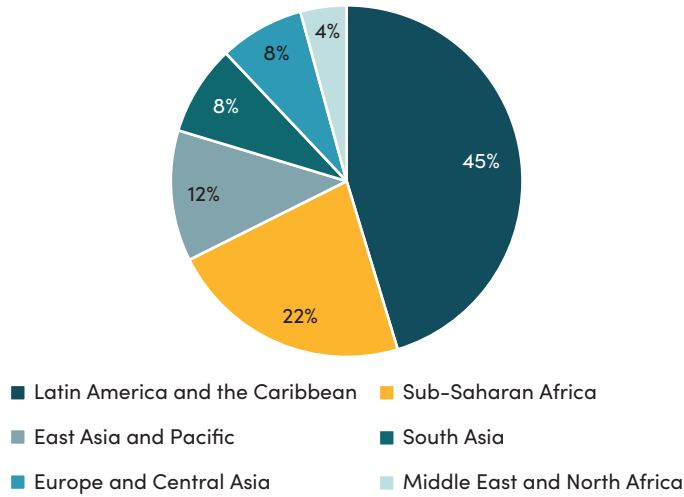
The IDB implemented the largest number of COVID-19 response projects among regional MDBs, and only 32 percent of these projects included gender-related indicators, though the IDB had the most gender-dedicated projects overall (25 projects). This suggests the IDB’s strength in prioritizing projects dedicated to gender equality, but perhaps room for growth in ‘mainstreaming’ gender considerations into other sectors and thematic areas. The ADB performed well in terms of integrating gender indicators into their overall portfolio (93 percent) and having a high concentration of gender-dedicated projects among their whole COVID response portfolio (13.6 percent, 23 projects). Both the World Bank and AfDB had the lowest proportion of gender-dedicated projects relative to their total COVID response at about 4 percent.

Geography²⁸

About 45 percent of total COVID response projects were approved for Latin America and the Caribbean, followed by sub-Saharan Africa at 22 percent, East Asia and Pacific at 12 percent, and all other regions at less than 10 percent. The dominance of projects in Latin America and the Caribbean is largely driven by the large number of IDB projects discussed above.

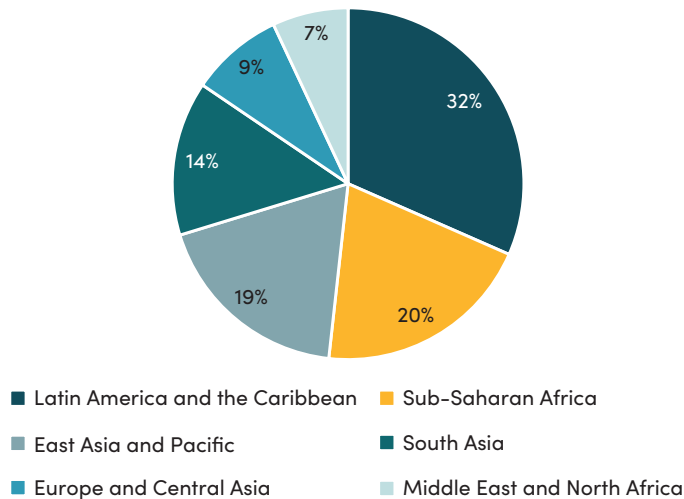
28 Multi-country and regional projects are excluded from the geographic analysis.

FIGURE 6. Percent of all COVID response projects by region



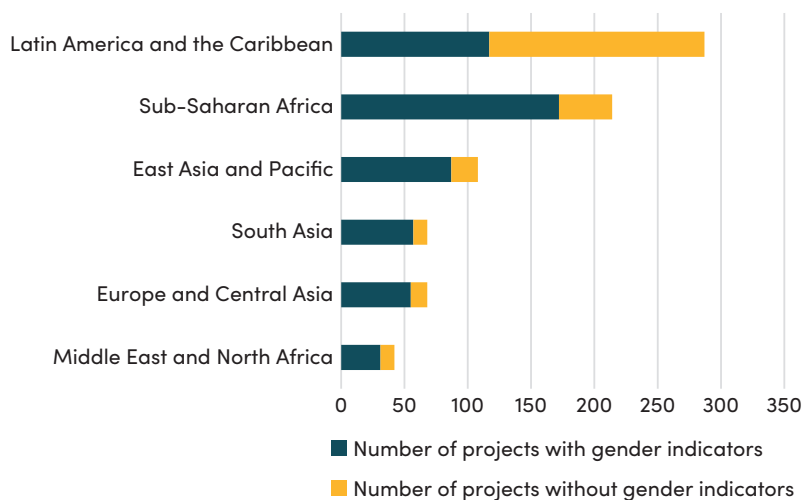
In terms of funding, the spread is a bit more even regionally, with about 32 percent of funding going to Latin America and the Caribbean, 20 percent to sub-Saharan Africa, 19 percent to East Asia and Pacific, 14 percent to South Asia, and 9 and 7 percent to Europe and Central Asia and the Middle East and North Africa, respectively.

FIGURE 7. Percent of funding to all COVID response projects by region



The figure below shows that despite having fewer overall projects than Latin America, sub-Saharan Africa had the largest number of projects with gender indicators (172 projects). Projects in South Asia, East Asia and Pacific, Europe and Central Asia, and sub-Saharan Africa were more likely to include gender indicators than projects in other regions, with at least 80 percent of projects in each of these regions including gender indicators. Only about 41 percent of projects in Latin America and the Caribbean included such indicators. This is largely driven by IDB activities, as only 32 percent of IDB projects in LAC include gender indicators, compared to 72 percent for the World Bank in the region.

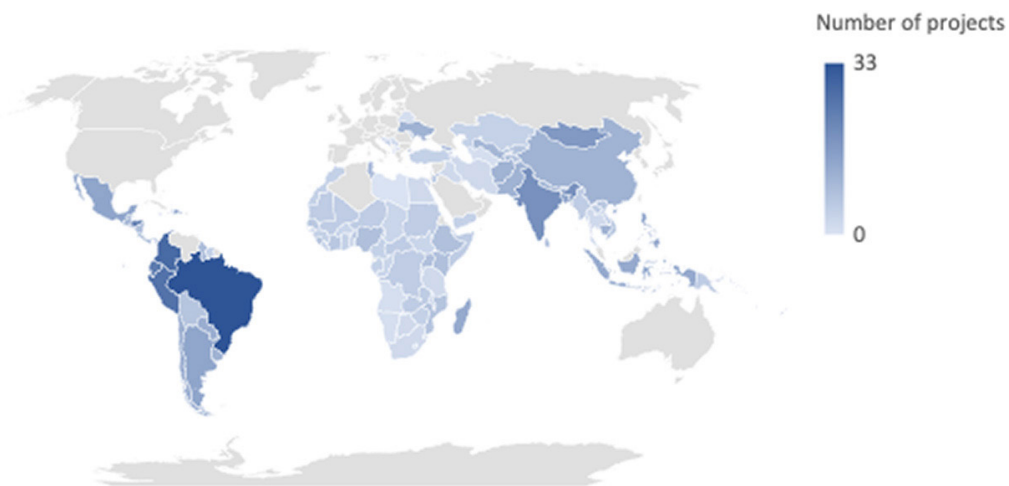
FIGURE 8. Number of COVID response projects with gender indicators by region



The regional breakdown for projects with a gender focus largely mirrors the proportions seen for the total number of projects. Latin America has the most at 26 projects (41 percent), followed by sub-Saharan Africa at 11 projects (17 percent), and East Asia and Pacific at 10 projects (16 percent).

The countries with the most COVID response projects are Brazil (33 projects), Colombia (28), Peru (26), Ecuador (24), and Honduras (23).

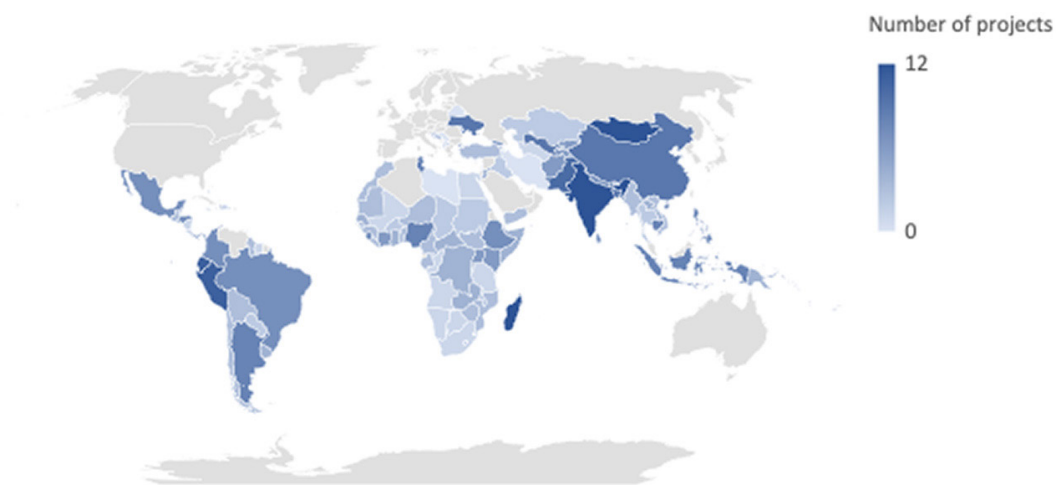
FIGURE 9. Geographic spread of all COVID response projects



Source: Powered by Bing © Australian Bureau of Statistics, GeoNames, Microsoft, Navinfo, OpenStreetMap, TomTom, Wikipedia.

For projects with gender indicators, the data show a slightly different picture: Latin America and the Caribbean retain a high concentration of projects, but South and East Asia take the lead. The top recipient countries for projects with gender indicators are India (12 projects), Mongolia (12), Madagascar (12), Ecuador (11), and Peru (11).

FIGURE 10. Geographic spread of COVID response projects with gender indicators



Source: Powered by Bing © Australian Bureau of Statistics, GeoNames, Microsoft, Navinfo, OpenStreetMap, TomTom, Wikipedia.

For the 69 projects with a gender equality focus, the countries with highest concentration are Madagascar (4), Bangladesh (3), and Peru (3), reflecting that no one region leads on financing gender equality-focused projects.

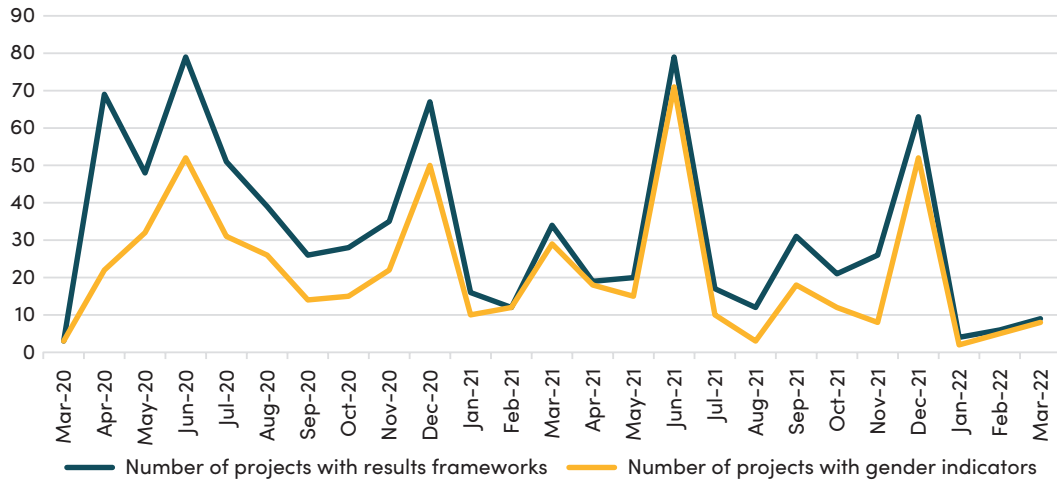
Timeline

Next, we examined trends over time: did the MDBs' approval of projects dedicated to promoting gender equality, or their incorporation of gender indicators into other projects, change over the course of the pandemic?

The integration of gender indicators was uneven during the first two months of the pandemic. Though few, all projects approved in March 2020 included gender indicators, but only 30 percent of April projects did so. For the rest of the first year of the pandemic, about 60 percent of projects included gender indicators.

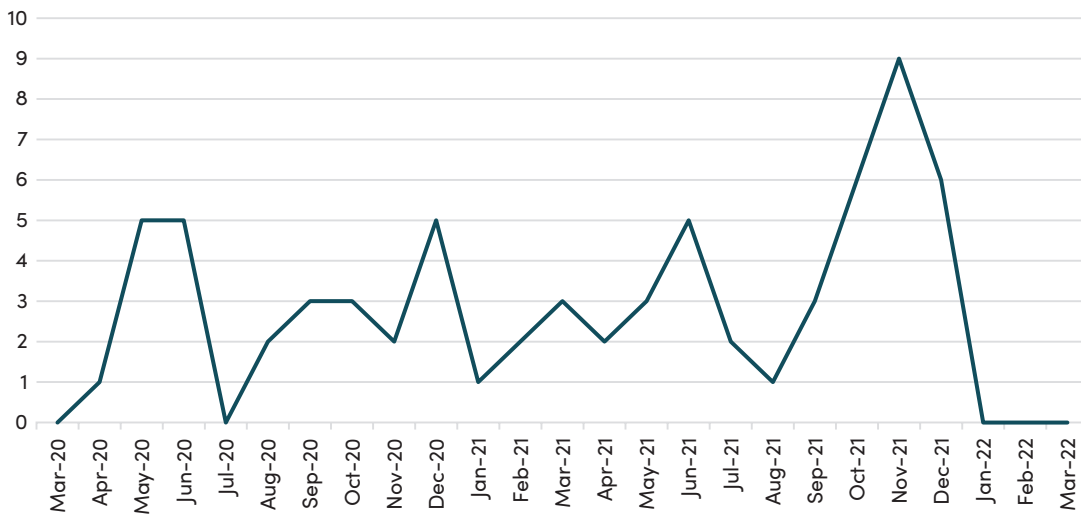
One year on, our data reflects more effort to include gender into MDB projects (perhaps in reaction to strong evidence on the disproportionate impacts of COVID-19 on women and girls). During the first half of 2021, about 90 percent of projects approved included gender indicators. Since then, there has been another drop off and more erratic patterns, which could also be because the volume of COVID response projects has gone down overall, making the trendlines less clear.

FIGURE 11. Number of COVID response projects with gender indicators over time



The timeline for gender-dedicated projects is also more erratic, largely due to smaller sample size. The number of gender-dedicated projects hovered between zero and five per month for the first year and a half of the pandemic. MDBs then approved more projects in the fall and winter of 2021, with a peak of nine projects approved during November 2021, before a sharp decline in the beginning of 2022 (mirroring the overall decline in COVID response projects during this period).

FIGURE 12. Number of gender-dedicated COVID response projects over time



Sector

For our sectoral analysis, we first recorded the primary sector for each project as reported by MDBs. Then, to minimize the number of total sectors and to normalize across organizations, we narrowed the list into ten broad categories.²⁹

The largest number of projects were focused on health (289), followed by social protection (117), banking and finance (87), education (48), and agriculture, livestock and fisheries (36). All other sectors had fewer than 30 projects.

Agriculture, livestock, and forestry projects were most likely to include gender-specific indicators (92 percent of projects), followed by water and waste management (79 percent) and social protection (75 percent). On the other hand, only two-thirds of health projects—those most prevalent in our sample—included gender indicators. Another missed opportunity is in education, where only 58 percent of projects included gender indicators.

FIGURE 13. Percentage of COVID response projects with gender indicators

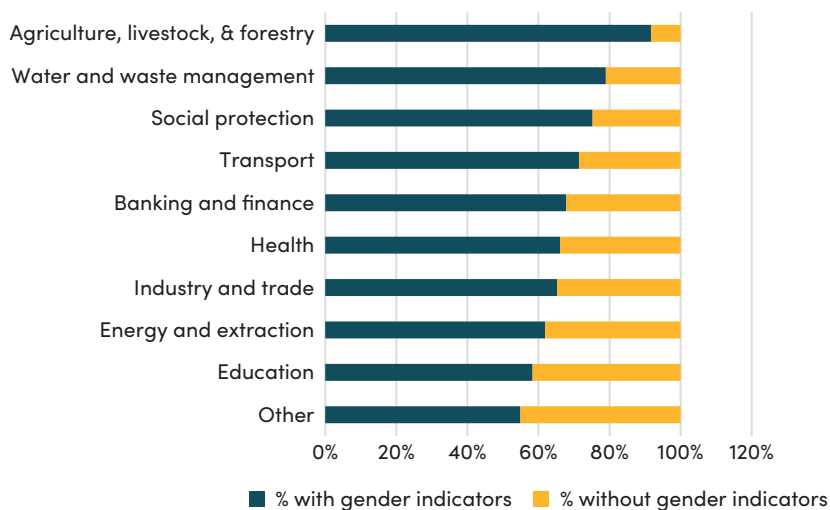


Table 1 shows our sectoral analysis within each MDB—and reveals significant differences across institutions. For example, the ADB included gender indicators in all of its health and education projects, while the IDB includes gender indicators in only 28 percent of health projects and none of its education projects, with the AfDB³⁰ and World Bank falling in between.

Sectors with the fewest gender indicators in projects' results frameworks were energy and extraction at the World Bank, industry and trade at the ADB, health at the AfDB, and education at

²⁹ The sectoral categories are agriculture, livestock and forestry; banking and finance; education; energy and extraction; health; industry and trade; social protection; transport; water and waste management; and "other". "Other" projects include those outside of the ten major categories, as well as projects that lacked a clearly named sector or covered multiple sectors.

³⁰ There are no AfDB education projects in our sample.

the IDB. Identifying the sectors in which considerations of gender equality are lagging is particularly important because MDB investments are largely organized by sector/thematic area; sector teams play a role in encouraging client countries to consider issues of gender equality in their MDB-financed programs.

TABLE 1. Percentage of COVID response projects with gender indicators by sector and MDB

Sector	World Bank	ADB	AfDB	IDB
Health	62%	100%	87%	28%
Other	75%	80%	90%	24%
Social protection	88%	–	100%	46%
Banking and finance	80%	88%	100%	49%
Education	95%	100%	–	0%
Agriculture, livestock, & forestry	92%	89%	100%	–
Industry and trade	89%	67%	100%	25%
Transport	92%	100%	–	38%
Energy and extraction	60%	100%	–	14%
Water and waste management	83%	75%	–	67%

Example projects and indicators by sector

Health

IDB Panama Immediate Public Health Response to Contain and Control Coronavirus and Mitigate its Impact on Services

Example indicator: Number of confirmed cases of and deaths from COVID-19 (sex-disaggregated).

Social protection

World Bank Cameroon Adaptive Safety Nets and Economic Inclusion Project

Example indicator: Households benefiting from regular cash transfers, of which recipient is a female (target 80%).

Banking and finance

AfDB Kenya Competitiveness and Economic Recovery Support Programme (CERSP)

Example indicator: MSMEs registered (target 40% women-owned).

Education

ADB Philippines EdTech Solutions for Last Mile Schools in COVID-19

Example indicator: At least 80% of pilot participating students (at least 50% of them female) complete digital content for distance education by school year 21/22 using tablet.

Agriculture, livestock, and forestry

World Bank Argentina Climate Intelligent and Inclusive Agri-food Systems Project

Example indicator: Beneficiaries with access to new or improved rural public infrastructure for agricultural risk mitigation and natural resources management, of them women (target 50%).

Industry and trade

AfDB Senegal Accelerated Industrialization, Competitiveness and Employment Support Programme (PAAICE)

Example indicator: Number of direct and indirect jobs created or safeguarded by the beneficiaries in the priority value chains, of which 35% for women.

Transport

World Bank Tonga Climate Resilient Transport Project II

Example indicator: Number of women who receive training on commercial driver licenses and obtain licenses (target 40 women).

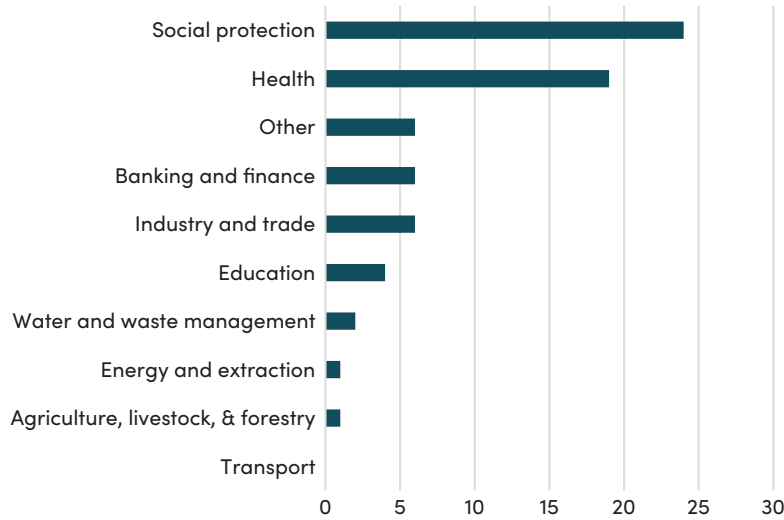
Energy and extraction

ADB India Azure Power COVID-19 Liquidity Support Project

Example indicator: APIPL increases the number of female technical staff members by at least 10% by December 2021.

Regarding gender-dedicated projects, we find the majority fall under social protection (24 projects) and health (19 projects), making up 35 and 28 percent of gender-dedicated projects, respectively. Banking and finance, industry and trade, and “other” each had 6 projects, (9 percent), and all other categories had fewer than 4 projects.

FIGURE 14. Number of gender-dedicated COVID response projects by sector

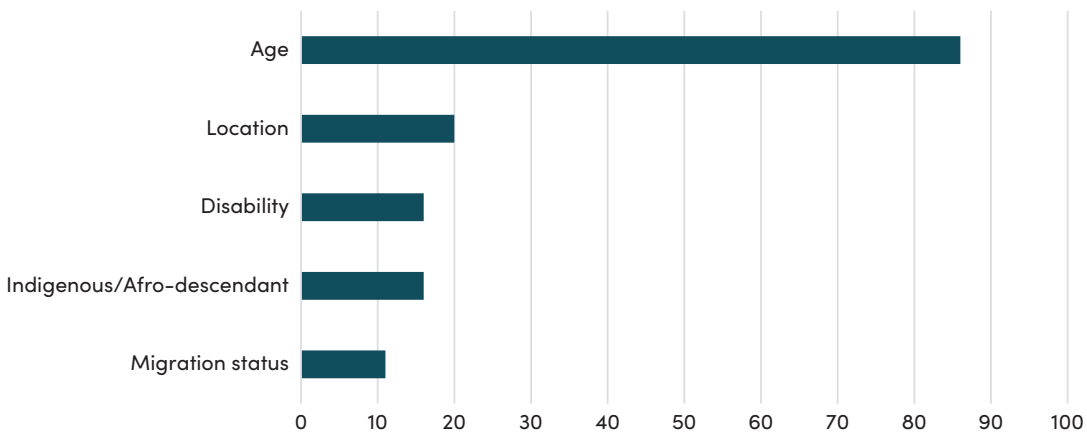


Intersectionality

Finally, we examine whether or not the projects that included gender indicators also considered other aspects of inequality and incorporated an intersectional approach to tracking progress. We checked each indicator that contained sex- or gender-disaggregated data to see whether the same indicator captured other demographic data.³¹

Overall, 128 projects included intersectional indicators, which is only 28 percent of projects with gender indicators and only 15 percent of all projects with results frameworks. Gender was most often combined with age (86 projects), location, including disaggregation by rural/urban (20 projects), and disability (16 projects).

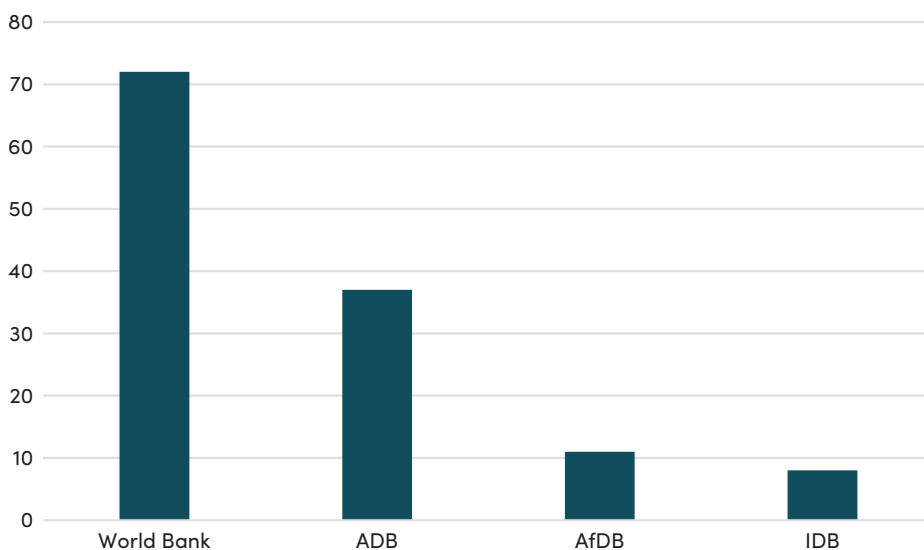
FIGURE 15. Number of projects with intersectional indicators



³¹ This analysis only focuses on intersectionality when attached to gender. If an indicator was disaggregated by gender and age it was included, but if it included only age and disability, for example, it was not.

Broken down by MDB, we see that the World Bank has the largest number of projects with intersectional indicators (72 projects), followed by the ADB (37 projects). The AfDB (11 projects) and IDB (8 projects) were less likely to include intersectional gender indicators in projects' results frameworks.

FIGURE 16. Number of projects with intersectional indicators by MDB



Limitations and next steps

The main limitation of this study is that it measures only intentionality; drawing on available data, we are only able to analyze what MDBs have set out to achieve through COVID response and recovery projects, rather than what they have achieved. This is an important first step, because if there are shortcomings even in the MDBs' intended approach to promoting gender equality, there are likely to be shortcomings in their results as well. As is the case with the UN Women and UNDP COVID-19 Global Gender Response Tracker,³² future research should build on this dataset with an examination of the results.

Second, while we collect and count the gender-related indicators each MDB project used, we stop short of making any judgment on the quality of those indicators. Even within this dataset, not all gender indicators are created equal; some may represent a much higher level of ambition than others. For example, the AfDB's "Mitigating Impact of COVID-19 on Household Food Security" project includes a target for 50 percent of all program participants receiving safe agricultural inputs to be women, while the World Bank's "Afghanistan Water, Sanitation, Hygiene and Institutional Support" project includes an indicator that three women will be hired as project staff (among other indicators). Both of those activities receive the same amount of credit in our analysis. With the publication of this

³² Available at <https://data.undp.org/gendertracker/>.

paper and accompanying dataset, we offer data allowing for follow up analysis on the quality of the indicators included, whether those indicators address key gender gaps in the relevant context, and the level of ambition of each of these indicators.

Third, this is a first attempt at descriptive statistics reflecting MDB projects' gender integration, and therefore we are not aware of any existing research that can serve as a comparison case. Ideally, we would be able to compare the results of our analysis to gender integration efforts before the pandemic to see if these projects mark a distinct change. An additional point of comparison could be whether the projects we define as COVID response differ significantly in their approach to gender than those projects we excluded from our sample from the same time period. Despite this limitation, we hope that this analysis can be used as a comparison case for future research.

Finally, MDB COVID response and recovery projects are closing and beginning to report on their progress towards the indicators in their results frameworks. As of June 29, 2022, 16 percent of the projects in our dataset had closed. An obvious next step would be to look at the final results of these projects and examine whether the MDBs met their gender equality-focused objectives.

Conclusion

This analysis presents descriptive statistics to document the extent to which the MDBs considered and/or sought to address gender gaps in their COVID response projects, including through gender-dedicated projects. With this dataset we have been able to identify key gaps in MDBs' intentions toward gender integration, whether by MDB, geography, sector, or income category.

We identified 1,052 COVID response projects from the World Bank, ADB, AfDB, and IDB, of which 814 (77 percent) had publicly available results frameworks to analyze. For those with results frameworks, only 541 (66 percent) included gender indicators. This is a striking finding, as leaders at all four MDBs have ramped up their rhetorical focus on gender equality in recent years, as well as employed teams of gender experts, but progress is still needed to ensure that gender gaps are considered across all relevant projects in a systematic way. One-third of the projects in our dataset did not have a single measure related to gender. Without gender indicators, governments and MDB support teams will not be held accountable to ensuring the reach and benefits of projects are inclusive.

In terms of funding levels, only 7 percent of financing across the four MDBs went to gender-dedicated projects. Higher volume projects are more likely to include gender indicators: we find that the average funding for projects with gender indicators (\$143 million USD) was nearly double that of projects without gender indicators (\$80 million USD), and that the average funding for gender-dedicated projects (\$105 million USD) was slightly higher than the average for all the projects in our sample (\$97 million USD). But we lack data on the specific amount of project funding aimed

at promoting gender equality. This is a problematic data gap, and we encourage all four MDBs to systematically report on the amount of financing going towards gender activities.

Regionally, projects in Latin America and the Caribbean were least likely to include gender indicators, largely driven by the IDB being less likely to include such indicators than its counterparts.

Our findings indicate that particular sector teams can do more to consider and address relevant gender gaps. We identify key sector gaps each MDB can address moving forward and make greater efforts to integrate gender indicators, with notable gaps being energy and extraction at the World Bank, industry and trade at the ADB, health at the AfDB, and education at the IDB.

Finally, to broaden their understanding of gender and overlapping and compounding social inequalities, we encourage all four institutions to work with client countries to include more intersectional indicators in project results frameworks. In our entire sample of COVID response projects with public results frameworks, only 15 percent (128 projects) included indicators that combined gender and other demographic information, most commonly age.

This analysis and its underlying database provide a snapshot of how the MDBs responded during the first two years of the COVID-19 pandemic and to what extent these institutions considered and addressed widening gender gaps. With a better understanding of recovery efforts thus far and where important gaps remain, we hope this analysis will lead to more systematic and sustained efforts to include gender indicators into all project results frameworks and to design more projects where advancing gender equality is a clear and stated goal.