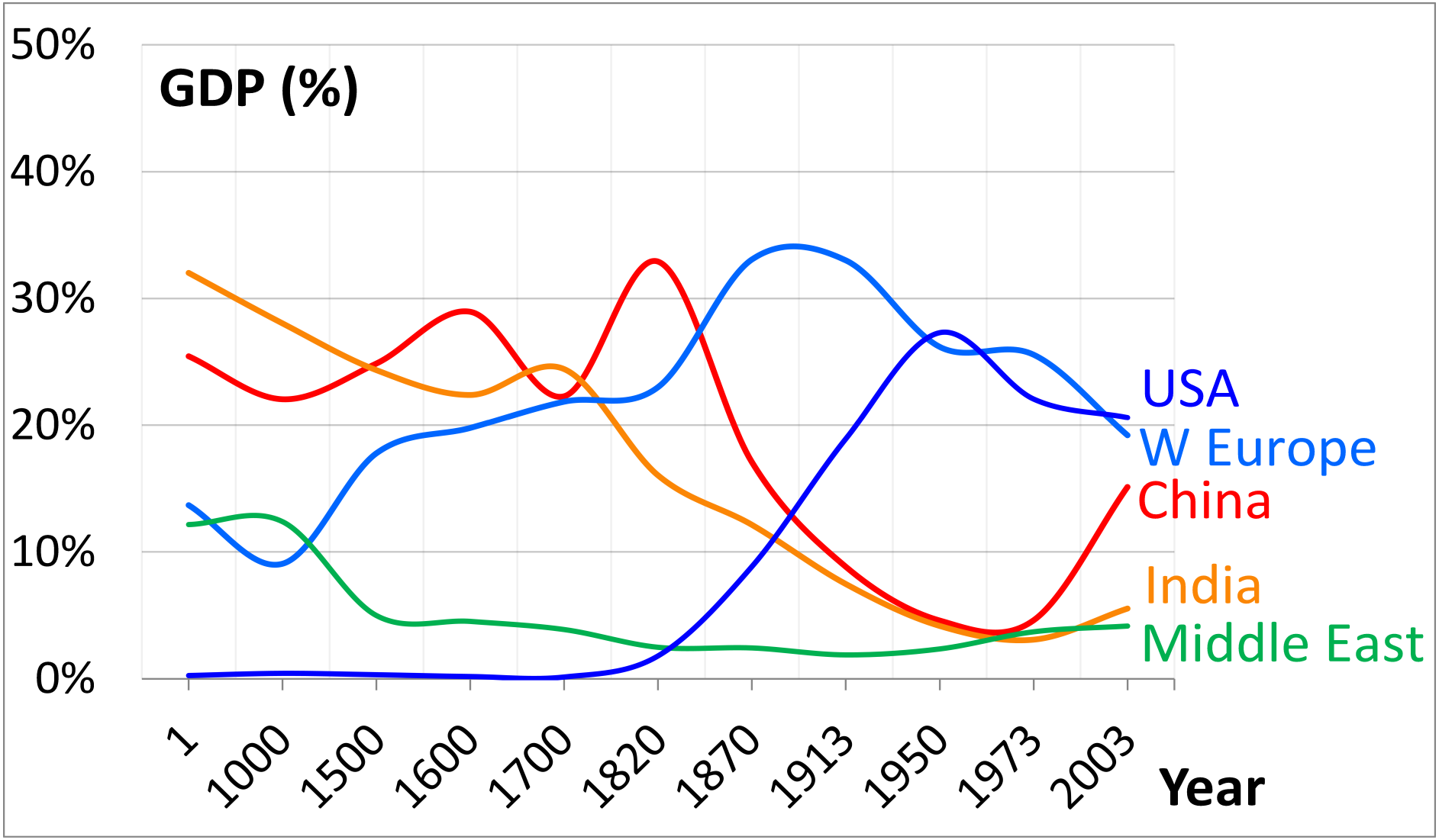
Women, Health and Economics: Presentation before participants of In-Service Training on "Breaking Barriers, Building Prosperity: Strategies for Women's Economic Inclusion" at LBSNAA, Mussoorie.

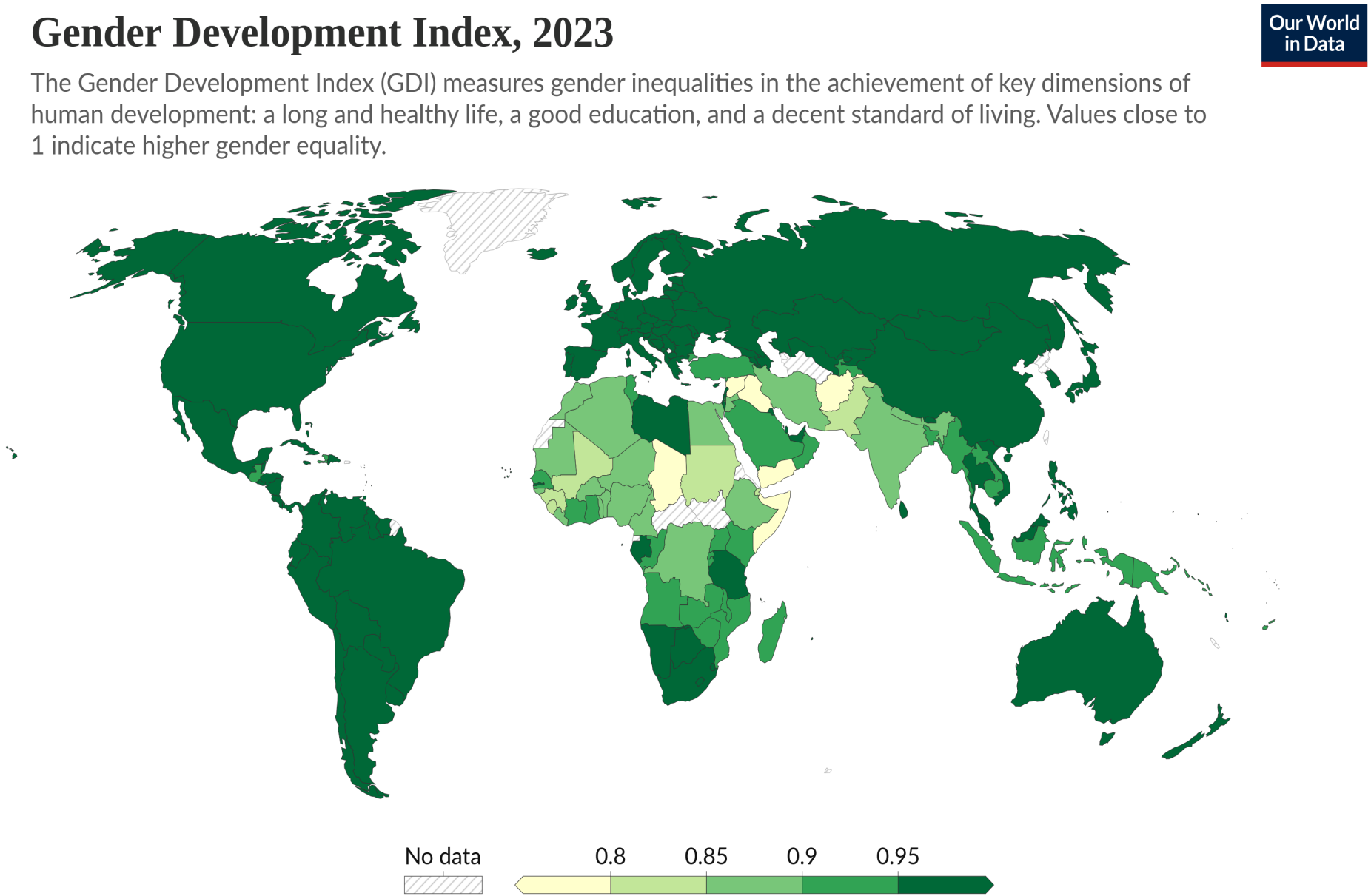
Prof. Rakesh Sarwal, MBBS, MPH, DrPH. (Community Medicine). ex-IAS, sarwalr@gmail.com LinkedIn Google Scholar

July 8, 2025

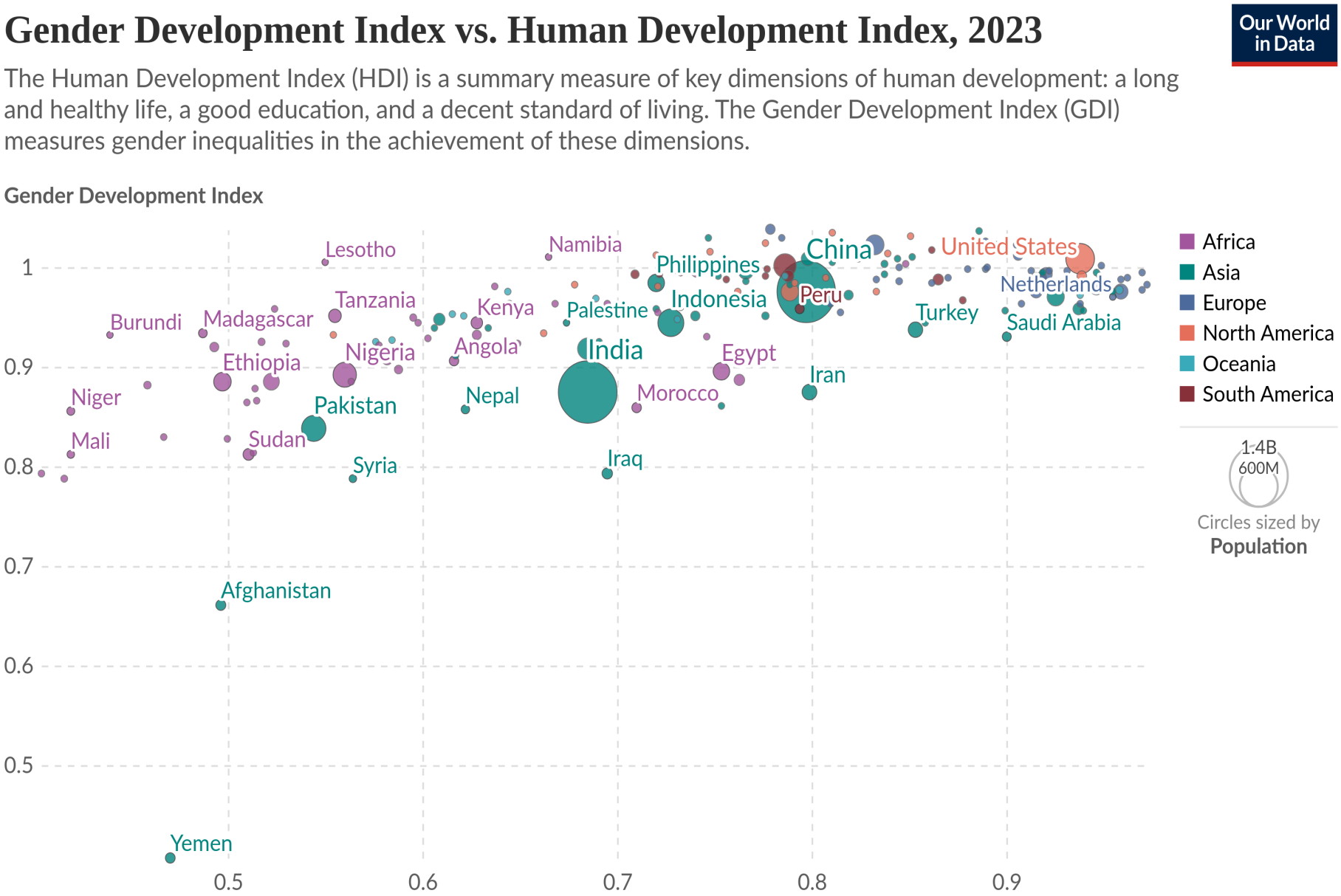
India: Historical Dominance in World GDP



Gender Development Index: India Rank 108/193



GDI vs HDI (1900 to present)



Global Gender Gap Index: India rank 129/146

- economic participation and opportunity
- educational attainment
- health and survival, and
- political empowerment
- The World Economic Forum estimates that at the current pace of progress, it will take 123 years to achieve full gender parity worldwide

Women's Health Issues across Lifespan

Women's Health- Issue to watch out

Adolescent stage

- Menstrual - irregularity
- Nutritional deficiency
- Urinary Tract Infection (UTI)

Childbearing stage

- Menstrual irregularity
- Polycystic Ovary Syndrome (PCOS)
- Infertility
- Maternal health
- Aneamia

Pre menopausal stage

- Fertility decline
- Hormonal -fluctuation
- Erratic menstruation
- Weight gain

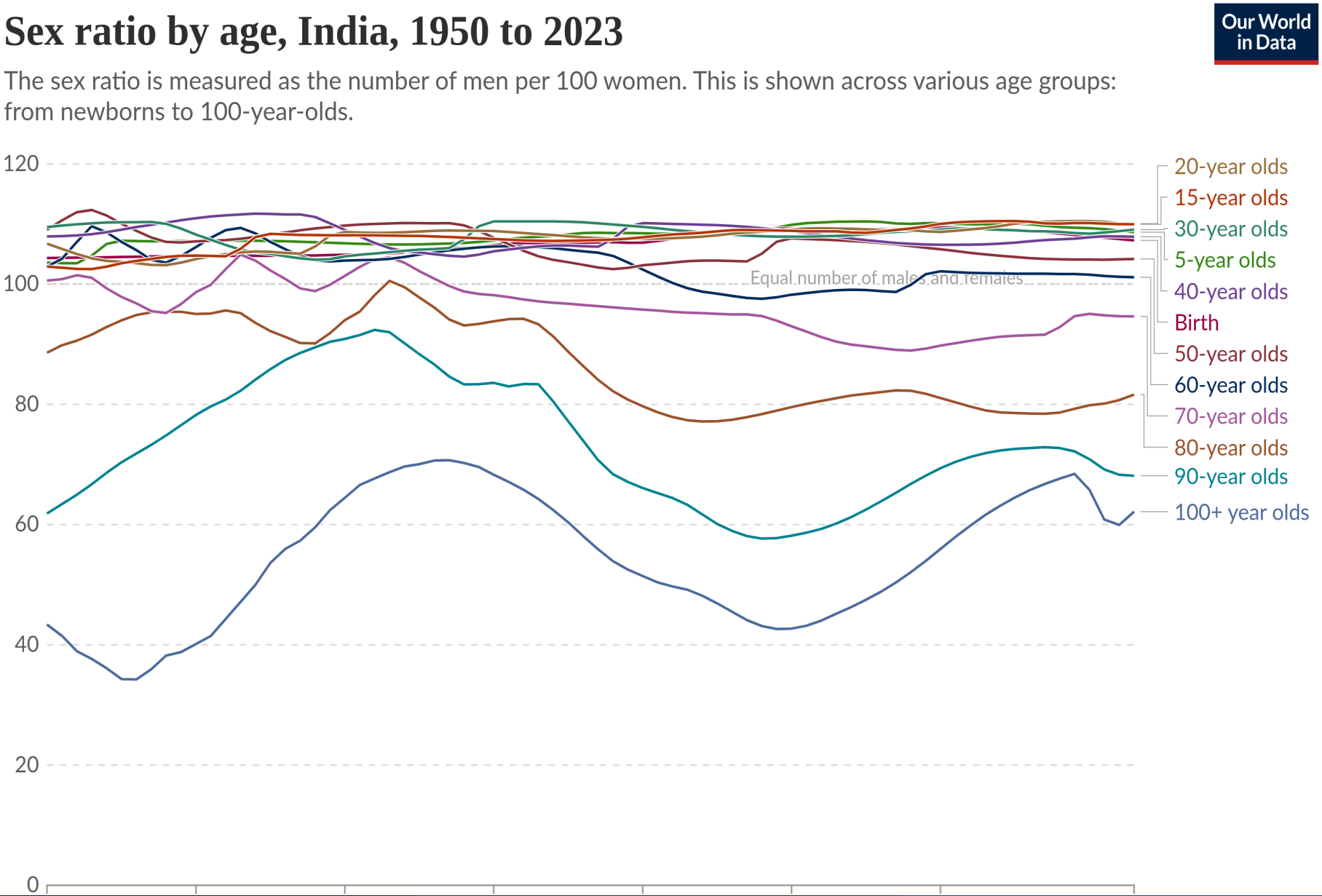
Postmenopausal stage

- Cardiovascular issues
- Osteoporosis
- Mental health issues
- Weight changes

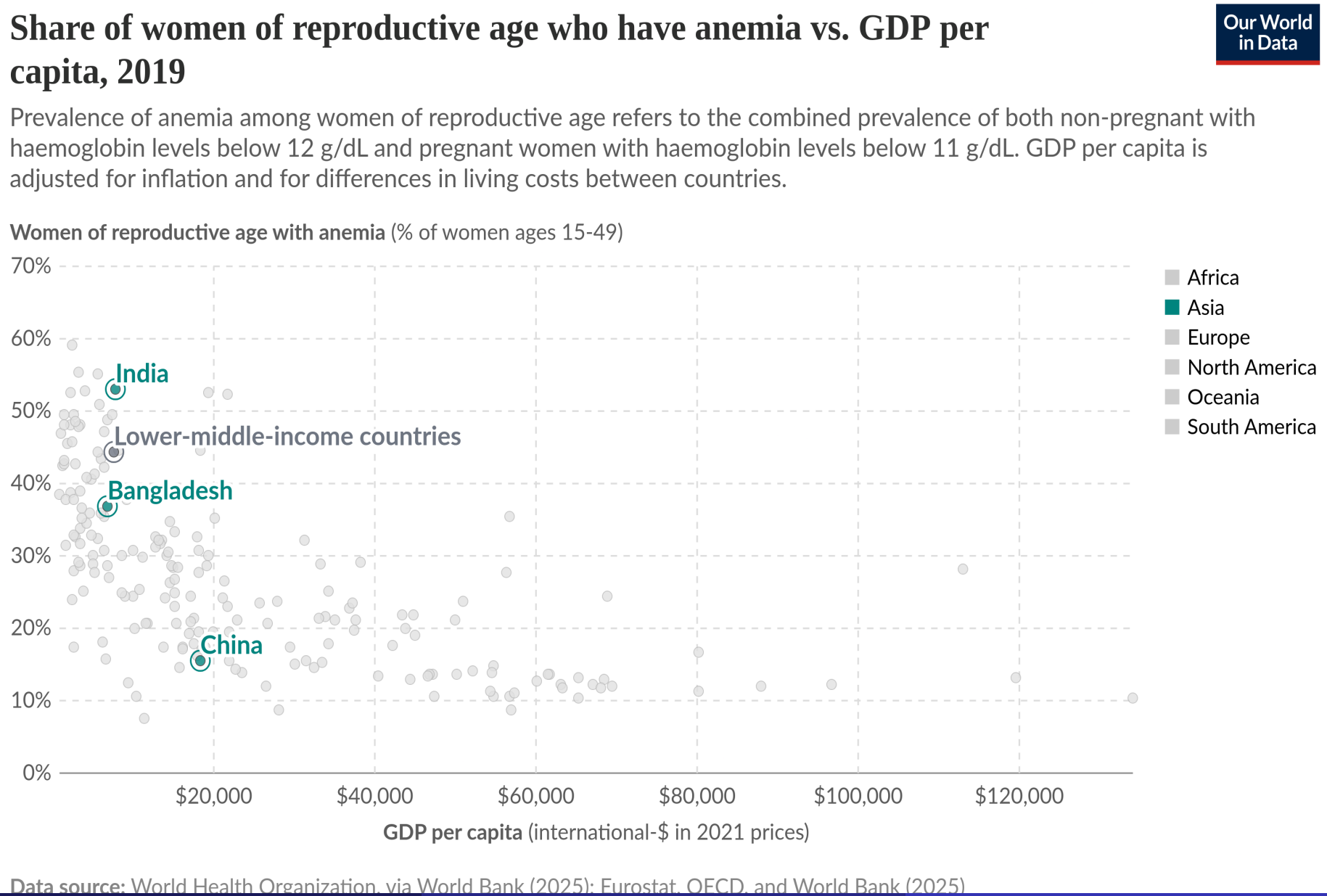
Gender issues in Health in India

- Sex Ratio at Birth
- India with 20% of worlds children hosts 40% of malnourished children
- Anemia among adolescent girls, pregnant women
- Early marriage
- Unmet need for family Planning
- Intimate partner violence
- Women as recipients of caste based injustice and violence
- High Maternal Mortality Ratio

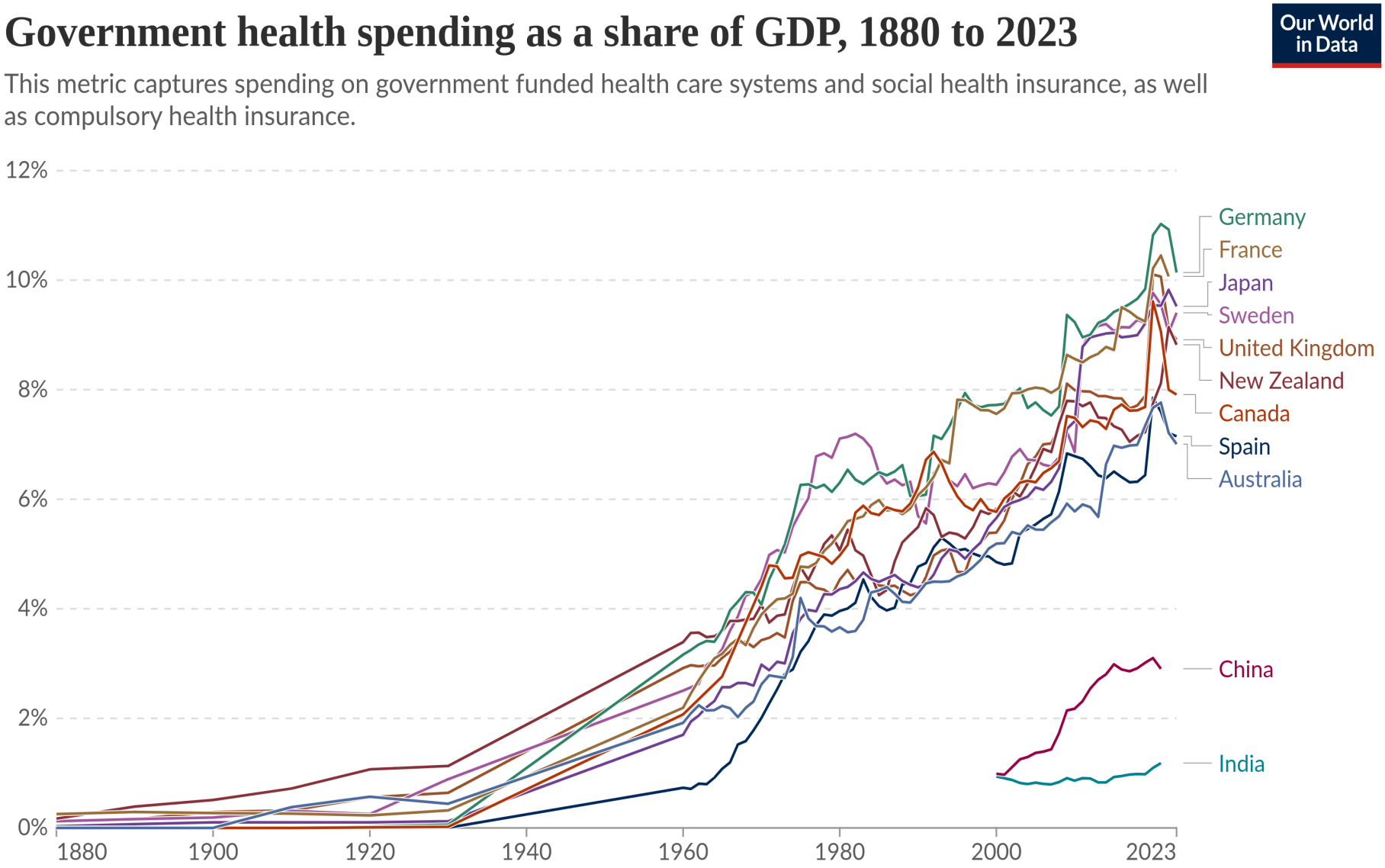
Sex Ratio by Age, India 1950-2023



Share of women of reproductive age with anemia



Public Health Spending as % of GDP

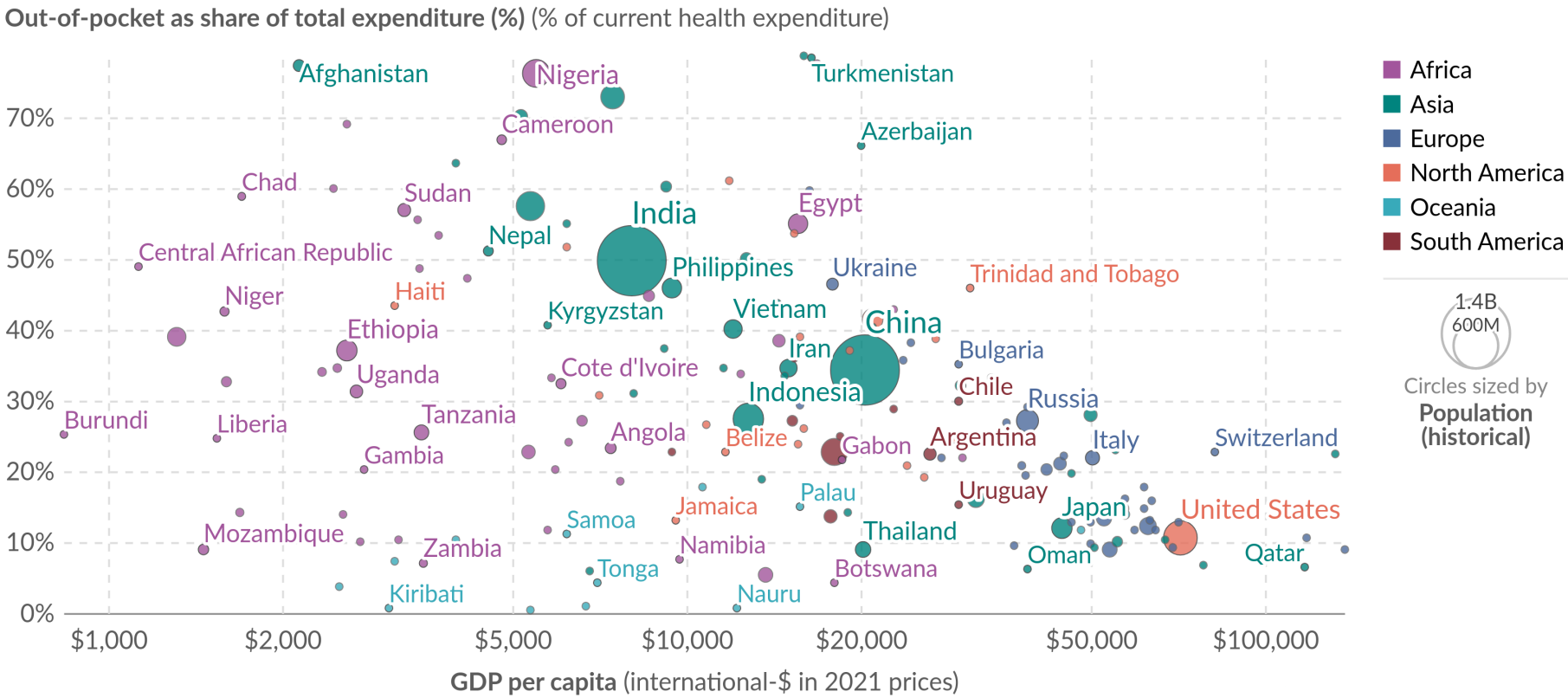


Out of Pocket Spending on Healthcare

Share of out-of-pocket spending on healthcare vs. GDP per capita, 2022

Our World in Data

Out-of-pocket spending on healthcare as percent of total current healthcare expenditure vs. GDP[1] per capita, adjusted for inflation and for differences in living costs between countries.



Data source: World Health Organization Global Health Expenditure Database, via World Bank (2025); Eurostat, OECD, and World Bank (2025)

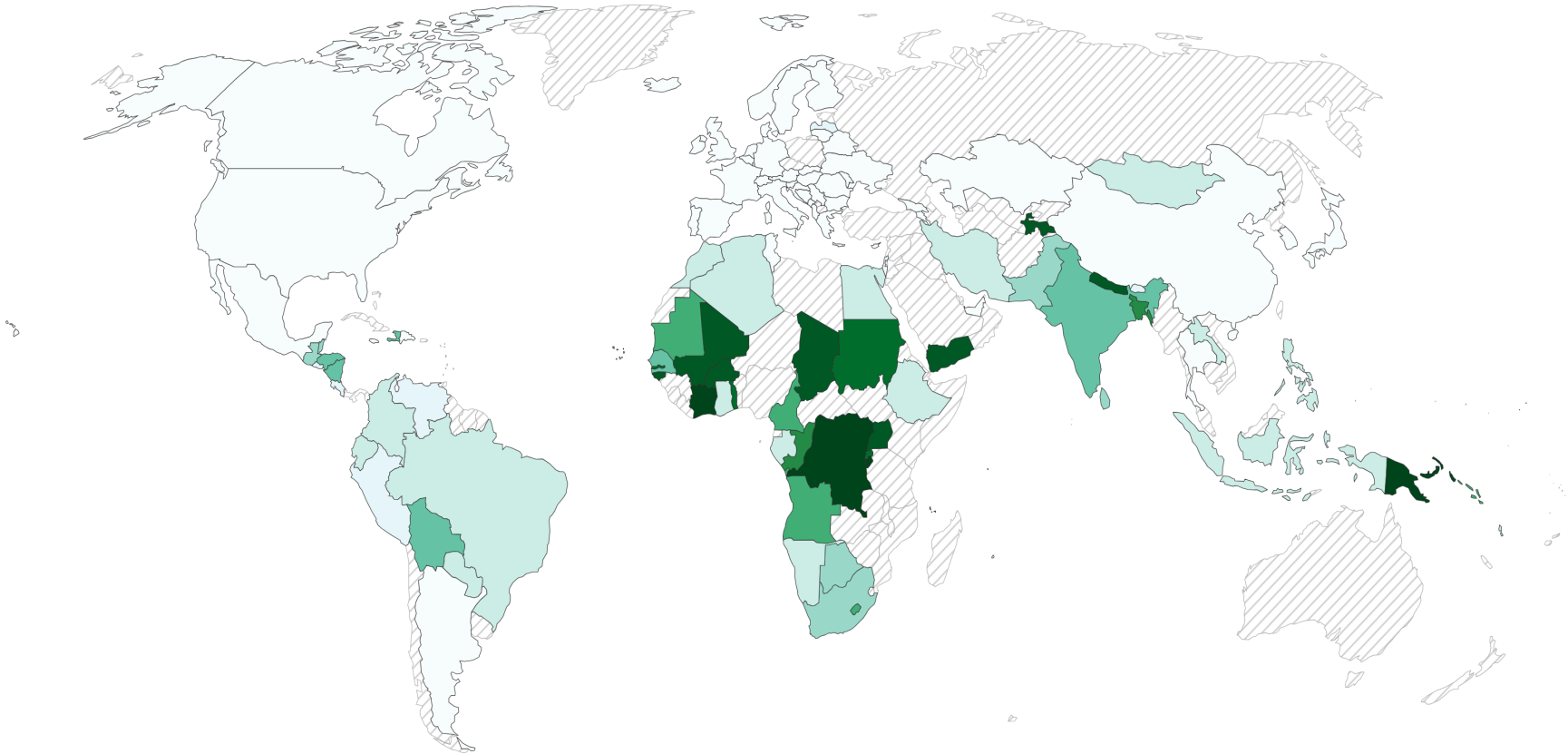
Note: "Out-of-pocket" spending refers to direct payments made by households to healthcare providers. GDP per capita is expressed in international-$[2] at 2021 prices.

Share of people at risk of falling into poverty from Healthcare, 2022

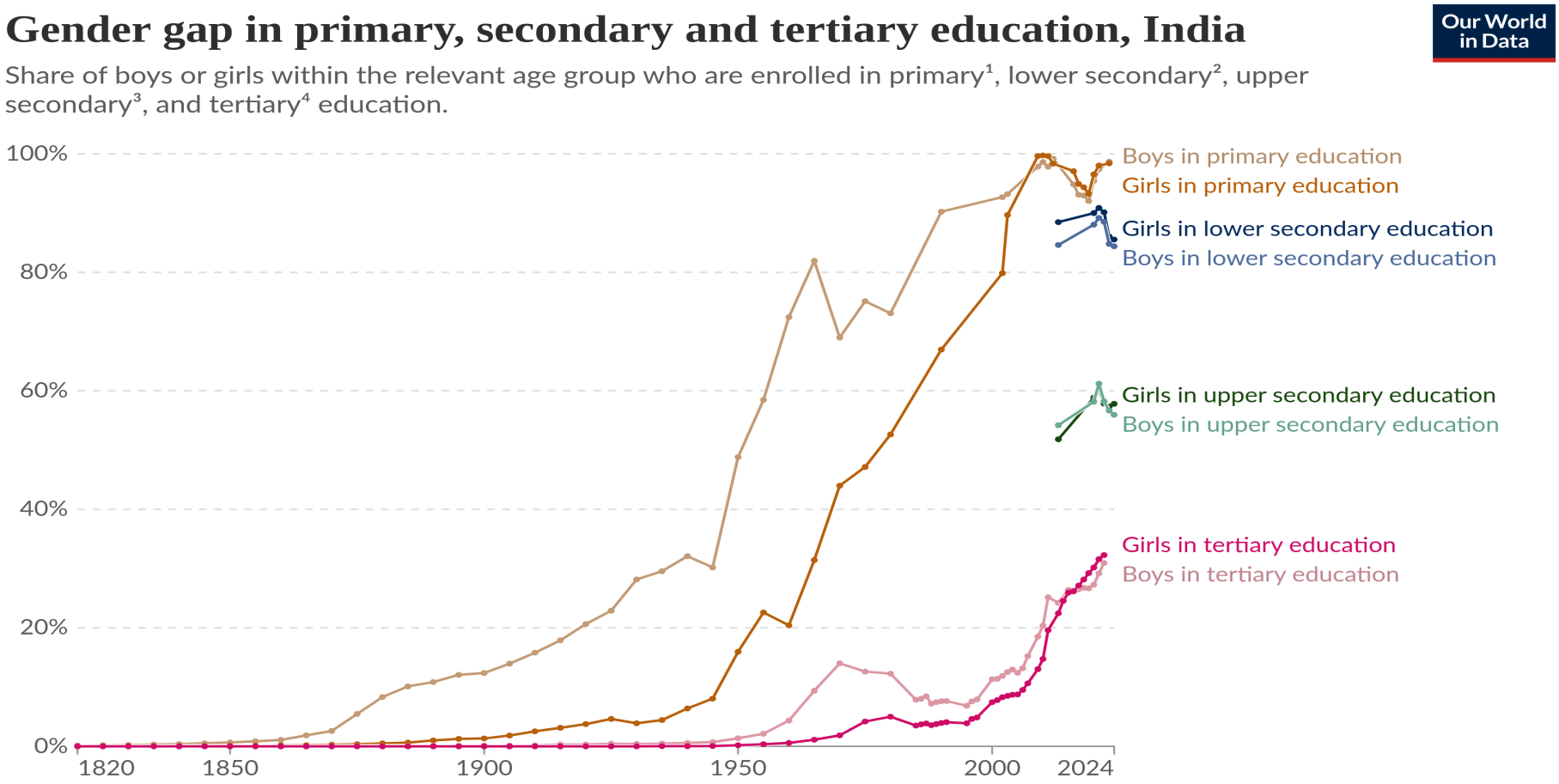
Share of people at risk of falling into poverty if payment for surgical care is required, 2022

Our World in Data

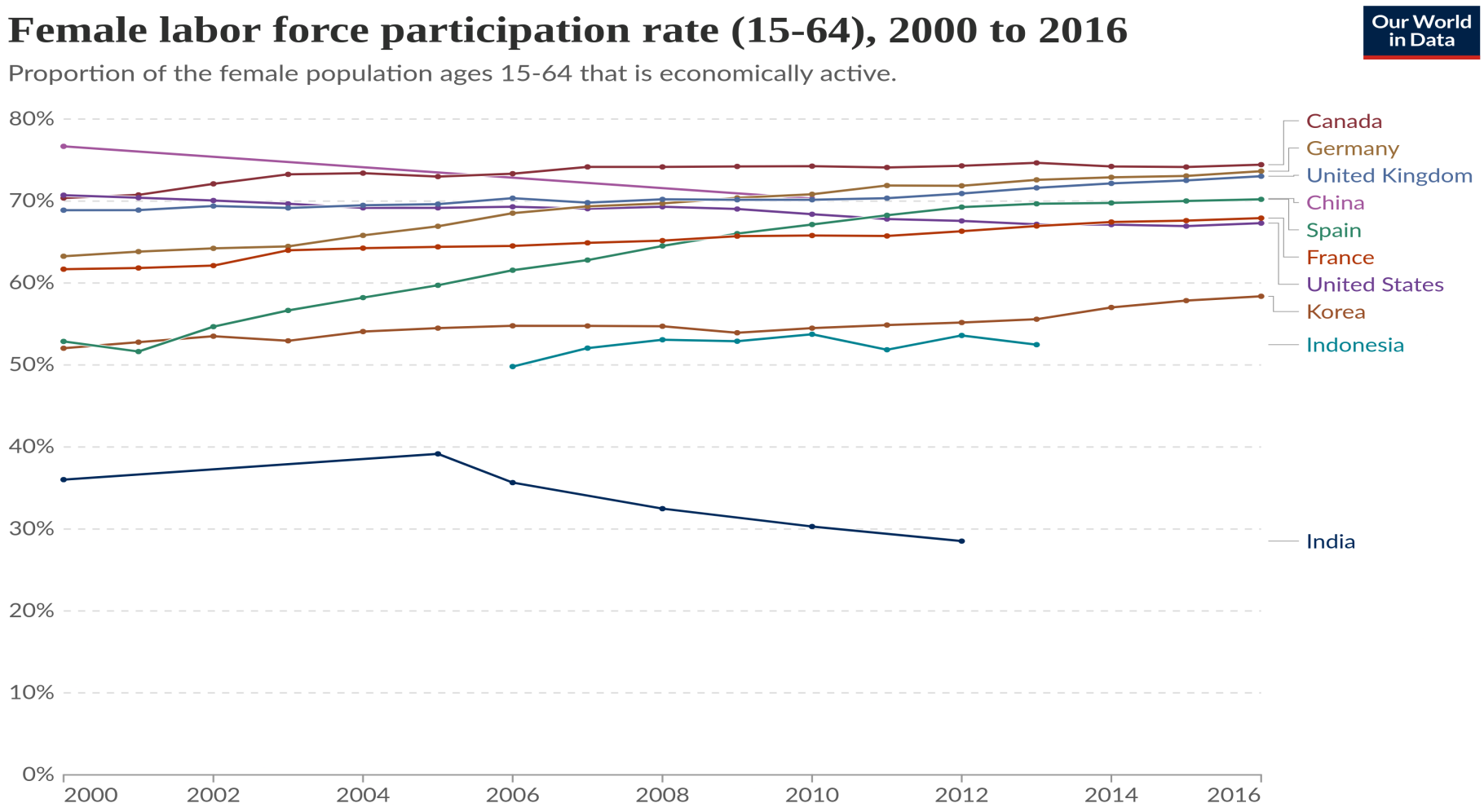
The proportion of population at risk of impoverishing expenditure when surgical care is required. Impoverishing expenditure is defined as direct out-of-pocket payments for surgical and anaesthesia care which drive people below the extreme poverty threshold.



Educational Enrollment by Gender (India,1820-2024)



Female Labour Force Participation across countries (2000-2016)



Gender Roles

Now: Conservative

Desirable: Progressive

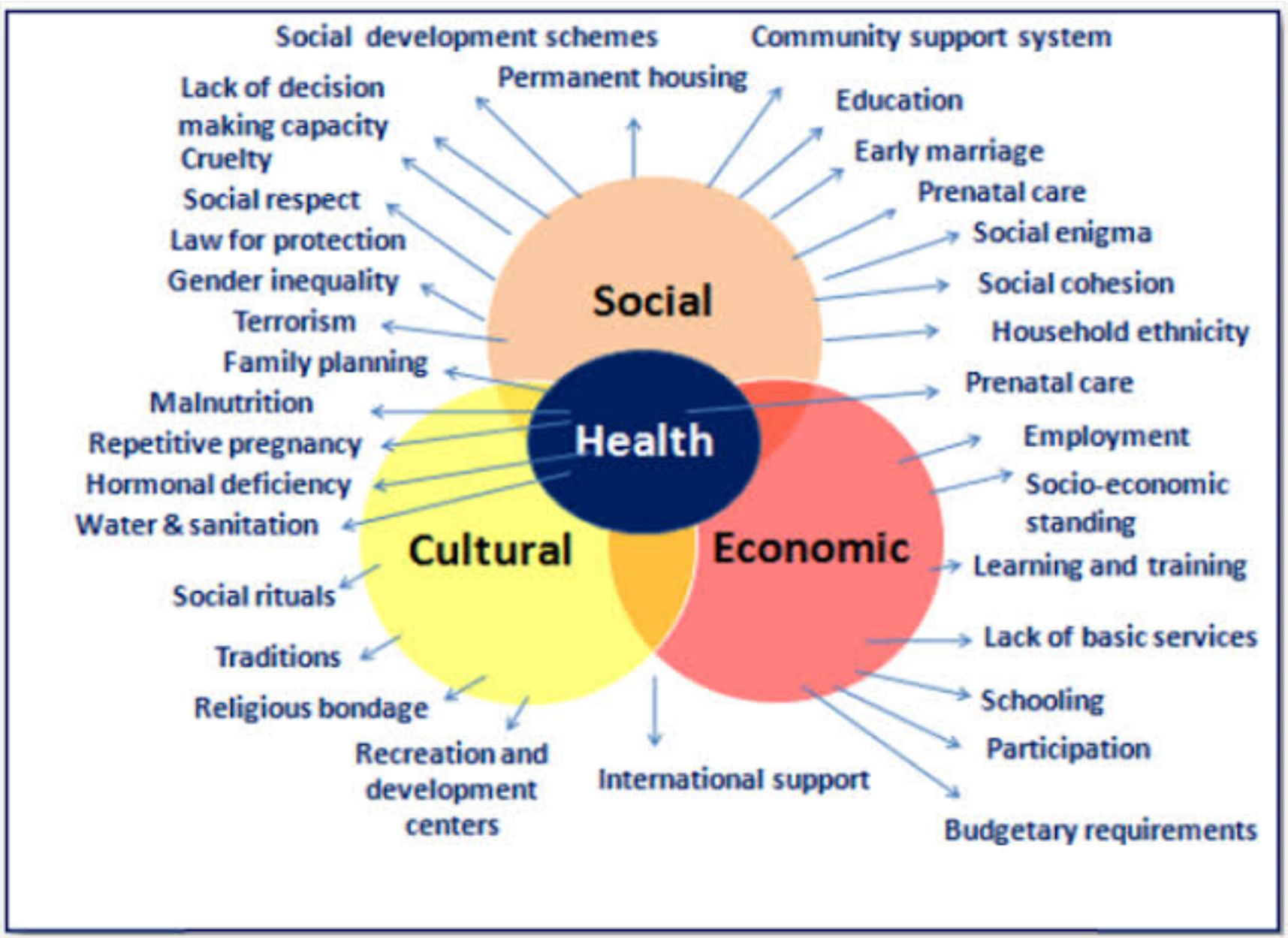
Constitutional provisions on health

- Right to equality (Article 14)
- Right to protection of life and personal liberty (Article 21 includes providing humane working conditions
- Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948
- Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), 1965)

Right to Life, a Fundamental Right, includes Right to Health ?

- India a signatory to Alma Ata Declaration, 1978 on Right to Health by 2000.
- India a signatory to Universal Health Coverage for all for 2030.

Health in Socio-Cultural Context



Health care scenario in India

- Health Systems:
  - HR gaps
  - Urban rural differentials in Health care
  - Rising drug prices as outside price control, TRIPS
  - Poor accountability to services and outcomes
  - Fragmentation of care: Pathies
  - food and nutrition outside health
  - Super-specialization at cost of Family Physician,
  - Neglect of health of Tribes, urban slums
  - Health care induced poverty trap
- Neglect of Primary, Preventive care at cost of tertiary care
- Low access to public health facilities
- Low quality of services, IPHS standards
- Increasing privatization of health care
- Insurance excludes OPD, medicines
- Rising consumer misinformation, Medical Shopping,

Inter-linkages: Health & Economic Empowerment

- Poor health reduces productivity and limits work opportunities.
- Economic dependence hinders access to healthcare.
- Better health higher income potential stronger agency.

Government Initiatives Health, Economic Empowerment

- National Health Mission (NHM)
- Janani Suraksha Yojana (JSY) Promotes institutional deliveries.
- Poshan Abhiyaan Tackles malnutrition among women and children.
- Self-Help Groups (SHGs) for microfinance and community empowerment.
- Skill India Mission Training women for various sectors.
- MUDRA Loans Support for women entrepreneurs.
- Digital India Expanding digital and financial inclusion.

Global best practices

- National Health Assembly (NHA) of Thailand for participatory health governance and implement the "Health in All Policies"
- UHC Thailand
- Home visits by Health teams in Thailand
- UHC in Thailand movie

Recommendations

- Integrated health, education, and economic programs: Food Processing an example.
- Invest in safe infrastructure, healthcare, and childcare.
- Promote gender equity in education and employment.
- Address harmful social norms through legal and awareness campaigns.
- Use gender dis-aggregated data for targeted policy.

Conclusion

- Womens health and economic empowerment are essential for inclusive growth.
- Addressing these areas together creates a multiplier effect on development.
- A gender-inclusive strategy benefits families, communities, and the nation.
- If India's female labor force participation rate were to rise to the level of men's, the country could unlock substantial economic growth, possibly adding 18-20% to GDP

Thanks and Feedback

- Click to give Feedback
- Questions ?