

**Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific**

Asia-Pacific Ministerial Conference on the Beijing+25 Review

Bangkok, 27–29 November 2019

Item 2 of the provisional agenda**

Review of the progress made, challenges to address and forward-looking policies to enact in order to accelerate the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in Asia and the Pacific in the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**Review of the progress and remaining challenges in implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in Asia and the Pacific**

Note by the secretariat

Summary

The present report contains a summary of the regional review of progress in the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in Asia and the Pacific, highlighting achievements, challenges and priority areas for realizing gender equality and women's empowerment. The report is based on the national review reports submitted by member States to the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) in the context of the 25-year review of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

In their national review reports, ESCAP member States identified three key achievements: the adoption of laws, regulations, action plans and policies; the advancement of women's economic empowerment; and the improvement of women's political participation and decision-making power. Three key challenges were identified: barriers to women's economic participation, gender norms and stereotypes, and the lack of gender capacities. Priority areas for the next five years to accelerate progress in gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls have also been identified by member States.

I. Introduction

1. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action was adopted in 1995 and subsequently endorsed by the General Assembly. Every five years since 1995, progress in achieving the strategic objectives of the Platform for Action has been reviewed by the Commission on the Status of Women. The fifth review will occur in 2020, marking the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Declaration and Platform for Action.

* Reissued for technical reasons on 22 October 2019.

** ESCAP/MCBR/2019/L.1.

2. In its resolution 2018/8, the Economic and Social Council called upon all States to undertake national-level reviews of the progress made and challenges encountered in the implementation of the Declaration and Platform for Action. Additionally, the Council encouraged regional commissions to undertake regional reviews so that the outcomes of intergovernmental processes at the regional level could feed into the 2020 review.

3. In 2019, the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) conducted a regional review of progress in the implementation of the Declaration and Platform for Action in Asia and the Pacific, in cooperation with the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) and with the support of the thematic working group on gender equality and empowerment of women of the Asia-Pacific Regional Coordination Mechanism.

4. An analytical review of regional progress in the implementation of the Declaration and Platform for Action was carried out through the administration of a global survey and the submission of national review reports by ESCAP member States. Out of its 49 member States and 9 associate members, ESCAP received national review reports from 41. The analytical review encompassed ESCAP member States geographically located in the Asia-Pacific region.¹

5. The 25-year review of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in 2020 will be the first time that the implementation of the Declaration and Platform for Action is reviewed with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development fully in place. The Beijing+25 review will harness synergies between the Declaration and Platform for Action and the 2030 Agenda to consolidate efforts to accelerate the achievement of key international commitments on gender equality.

6. The 12 critical areas of concern of the Platform for Action have been clustered into six overarching themes that highlight the alignment of the two frameworks: inclusive development, shared prosperity and decent work; poverty eradication, social protection and social services; freedom from violence, stigma and stereotypes; accountability, participation and gender-responsive institutions; peaceful and inclusive societies; and environmental conservation, climate action and resilience-building. In addition, member States have reported on their key priorities, achievements and challenges with regard to gender equality; national institutions and processes; and data and statistics for advancing the empowerment of women and girls in the region.

7. The present document contains a summary of the identified achievements, challenges and key actions taken by ESCAP members and associate members to advance gender equality and women's empowerment. Furthermore, the key priority areas for action for countries in the region for the next five years are identified, with a view to accelerating the achievement of gender equality in the region.

¹ All data points and examples in the present document, unless specified otherwise, have been sourced from the national review reports.

II. Overview of progress and challenges in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls

A. Key achievements

8. Asia-Pacific countries listed achievements of the past five years, which can be grouped into three categories: the adoption of laws, regulations, action plans and policies; the advancement of women's economic empowerment; and the improvement of women's political participation and decision-making power.

Adoption of laws, regulations, action plans and policies

9. Sixty-three per cent of the countries in the review identified the adoption of laws, regulations, action plans and policies as one of the key achievements over the review period. In Asia and the Pacific, 33 countries have a current gender strategy or national action plan on gender equality and 47 countries have ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.² Furthermore, several countries have adopted progressive legislative measures to prevent violence, promote women's economic participation and leadership and provide land rights. It has been estimated that by 2025, advancing women's equality could add \$4.5 trillion to annual gross domestic product (GDP) for Asia and the Pacific as a whole.³

Advancement of women's economic empowerment

10. Sixty-three per cent of the countries reported the advancement of women's economic empowerment as one of the key achievements. Despite the falling participation rates of women in the labour force and rising informality, countries have strengthened legislative measures with regard to equality in the workplace, developed laws, policies and programmes to achieve work-life balance and supported the transition of informal sector workers into the formal sector (see paras. 16–18). Women's entrepreneurship is seen as a pathway towards women's economic empowerment. Ten countries reported having conducted time-use surveys during the review period to impute value to unpaid work carried out mostly by women. If included in the measurement of GDP, unpaid care work carried out by women in Asia and the Pacific would add \$3.8 trillion to the total regional GDP.⁴

Improvement of women's political participation and decision-making

11. Forty-nine per cent of the countries in the review identified the improvement of women's participation and decision-making as one of the key achievements. Women's participation in public life and decision-making is critical in advancing the agenda of gender equality. For countries in the region, the average political participation of women has increased since 1995 (see figure I), with four countries achieving more than 30 per cent women in national parliamentary representation.

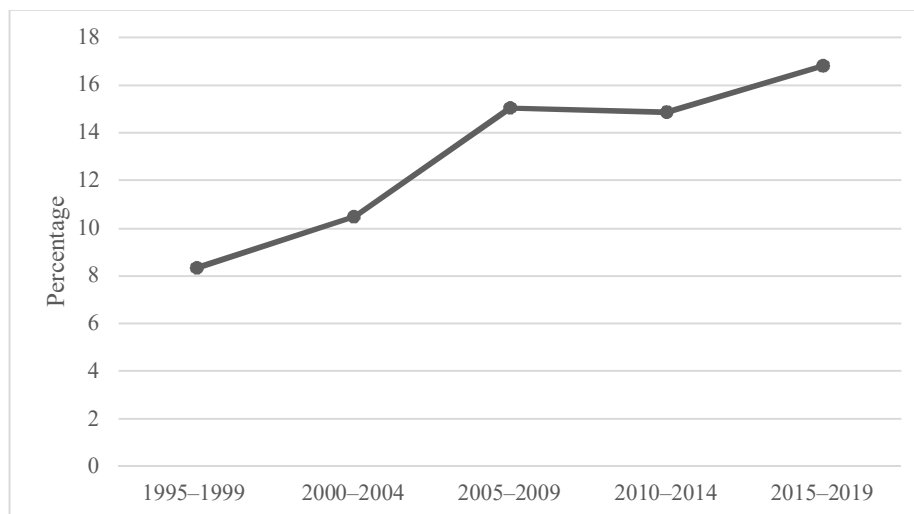
² United Nations, *Treaty Series*, vol.1249, No. 20378.

³ McKinsey Global Institute, *The Power of Parity: Advancing Women's Equality in Asia Pacific* (New York, McKinsey and Company, 2018).

⁴ Ibid.

Figure I

Average percentage of women in parliament per five-year period since the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, Asia and the Pacific



Source: ESCAP calculations based on Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), New Parline: the IPU's open data platform (beta). Available at <https://data.ipu.org/> (accessed on 12 July 2019).

B. Key challenges

12. Countries identified challenges in realizing gender equality and women's empowerment, which can be grouped into three categories: barriers to women's economic participation, gender norms and stereotypes, and the lack of gender capacities.

Barriers to women's economic participation

13. Forty-nine per cent of the countries noted that the difficulties of navigating the future terrain of work presented a key challenge in the region. Technological changes, climate change and demographic shifts are forces that are changing the landscape of work.⁵ In the era of the fourth industrial revolution, technological automation is putting workers in the Asia-Pacific region at risk of losing their jobs. In five member countries of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), namely Cambodia, Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand and Viet Nam, it was found that women were more likely than men to be employed in an occupation at high risk of automation and were therefore more susceptible to losing their jobs.⁶ Globally, the implementation of the Paris Agreement will lead to the loss of 6 million jobs and the creation of 24 million jobs, for a net gain of 18 million jobs.⁷ By 2030, 13 per cent of

⁵ International Labour Organization (ILO), *Work for a Brighter Future: Global Commission on the Future of Work* (Geneva, 2019).

⁶ Jae-Hee Chang and Phu Huynh, "ASEAN in transformation: the future of jobs at risk of automation", Bureau for Employers' Activities, Working Paper. No. 9 (Geneva, ILO, 2016).

⁷ ILO, *World Employment and Social Outlook 2018: Greening with Jobs* (Geneva, 2018).

the work force in ASEAN countries will be between 15 and 24 years of age, down from 17 per cent in 2015.⁸

Gender norms and stereotypes

14. Forty-four per cent of the countries reported that the translation of policies, plans and programmes into concrete actions was being stifled by adverse gender norms and stereotypes. Countries noted the need to raise the awareness and understanding of parliamentarians, public service employees and the public more broadly. Gender policies, plans and programmes that account for norms and stereotypes in their design are more likely to result in efficient and sustained outcomes.

Lack of gender capacities

15. Forty-one per cent of the countries noted a lack of capacity among individuals and entities responsible for implementing gender equality policies, plans and programmes. Finance and budgetary limitations were also cited as roadblocks to ensuring sustained investments in gender equality. For effective gender mainstreaming, training and technical support are seen as critical.

III. Key actions taken to advance gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls

16. The following sections contain a summary of the key actions taken by countries to advance gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls in the review period.

A. Inclusive development, shared prosperity and decent work

17. The 2030 Agenda is a clarion call for inclusive development that accounts for social, economic and environmental factors in the journey towards sustainable development. There has been gender-inclusive development with respect to paid and unpaid work in the past five years.

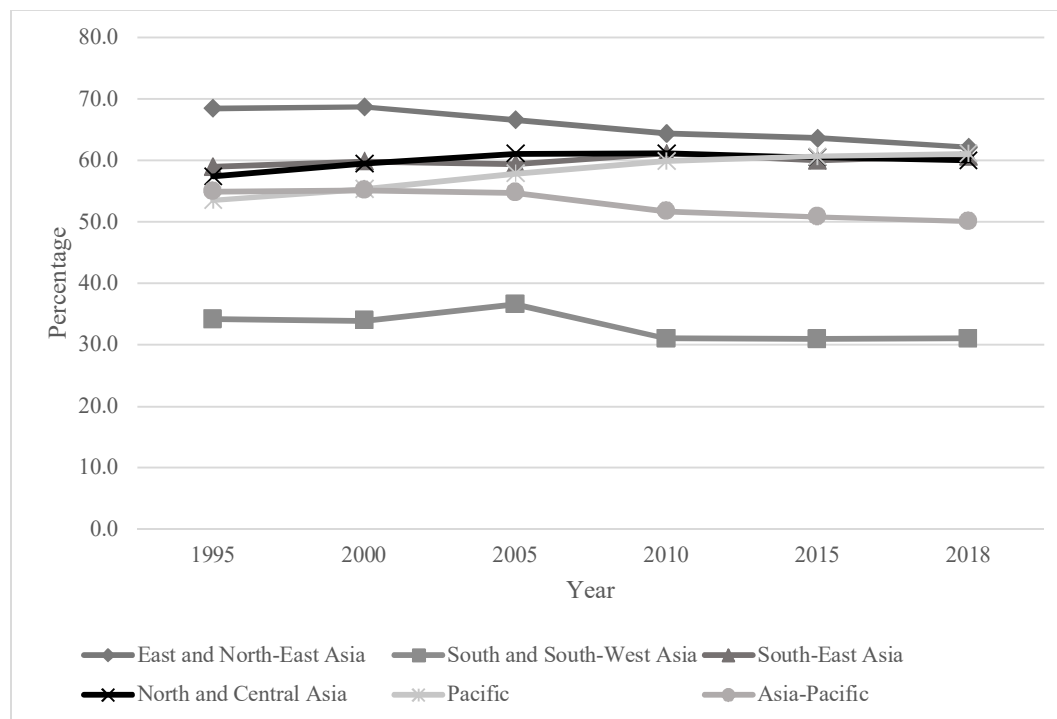
18. There is a large gender gap in economic participation in the Asia-Pacific region. In 2018, the labour force participation rate among men 25 years of age and older was 84 per cent, compared to 50 per cent among women of the same age group, down from 55 per cent in 1995 (figure II). Women are overrepresented in vulnerable employment, with no social protection. Forty-one per cent of working women are employed in elementary occupations and as skilled agriculture, forestry and fishery workers. In the last five years, women's participation has declined slightly in this sector but has risen, albeit slowly, in professional and technical occupations.⁹ In addition, women are

⁸ Jae-Hee Chang and Phu Huynh, "ASEAN in transformation: the future of jobs at risk of automation".

⁹ ESCAP calculations based on ILO, Informal employment and informal sector by sex database, ILOSTAT. Available at www.ilo.org/ilostat/faces/oracle/webcenter/portalapp/pagehierarchy/Page27.jspx;ILOSTAT_COOKIE=86qpRbj68MpkUwTC1ypxrP_pH9KNhxHitK1hZOoO6kvx0Yqh3c0z-!-1991620366?indicator=IFL_XIEM_SEX_ECO_IFL_NB&subject=EMP&datasetCode=A&collectionCode=YI&_adf.ctrl-state=a2nubxhce_4&_afLoop=1259294308167390&_afWindowMode=0&_afWindowId=null#!%40%40%3Findicator%3DIFL_XIEM_SEX_ECO_IFL_NB%26_afWindowId%3Dnull%26subject%3DEMP%26_afLoop%3D1259294308167390%26datasetCode%3DA%26collectionCode%3DYI%26_afWindowMode%3D0%26_adf.ctrl-state%3Dvhc2baocx_4 (accessed on 22 June 2019).

21 per cent less likely to be employed on a full-time basis than men in the region, and women with children are 28 per cent less likely to be so employed than men in the region, indicating the existence of a motherhood penalty.¹⁰

Figure II
Female labour force participation rate in Asia and the Pacific, 1995–2018



Source: ESCAP calculations based on data from ILO, World Employment and Social Outlook: Trends 2019. Available at www.ilo.org/wesodata (accessed on 17 June 2019).

19. To fight discrimination against women in the workplace, 28 countries strengthened legislative measures and policies relating to equal pay and the recruitment, retention and promotion of women, and 19 countries adopted gender-responsive labour market policies. Under phase II of the Maubisse Declaration, Timor-Leste committed to engaging rural women and persons with disabilities in public investment planning and decision-making in the area of infrastructure development, through the implementation of a quota of 30 per cent and 2 per cent, respectively.

20. Women often encounter legal and regulatory social barriers that restrict their ability to own assets, enter into contracts and obtain credit. To address this, 20 countries have improved women's financial inclusion and access to credit. In the Islamic Republic of Iran, the access of rural and nomadic women to credit is being augmented through the Rural and Nomadic Women's Micro-Credit Fund. It offers easy access to low interest credit for agriculture and productive activities. Through its National Financial Inclusion Strategy, the Government of Pakistan intends to make easy access to financial services available to at least 50 per cent of the adult population and 25 per cent of adult women by 2020.

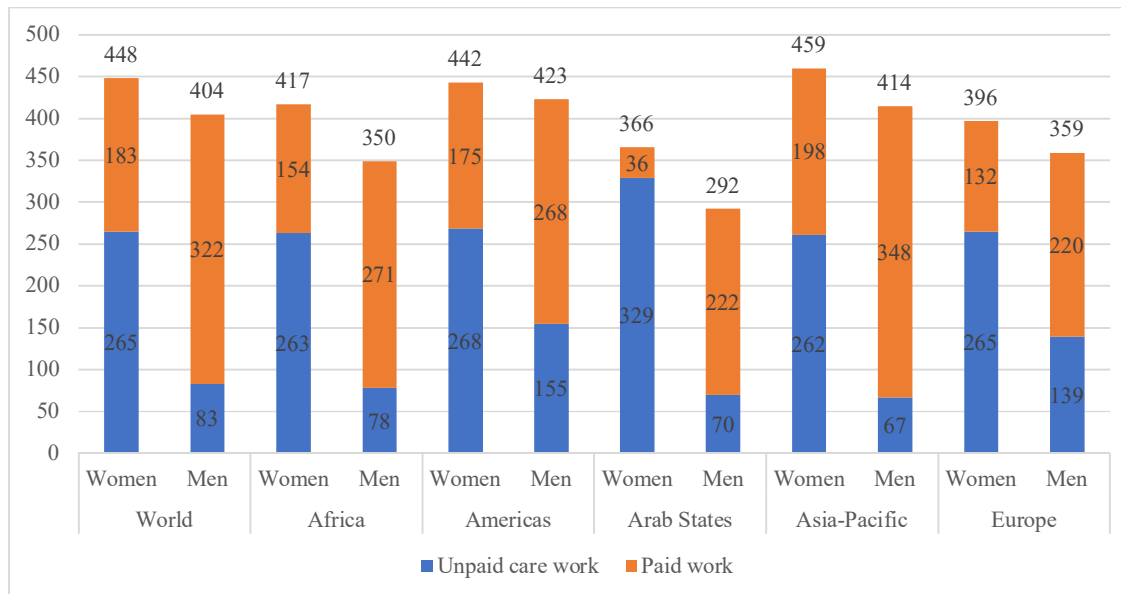
¹⁰ ESCAP, *Inequality of Opportunity in Asia and the Pacific: Decent Work* (ST/ESCAP/2822).

21. The informal economy in Asia is large, multi-segmented and segregated by gender. Approximately 64 per cent of women workers in the region are employed in the informal sector.¹¹ Nine countries made efforts to support the transition from informal to formal work. In the Lao People's Democratic Republic, the 2014 Social Security Law allows informal sector workers to join the National Social Security Fund.

22. Women in Asia and the Pacific work the longest hours (paid and unpaid work) in the world. On average, women in the region did four times the amount of unpaid care work that men did (figure III). This has serious implications on outcomes such as gender gaps in earnings as well as in economic and political participation.

23. To ease the burden of unpaid work, 24 countries have introduced or strengthened various types of family leave. Family leave provides significant benefits to working mothers, as well as their children, partners, families and communities. Forty-four countries in the region mandate maternity leave, while 14 countries mandate paternity leave.¹² In the Russian Federation, women who have taken maternity leave for up to three years are provided professional training and retraining to improve their employment chances upon their return. In the Republic of Korea, women's re-employment centres provide counselling and vocational training for women whose careers have been interrupted.

Figure III
Time spent daily in unpaid care work, paid work and total work, by sex and region, latest year for which data are available
(Minutes)



Source: ESCAP calculations based on International Labour Organization, *Care Work and Care Jobs for the Future of Decent Work* (Geneva, 2018).

Note: For 15 and older age group. Estimates weighted by working-age population.

¹¹ ILO, *Game Changers: Women and the Future of Work in Asia and the Pacific* (Bangkok, 2018).

¹² ESCAP calculations based on World Bank, *Women, Business and the Law 2019* database. Available at <https://wbl.worldbank.org/> (accessed on 25 July 2019).

24. Twenty countries have expanded childcare services in the region. Studies find that pre-school education yields the highest returns in terms of future earnings and that the positive effects are greater for children from disadvantaged households.¹³ The Palau Community Action Agency-Belau Head Start Programme provides comprehensive services, including health, education, disability, family/community partnership, and facilities and transportation to children between the ages of three and five years old and their families. The Grandmother Project on promoting women's employment in Turkey enables mothers to participate in the labour market, while grandmothers are paid to take care of children aged zero to three.

25. Demographic changes effect changes in family structures in the region. In Asia and the Pacific, the demographic of older persons aged 60 and above is expected to more than double, from 572 million in 2017 to approximately 1.3 billion by 2050.¹⁴ For many countries, the growth rate of the population of older persons is more rapid than that of the working-age population. This increases the demand for care and health services for older persons.

26. Sixteen countries or areas in the region have expanded services for the frail and elderly. In Macao, China, the government provides community care services, home care and support services to alleviate the pressure on family caregivers. The service gaps in elderly care, childcare and home-based health care in the region are being filled by domestic workers. There are an estimated 10 million domestic workers in South-East Asia and the Pacific. In ASEAN countries alone, 83 per cent of domestic workers are women.¹⁵

27. Eleven countries in the region took special measures over the past five years to combat discrimination and protect the rights of migrant women. Asia and the Pacific remains the world's most dynamic region for migration. ILO estimates that the region hosts 20.4 per cent of the world's 164 million migrant workers.¹⁶ Despite their significant economic and social contributions to the region, migrant women face discriminatory laws, policies and gendered social norms which, in turn, create structural barriers to realizing their rights to decent work and safe migration.

28. Thirteen countries in the region took austerity measures over the review period, but no country had assessed its gendered impact. The impact of macroeconomic policies on unpaid work and gender equality should be better studied, and countries should explore options to free up fiscal space to ensure adequate social protection measures for women.

¹³ James Heckman, Rodrigo Pinto and Peter Savelyev, "Understanding the mechanisms through which an influential early childhood program boosted adult outcomes", *American Economic Review*, vol. 103, No.6 (October 2013).

¹⁴ ESCAP, "Financing for long-term care in Asia and the Pacific", Social Development Policy Briefs, No. 2018/01 (Bangkok, 2018).

¹⁵ ILO, "An aging Asia increases the demand for domestic workers. But what about their rights?", 16 June 2019.

¹⁶ ILO, "Labour migration in Asia and the Pacific". Available at www.ilo.org/asia/areas/labour-migration/WCMS_634559/lang--en/index.htm (accessed on 3 September 2019).

B. Poverty eradication, social protection and social services

29. Poverty has an impact on people's quality of life and obstructs their capacity to make decisions about education, health and employment. Countries have taken action to (a) reduce poverty among women and girls, (b) improve access to social protection, (c) improve health outcomes and (d) improve education outcomes.

1. Poverty

30. Over the past 20 years, the combined income inequality in Asia and the Pacific rose by more than 5 per cent, contrary to the trend in almost all other regions of the world. Income inequality grew in 40 per cent of the countries, including in four of the five most populous countries, accounting for 70 per cent of the population of the region.¹⁷

31. Globally, women between 20 and 34 years of age are more likely to be poor than men of the same age group. Households with children are among the poorest, while single parents with children, and predominantly single mothers with children, face a higher risk of poverty. Poverty is multidimensional in nature and its impacts are likely to be worse for women than for men, which exacerbates gender inequality. Furthermore, data suggest that the gender differences in poverty are statistically significant in South Asia, where poverty rates for women are 15.9 per cent compared to 14.3 per cent for men.¹⁸

32. To fight poverty, 27 countries have supported women's entrepreneurship and business development activities, 23 countries have promoted access to the labour market through active labour market policies and 22 countries have strengthened social protection. The Government of Samoa facilitates livelihood support for vulnerable families through the revival of the weaving of *ie sae* fine mats that are used in high-level traditional exchanges in that country.

2. Social protection

33. Women in the Asia-Pacific region have lower chances of being part of social insurance programmes compared to men.¹⁹ While social protection programmes in the region have expanded over the past few years, regional expenditure on these programmes stands at 6.6 per cent of GDP, well below the global average of 11.2 per cent. Consequently, 60 per cent of all women, men and children in the region may be without adequate social protection. Currently, fewer than 4 out of 10 people have access to any kind of health care and only 3 out of 10 mothers with newborns receive maternity benefits in the region.²⁰

¹⁷ ESCAP, "Environment and inequality", Policy Brief (Bangkok, n.d.).

¹⁸ Ana Maria Munoz Boudet and others, "Gender differences in poverty and household composition through the life-cycle", Policy Research Working Paper, No.8386 (Washington D.C., World Bank, 2018). For the World Bank, South Asia comprises Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

¹⁹ Asian Development Bank and UN-Women, *Gender Equality and the Sustainable Development Goals in Asia and the Pacific: Baseline and Pathways for Transformative Change by 2030* (Bangkok, 2018).

²⁰ See ESCAP/CSD/2018/1.

34. In the region, 21 countries have introduced or strengthened social protection for unemployed women over the review period. In Armenia, since 2016, mothers who are unemployed or self-employed are entitled to maternity benefits for 140 days. Domestic workers in Turkey, the bulk of whom are local and migrant women, benefit from social security under Law No. 5510 concerning social insurance and universal health insurance, and their employers are obligated to pay their premiums if their services are availed of for 10 days or more in a month.

3. Health

35. Unequal access to health care undermines inclusive development. While overall access rates have increased, women in the worst-off households in rural areas continue to face significant hurdles in accessing care. There has been unprecedented progress in reducing maternal deaths in the Asia-Pacific region. However, in 2015, 85,000 women in the region died while giving birth, and 75 per cent of those deaths were attributed to the five leading preventable causes of maternal mortality. Rates of maternal mortality were highest in South and South-West Asia and South-East Asia. Despite important gains in improving access to contraception, in 2017, an estimated 132 million women in the region had an unmet need for contraception. Profound inequalities remain in access to skilled birth attendance and antenatal care.²¹

36. To improve health outcomes of women and girls, 29 countries have expanded specific services for women such as sexual and reproductive health, mental health, maternal health and HIV health services; 23 countries have promoted access to health care through the expansion of universal access or the provision of public health services; and 14 countries have strengthened comprehensive sexuality education in schools or communities. In Myanmar, comprehensive sexuality education has been included in life skills school curriculum for grades 1–11.

37. Sexual and reproductive health services are increasingly taking into account the needs of youth and are giving them a voice. Adolescent cabinets in Mongolia, youth-friendly clinics in the Cook Islands and youth-friendly health service centres in Thailand engage young people in making informed decisions regarding reproductive health and rights.

38. The scourge of non-communicable diseases is rearing its head in the region. In the Marshall Islands, the epidemic levels of non-communicable diseases are reported as one of the key challenges the country faces. Among women in the region, breast cancer is the most common type of cancer, accounting for 18 per cent of all cancer diagnoses.²² In China, women in rural areas are provided free screenings for breast and cervical cancer.

4. Education

39. The Asia-Pacific region has made significant progress towards achieving gender parity in primary education enrolment and is nearing parity at secondary and tertiary levels. Eight member States have achieved parity at

²¹ See ESCAP/APPC/2018/3.

²² Danny R. Youlden and others, “Incidence and mortality of female breast cancer in the Asia-Pacific region”, *Cancer Biology & Medicine*, vol 11, No .2 (June 2014). Available at www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4069805/.

all three levels. Except in South and South-West Asia, women now outnumber men in tertiary institutions, with a regional gender parity index of 1.07.²³

40. Twenty-two countries have taken measures to increase girls' access to, retention in and completion of education, including technical and vocational education and training and skills development. Fiji has seen an increase in women in skill development programmes, particularly in areas dominated primarily by men such as the industrial arts. The government-run Technical College of Fiji has been encouraging men to participate in areas traditionally dominated by women, such as cookery, baking and patisserie, and vice-versa for women.

41. Eighteen countries have strengthened educational curricula to increase gender-responsiveness and eliminate bias at all levels of education. In the Marshall Islands, school curricula are currently being reviewed to eliminate depictions of gender stereotypes and discrimination.

42. In Asia and the Pacific, women's participation in the fields of science, technology, engineering and mathematics is often limited to certain disciplines and to lower-ranking positions with less job stability. Despite sometimes outperforming men in training, women are much less likely to enter employment in these industries and are consistently paid less than their male counterparts when they do.²⁴ To rectify this situation, 17 countries have increased access to skills and training in new and emerging fields, especially science, technology, engineering and mathematics. In the Republic of Korea, a gender quota system encourages research institutes to recruit and promote women.

43. Asia and the Pacific hosts 4.2 million refugees and 2.7 million internally displaced persons. Forty-eight per cent of refugees in the Asia-Pacific region are women and 49 per cent are children. Over the past five years, countries in the region have taken measures to prevent discrimination and protect the rights of refugee and internally displaced women (six countries) and women in humanitarian settings (six countries).²⁵ There are good practices emerging from the region that address multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination. Through the Universal Public Health Insurance scheme, refugees in the Islamic Republic of Iran can benefit from a health insurance package for hospitalization, similar to that afforded to nationals.²⁶ Furthermore, in accordance with the Code of Conduct on the education of foreigners admitted in 2016, free education is provided to immigrant children.

C. Freedom from violence, stigma and stereotypes

44. Freedom from violence, stigma and stereotypes is fundamental to achieving gender equality. Worldwide, approximately 30 per cent of women have faced physical and/or sexual violence from an intimate partner. In Asia and the Pacific, this figure ranges from 15 per cent in Bhutan, the Lao People's Democratic Republic and the Philippines to 68 per cent in Kiribati (figure IV). Countries in Asia and the Pacific have prioritized the elimination of violence by enacting laws, initiating policies and forging new partnerships. They are

²³ ESCAP, Education, ESCAP Statistical Online Database. Available at http://data.unescap.org/escap_stat/#data/30 (accessed on 25 July 2019).

²⁴ ILO, *Game Changers: Women and the Future of Work in Asia and the Pacific*.

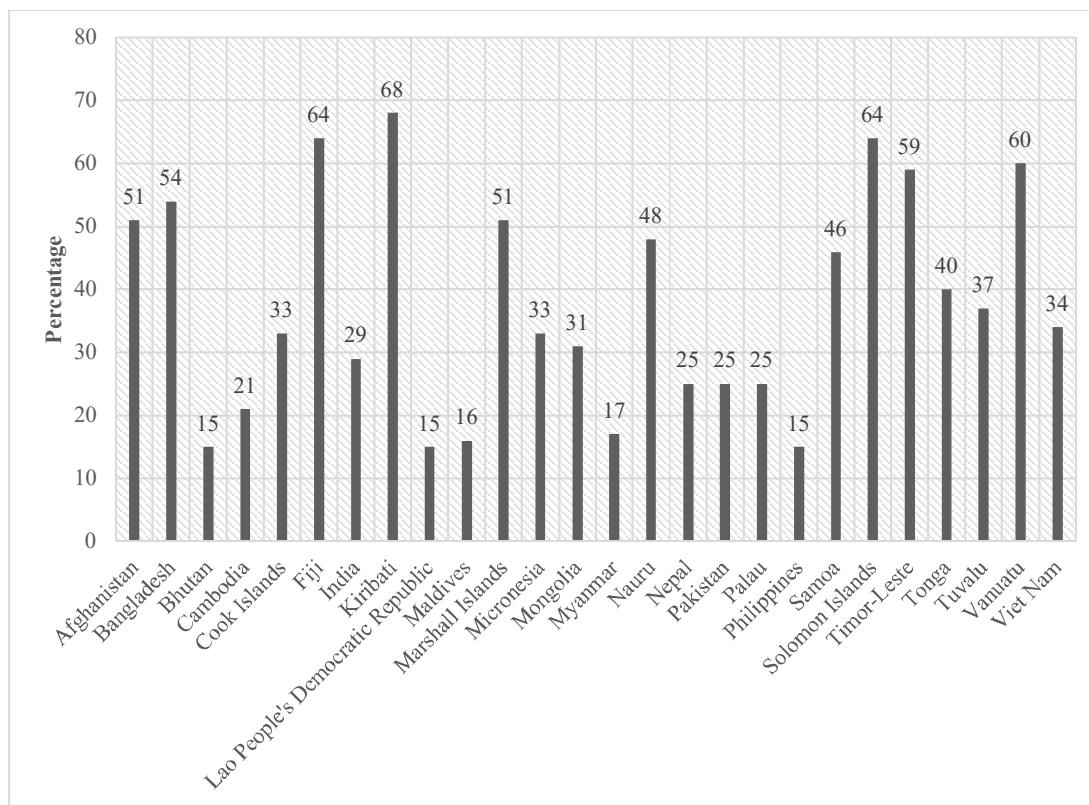
²⁵ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), *Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2018* (Geneva, 2019).

²⁶ UNHCR, "For refugees in Iran, health plan brings care and calm", 17 December 2015.

employing various strategies to end violence against women and girls and address stigma and stereotypes that constrain women's potential.

Figure IV

Proportion of women who experienced physical and/or sexual violence by an intimate partner



Source: United Nations Population Fund, kNOwVAWdata. Available at <https://asiapacific.unfpa.org/knowvawdata> (accessed on 30 June 2019).

45. In 2018, 47 countries in Asia and the Pacific had dedicated legislation on domestic violence and 13 countries had developed national action plans on violence against women and/or domestic violence.²⁷ In 2016, ASEAN adopted its Regional Plan of Action on the Elimination of Violence against Women, in effect until 2025. The ASEAN Convention against Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, a legally binding regional agreement among the ASEAN countries, was signed in November 2015.

46. In the Asia-Pacific region, countries commonly identified violence against women and girls as a top priority of the past five years (30 countries) and for the coming five years (29 countries). Countries identified changing negative social norms and gender stereotypes as a priority for the past five years (9 countries) and the coming five years (11 countries). Stigma and stereotypes constrain women's and girls' potential and ability to access services and justify discrimination, violence and exploitation. Among the different forms of violence, most countries prioritized eliminating intimate

²⁷ UN-Women, "Ending violence against women mapping data in Asia and the Pacific"; 2018 and data from national reports.

partner violence (33 countries) followed by sexual harassment and violence (22 countries) and trafficking in women and girls (19 countries).

47. To address violence against women and girls, countries introduced or strengthened laws, as well as their enforcement and implementation (31 countries), services for survivors of violence (29 countries) and strategies to prevent violence (22 countries). An anti-catcalling ordinance made Quezon City the first city in the Philippines to penalize street harassment and led to the adoption of the new national law against sexual harassment in public spaces. Several countries provide free legal services, hotlines and digital applications to report violence, as well as emergency shelters and safe spaces for survivors in the context of humanitarian crises.

48. For 28 countries, public awareness and changing attitudes have been the key strategies to prevent violence. Seventeen countries considered working with boys and men a crucial strategy. CHVEN – Men Against Violence in Georgia – is a case in point. Several countries have collaborated with non-governmental organizations, faith-based organizations and private-sector stakeholders.

49. To tackle technology-facilitated gender-based violence, 22 countries have introduced or strengthened legislation and regulatory provisions with a view to enhancing prevention and response. Nineteen countries have implemented awareness-raising initiatives on the issue. A research study on young people's experience of digital risk, conducted in New Zealand, concluded with the recommendation to involve women in programming and designing online environments to address cyberviolence. The Republic of Korea has established the Digital Sexual Crime Victims Support Centre to provide one-stop support services such as counselling, content deletion, investigation, and legal and medical assistance.

50. Twenty-five countries indicated that, in the past five years, they have addressed violence against women facing multiple forms of discrimination. Countries most commonly took measures to prevent discrimination against and promote rights of women living with disabilities (27 countries), women living in remote and rural areas (25 countries), younger women (19 countries) and older women (14 countries).

51. To eliminate discrimination against and violations of the rights of the girl child, 26 countries have strengthened access to quality education, skills development and training, 21 countries have taken measures to eliminate violence, 19 countries have implemented policies and programmes to reduce or eradicate child, early and forced marriage, and 17 countries have promoted awareness and participation of girls in economic, social and political life.

D. Participation, accountability and gender-responsive institutions

52. Women's participation in public life and decision-making is critical in advancing the agenda of gender equality. For countries in the region, the average political participation of women has increased since 1995, but lags behind global trends; women's representation in the region is at 18 per cent, whereas the global average is at 24 per cent.²⁸

²⁸ ESCAP calculations of weighted average based on Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), New Parline: the IPU's open data platform (beta), Percentage of women. Available at https://data.ipu.org/compare?field=chamber%3A%3Afield_auth_secretary_general&structure=any__lower_chamber#map (accessed on 12 July 2019).

53. To promote women's participation in public life and decision-making, countries have implemented capacity-building and skills-development initiatives (22 countries), collected and analysed data on women's political participation (21 countries), provided opportunities for mentorship, training in leadership, decision-making, public speaking, self-assertion and political campaigning (20 countries) and reformed constitutions, laws and regulations (17 countries).

54. Several countries in the region are conducting mock parliaments in which women can gain competence and the aspiration to be in politics. Following the 2018 general elections in Fiji, women now account for 20 per cent of representation in Parliament, a record high for the country. This is attributed to the role-model effect of its first woman Speaker of the Parliament, under whose aegis the first Women's Parliament was conducted in 2016. This enabled 50 aspiring women leaders to learn about Parliament and important development issues and augment their policy skills.

55. Several countries have instituted quotas of varying kinds to support the representation of women in parliaments. An ESCAP study shows that countries without quotas have a median representation that is lower than the medians in countries with quotas, regardless of type. Though there are exceptions (for example, the Lao People's Democratic Republic), on the whole, countries with quotas are doing better than those without. While quotas have helped to increase women's parliamentary representation in the region, the same study shows that quotas need to be complemented with sustained mentoring, training and skills development for women parliamentarians.²⁹ The Women's Committee of Uzbekistan has a database of more than 6,000 women leaders who could potentially be candidates for election to Parliament, and is developing a programme to augment the leadership skills of women leaders.

56. In the Platform for Action, women's increased participation in the media is considered an important means to combat negative social norms. To address the portrayal of women and girls, discrimination and/or gender bias in the media, 18 countries in the region have been promoting women's leadership and participation in the media.

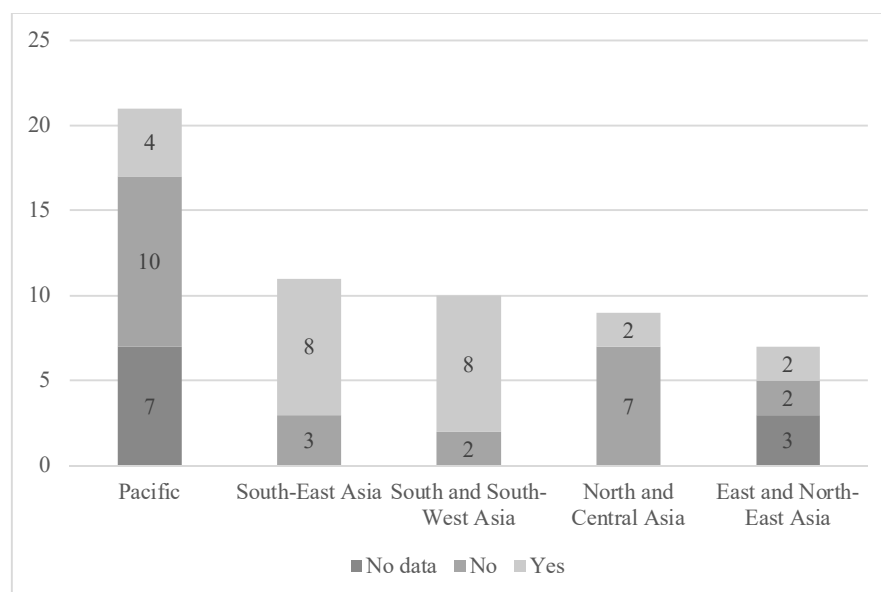
57. To increase the participation of women in the media, countries took measures to enhance access to, and the affordability and use of, information and communications technology (18 countries), strengthened the provision of formal and technical vocational education and training in the media and information and communications technology, including in the areas of management and leadership (11 countries) and provided support to women's media networks and organizations (10 countries).

58. To realize gender equality in the region, it is critical to have gender-responsive institutional mechanisms in place. Eleven countries track the proportion of national budgets invested in the promotion of gender equality. According to International Monetary Fund data, almost half of the countries in the region have developed a gender budgeting initiative (figure V). Fourteen countries have national human rights institutions with a specific mandate to focus on gender equality or gender discrimination. In Bangladesh, since 2015, the subdistrict councils have been instructed to spend 3 per cent of the total

²⁹ ESCAP, *Pathways to Influence: The SDGs and Women's Transformative Leadership in Asia and the Pacific* (forthcoming).

budget on the Women Development Forum, and 25 per cent of the projects of the councils are to be implemented by women members.

Figure V
Number of countries with government gender budgeting initiatives, by subregion



Source: ESCAP calculations, based on International Monetary Fund, Gender budgeting and gender equality data 2017. Available at <https://data.imf.org/?sk=AC81946B-43E4-4FF3-84C7-217A6BDE8191> (accessed on 9 August 2019).

E. Peaceful and inclusive societies

59. Peaceful and inclusive societies require the meaningful participation of women in peace processes, security agreements, humanitarian action, conflict resolution and crisis response. The Asia-Pacific region has witnessed numerous protracted conflicts, humanitarian crises and natural disasters, all of which exacerbate women's vulnerability to violence, exploitation and rights violations.

60. The year 2020 marks two decades since the adoption of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on women, peace and security. According to PeaceWomen, 14 countries in Asia and the Pacific have adopted national action plans to implement the provisions of that resolution.³⁰ Fifteen countries have integrated women, peace and security commitments into key national and interministerial policy, planning and monitoring frameworks.

61. Women remain underrepresented in peace processes and negotiations worldwide. Between 1992 and 2017, women made up just 3 per cent of mediators, 3 per cent of witnesses and signatories, and 9 per cent of

³⁰ PeaceWomen, "Member states", National action plans for the implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 on women, peace and security database. Available at peacewomen.org/member-states (accessed on 5 July 2019); and additional data from national reports.

negotiators.³¹ When women meaningfully participate in peace processes, agreements are 35 per cent more likely to last over a 15-year period.³²

62. In Asia and the Pacific, 18 countries promoted the equal participation of women in humanitarian and crisis response activities at all levels, particularly at the decision-making level. Seventeen countries promoted and supported women's meaningful participation in peace processes and in the implementation of peace agreements. To augment participation in negotiations, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia works with partners to provide training to women civil servants on high-level negotiation and mediation skills.

63. Peaceful and inclusive societies must respect and promote civil society participation, including that of women's and youth organizations. Nine countries in the region reported having protections for civil society spaces and women's human rights defenders. In the region, only nine countries, all from the Pacific subregion, have open civic spaces.³³ The 2018–2020 national action plan of Georgia for the implementation of the Security Council resolutions on women, peace and security promotes dialogue with conflict-affected and internally displaced women as part of its localization strategy and has an established platform for regular dialogue with civil society representatives.

64. To enhance judicial and non-judicial accountability for violations of international humanitarian law and for human rights violations of women and girls in conflicts, or to enhance humanitarian action and crisis response, 18 countries have taken measures to combat trafficking in women and children, 15 countries have implemented legal and policy reform to redress and prevent violations of the rights of women and girls, and 14 countries have strengthened the capacity of security sector institutions with regard to human rights and the prevention of sexual and gender-based violence. In Mongolia, training was provided to 500 law enforcement officers and social workers on human trafficking, child protection and labour exploitation. The Vanuatu Women's Centre trains frontline health service providers, police officers and pastors to be advocates for gender equality and the elimination of violence in the development and humanitarian sectors. In Armenia in 2017, health personnel and firefighters in various locations received training on the minimum reproductive health services to be administered in emergency situations.

65. In its resolution 2250 (2015) on youth and peace and security, the Security Council called for youth leadership and participation in peace and security processes, including efforts to counter violent extremism. In September 2018, the Government of the Philippines began drafting its national action plan for youth, peace and security to ensure that youth voices are heard in peace and security contexts.

66. Following the World Humanitarian Summit in 2016, stakeholders committed to forging partnerships and increasing collaboration across the development, peace and humanitarian sectors. Armed conflict, natural disasters and climate change have exacerbated humanitarian needs, which must

³¹ Council on Foreign Relations, "Women's participation in peace processes", 30 January 2019.

³² Laurel Stone, "Quantitative analysis of women's participation in peace processes", in *Reimagining Peacemaking: Women's Roles in Peace Processes*, Marie O'Reilly, Andrea Ó Súilleabháin and Thania Paffenholz (New York, International Peace Institute, 2015).

³³ Civicus, "Monitor: tracking civic space", Civicus database. Available at <https://monitor.civicus.org/> (accessed on 25 July 2019).

be aligned with development efforts. Following the participation of Fiji in the Summit and in the wake of Tropical Cyclone Winston, the Government developed a national humanitarian policy for disaster risk management in 2017.

F. Environmental conservation, climate action and resilience-building

67. The Asia-Pacific region remains extremely vulnerable to climate change and is the most disaster-prone region in the world. In 2018, almost half of the 281 natural disaster events worldwide occurred in Asia and the Pacific, and the region witnessed eight of the ten deadliest natural disasters.³⁴ Environmental depletion and climate-induced changes have a disproportionate impact on women and add increased pressures on women's time, income, health, nutrition and social support systems.

68. To integrate gender concerns into environmental policies, 25 countries supported women's participation and leadership in environmental and natural resource management and governance; 16 countries promoted the education of women and girls in science, engineering, technology and disciplines relating to the natural environment; and 15 countries increased women's access to and control over land, water, energy and other natural resources.

69. In Nepal, the Community Forestry Development Programme Guidelines, 2014, reserves 50 per cent representation for women and proportional representation of Dalit, ethnic and marginalized communities in the executive committees of community forest user groups. Additionally, the Community Forest User Group Financial Procedure Guidelines, 2016, requires the group to allocate 35 per cent of total income to programmes for women and Dalit and indigenous communities. Decisions have to be taken in a participatory manner and the executive committees must have a woman serving as either the president or the secretary. As of 2019, 37 per cent of the committee members of the community forest user groups are women.

70. To integrate gender into disaster risk reduction, climate resilience and mitigation policies and programmes, 23 countries supported the participation and leadership of women; 18 countries introduced or strengthened and implemented gender-responsive laws and policies; and 17 countries strengthened the evidence base and raised awareness about the disproportionate vulnerability of women and girls.

71. In certain contexts, climate change can hasten early, child or forced marriage. In Fiji, the rapid gender analysis conducted after Tropical Cyclone Winston showed the increased rate of gender-based violence and highlighted the need to prioritize equal access to humanitarian assistance and targeted support for people with specific concerns.

72. The FemLINKPACIFIC Women's Weather Watch programme has created a network of women rural leaders on the ground in different towns and villages in Fiji and Vanuatu and engages them throughout the disaster management cycle, including before, during and after disasters. Using community radio, they update listeners on the weather conditions and imminent threats of natural disasters. This programme utilizes women's particular knowledge of the natural environment, makes a case for gender-

³⁴ *Asia Pacific Disaster Report 2019: The Disaster Riskscape across Asia-Pacific - Pathways for Resilience, Inclusion and Empowerment* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.19.II.F.12).

inclusive humanitarian preparedness and response, and documents women's lived experience of disasters.

IV. National institutions and processes to advance gender equality

73. The presence of relevant national institutions and processes is critical to implementing and building synergies between the commitments made in the Platform for Action and the 2030 Agenda. All countries in the review have reported the presence of national gender machinery (national coordination mechanism) for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. In 28 countries, the head of the national machinery is a member of the institutional process for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Sixty-six per cent of the countries have formal mechanisms in place to allow stakeholders to participate in the implementation and monitoring of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the 2030 Agenda.

74. For 28 countries, gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls are key priorities in national plans or strategies for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, while two countries did not consider these priorities within the scope of the plan or strategy. Four countries in the region do not have a national strategy or action plan for achieving the Goals.

75. For the preparation of its national progress report on the Platform for Action, the Government of the Philippines adopted a whole-of-government, whole-of-society approach. A kick-off activity was held in January 2019, followed by consultations carried out with the support of UN-Women at the subnational and national levels. A national consultation and validation workshop was held in March 2019, with 134 multi-stakeholder representatives. In attendance were rural women, migrant workers, union members, workers in the informal economy, urban poor, indigenous women, Bangsamoro women, Muslim women, persons with hearing disabilities and youth.

Table 1
Stakeholder participation in the national coordination mechanisms for the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in Asia and the Pacific

<i>Civil society organizations</i>	<i>Women's rights organizations</i>	<i>Academia</i>	<i>Faith-based organizations</i>	<i>Parliaments/parliamentary committees</i>	<i>Private sector</i>	<i>United Nations system</i>
26 countries	21 countries	16 countries	12 countries	16 countries	15 countries	17 countries

Table 2
Stakeholder participation in the national coordination mechanisms for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in Asia and the Pacific

<i>Civil society organizations</i>	<i>Women's rights organizations</i>	<i>Academia</i>	<i>Faith-based organizations</i>	<i>Parliaments/parliamentary committees</i>	<i>Private sector</i>	<i>United Nations system</i>
28 countries	23 countries	20 countries	13 countries	17 countries	19 countries	22 countries

V. Data and statistics

76. Data are a key means of implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The Platform for Action contains the recommendation that Governments produce and disseminate statistics disaggregated by sex. Data gaps in gender statistics are a key impediment to the advancement of gender equality in the region, as has been identified by 12 countries. Seven out of nine targets (six targets and three means of implementation) of Sustainable Development Goal 5 have been reported to have insufficient data in the region.³⁵

77. Over the past five years, with respect to gender statistics, countries have made the most progress in producing knowledge products on gender statistics (17 countries), conducting new surveys to produce national baseline information on gender-related topics (15 countries) and re-processing existing data to produce disaggregated data or new gender data (14 countries). In the coming five years, the top three priorities of the countries are to conduct new surveys to gather baseline data (19 countries), to use gender-sensitive data in formulating policies and programmes (19 countries) and to improve statistical capacity-building among users (15 countries).

78. Twenty-eight countries have developed national indicators for monitoring the progress of the 2030 Agenda. Thirty countries have already started data collection and compilation on Sustainable Development Goal 5 indicators and on gender-specific indicators under other Goals. In 32 countries, major surveys provide sex-disaggregated data.

79. The Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran annually publishes the Women and Family Atlas, a statistical atlas covering 40 indicators on the status of women at the national and local levels. The National Commission for Women and Children in Bhutan has developed the Gender Equality Monitoring System, used by gender focal points at the national and local levels to track progress on gender mainstreaming in the country. The system is used to manage data and information on 52 gender-specific indicators.

Table 3
Number of Asia-Pacific countries with disaggregated data, by indicator

<i>Geographic location</i>	<i>Income</i>	<i>Sex</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Education</i>	<i>Marital status</i>	<i>Race/ ethnicity</i>	<i>Migratory status</i>	<i>Disability</i>	<i>Other</i>
30	26	32	30	28	28	17	16	19	17

³⁵ ESCAP, “Expected achievement: dashboard”, SDG Progress Assessment webpage. Available at <http://data.unescap.org/#progress> (accessed on 25 July 2019).

VI. Priority areas for action

80. Countries identified the following priority areas of action for the coming five years to accelerate progress towards gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls.³⁶

81. **Eliminating violence against women and girls.** Despite the efforts of countries to address violence, the region has a long way to go to eliminate violence. Furthermore, evidence shows that violence is preventable and that prevention is a cost-effective strategy.³⁷ Efforts should be directed towards adopting legislative measures that cover all forms of gender-based violence and ensuring their just implementation without cowering before the adverse effects of gender norms, stigmas and stereotypes.

82. **Political participation of women.** Though there has been steady progress over the past 25 years, ESCAP research shows that it will take at least 20 years to reach an average parliamentary participation rate of 30 per cent for women across the region and 44 years to achieve gender parity in parliamentary representation.³⁸ Measures should be taken to address barriers to women's political participation, such as the burden of unpaid work, the backlash against women in power due to gender norms and stereotypes and the perception of leadership as a man's domain, and to provide leadership, networking and mentoring programmes.

83. **Women's entrepreneurship and women-led enterprises.** Countries recognized women's entrepreneurship as an important avenue for achieving women's economic empowerment. By ensuring an enabling policy environment, countries will be able to rectify the financial, technological and scaling-up challenges faced by women entrepreneurs. In particular, measures to ensure digital and financial inclusion for women in the region would go a long way towards empowering women entrepreneurs. Furthermore, to tackle the gender digital divide in the region, efforts should be directed towards ensuring accessibility and affordability, as well as the safety and participation of women and girls as users, content creators, employees and innovators in the digital space.

84. **Equality and non-discrimination under the law and access to justice.** Countries noted the importance of laws and access to justice in guaranteeing equality and protecting women against discrimination. While the region has made great progress in adopting progressive laws, efforts should be directed towards ensuring their efficient and effective implementation.

85. **Quality education.** Countries noted the need to be prepared for the changing world of work in the future and considered education to play a key role in ensuring that the workforce is adequately prepared to meet the demands of the labour market. To make the workforce competitive, countries in the region are turning to providing technical vocational education and training and skills development for men and women. Amid the looming threat of automation, efforts should be directed towards supporting women's

³⁶ Priority areas have been identified on the basis of the responses of countries to question 5 in UN-Women, "Guidance note for comprehensive national-level reviews", September 2018.

³⁷ UN-Women, "A framework to underpin action to prevent violence against women", 2015.

³⁸ ESCAP, *Pathways to Influence: The SDGs and Women's Transformative Leadership in Asia and the Pacific* (forthcoming).

participation in science, technology, engineering and mathematics education and careers to turn the tide and convert job losses into gains.

86. **Right to work and rights at work.** Strengthening legislative measures and gender-responsive labour market policies was deemed critical to protect women's right to work and rights at work. Furthermore, creating an enabling and supportive policy and legislative environment could go a long way towards increasing women's economic participation, which is steadily declining for the region.

87. **Gender-responsive budgeting.** Countries stressed the importance of gender-responsive budgeting in fulfilling their commitments to the development of a gender-equal society. Efforts should be directed towards supporting and ensuring the institutionalization and collection of gender-disaggregated data in all ministries and departments to enable the mainstreaming of gender-responsive budgeting into policy, programme design and implementation.

88. **Access to affordable quality health care, including sexual and reproductive health and rights.** Countries in the region are expanding sexual and reproductive health and rights, with particular focus on youth and adolescents, and must aspire to adopt universal health-care policies, inclusive of maternal, sexual and reproductive health-care services and related social protection benefits, to ensure that all groups have access without prohibitive out-of-pocket expenses.

89. **Changing negative social norms and gender stereotypes.** Persistent adverse social norms and gender stereotypes prevent women from fully exercising their social, economic and political rights. Countries find that efforts to challenge and remove such norms are complicated and slow to yield benefits. Despite this, countries stress the importance of changing social norms to make gender equality a reality.

90. **Unpaid care and domestic work/work-family conciliation.** Countries stressed the need to recognize, reduce and redistribute the burden of unpaid work by adopting appropriate family leave policies, expanding childcare services and elderly care, and conducting time-use surveys. By addressing unpaid work, Governments can create an enabling environment for women's economic, social and political empowerment.

91. **Gender-responsive social protection, public services and infrastructure.** Countries noted the importance of gender-responsive social protection as a means to mitigate risks throughout the life cycle of women and also to create lasting opportunities for women's empowerment. In this regard, actions should be taken to increase investment in social protection, make it inclusive of women workers in informal employment and complement it with gender-responsive public services and infrastructure, which are key to reducing and redistributing the burden of unpaid work. This includes the provision of affordable childcare, water, sanitation and clean energy services, especially in rural areas, all of which could reduce the pressures on women's time.

92. **Gender-responsive disaster risk reduction and resilience-building.** For the most disaster-prone region in the world, developing gender-responsive disaster risk reduction and building resilience are key priorities. In particular, action should be taken to integrate the specific needs of women and girls into the humanitarian response to natural disasters. Furthermore, it is critical to promote women as agents of change in safeguarding the environment by

gender-mainstreaming environmental policies, plans, programmes and implementation.

93. **Poverty eradication, agriculture productivity and food security.** Several countries stressed the need to promote the rights of women in rural and remote areas and considered improving agricultural productivity central to improving food security and alleviating poverty. Measures must be directed towards ensuring equal access by rural women to land, capital and technology and addressing barriers to trading their products in national, regional and international markets.

VII. Issues for consideration by member States

94. In view of the key achievements, challenges, actions taken and priority areas to advance gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, member States may wish to deliberate on the following topics and provide guidance to the secretariat and the United Nations system on the assistance required in this regard:

- (a) Key actions to harness the synergies between the Platform for Action and the 2030 Agenda for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls;
 - (b) Policy actions to address the key challenges in advancing gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, from national to local levels;
 - (c) Regional collaboration and partnerships to accelerate the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls in the region.
-