

ASIA AND PACIFIC POLICY DIALOGUE ON “WOMEN’S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT IN THE CHANGING WORLD OF WORK”

SUMMARY REPORT OF RECOMMENDATIONS



Background

The Asia-Pacific policy dialogue on “Women’s Economic Empowerment in the Changing World of Work”, was held at the United Nations Conference Centre in Bangkok from 23–24 February. The recommendations made by participants at the meeting will inform the sixty-first session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW61) in New York in March 2017.

Organized by the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) and the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) with the technical support and collaboration of the Thematic Working Group on Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment (TGW-GEEW), the meeting saw participation from high-level representatives from Ministries responsible for the advancement of gender equality and Ministries of Labour from 16 countries, along with experts and practitioners from the private sector, academia, trade unions, civil society organizations and the United Nations.

Realizing women’s economic empowerment requires transformative, structural change. However, the Asia-Pacific region is faced with increasing pressure and challenges, including the concentration of wealth in fewer hands, a regression of women’s rights in some countries, competing priorities and emerging crises, such as climate change and its related disasters. Innovative measures are required to overcome these barriers and ensure women’s economic empowerment in the changing world of work. The meeting discussed the gender-differential impact of regional trends on women’s ability to participate and lead in the workplace on par with men.

Women in the region are more likely than men to be in vulnerable jobs. In 2016, the vulnerable employment rate was 80 per cent for women and 72 per cent for men in South Asia¹. Likewise, in South-East Asia the rates were 60 per cent for women and 53 per cent for men, respectively². Of 231 million migrants around the world, 60 million can be found in Asia and the Pacific. About 95 million migrants in the world come from this region. Half of them are women³. There are also rising concerns about the high numbers of female migrant workers channeled into domestic work and low-end manufacturing supply chains, where labour regulations and protections either do not apply or are not enforced.

In the meantime, rapid advances in technology are changing the way the world works and the world of work. Yet, for many women business owners in Asia-Pacific, the potential of ICTs is out of reach due to their limited access to ICT know-how and equipment at various stages of the supply chain.

The participants deliberated upon the situation in Asia and the Pacific, discussing issues of rapid technological advancement, changing demographics, the role of private sector in emerging economies, climate change and structural issues of gender-based discrimination and violence that impede women’s progress. The [background paper](#) for the event served as key input to the deliberations. The recommendations also rely on the Report of the Secretary-General Women’s economic empowerment in the changing world (E/CN.6/2017/3) of work

¹ UN ESCAP (2016). *Economic and Social Survey of Asia and the Pacific 2016: Year End Update*. UN ESCAP, Bangkok. 36p. <http://www.unescap.org/resources/economic-and-social-survey-asia-and-pacific-2016-year-end-update>

² Ibid.

³ UN ESCAP (2016) *Asia-Pacific Migration Report 2015*, UN ESCAP Bangkok. 9p. <http://www.unescap.org/resources/asia-pacific-migration-report-2015>

recent research and data from United Nations entities and other sources, including the Secretary-General's High-level Panel on Women's Economic Empowerment.

The meeting, made action-oriented recommendations to turn the tide on gender inequality and ensure equal access to decent work for all. This document presents a summary of the recommendations. A full report of the meeting will be circulated in due course.

Overview of Recommendations

The present recommendations are anchored in the theme of women's rights to and at work, as enshrined in the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families and several International Labour Organization (ILO) conventions, including the ILO declaration on fundamental principles on human rights, for all work and workers without regard to sex, nationality, race, disability, employment, migration status and all social diversities.

Women's economic empowerment and the realization of women's rights to and at work are essential for the achievement of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (see E/CN.6/2015/3), and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and related resolutions such as UN Security Council Resolutions on women, peace and security, including UN Security Council Resolution 1325. Of particular relevance is Sustainable Development Goal 5 to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls as well as Goals 1, 2, 3, 4, 8, 10 and 16, with focus on human rights frameworks and responding to the call for action to leave no one behind. The sixtieth session of the Commission on the Status of Women provided a road map for the gender-responsive implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development that highlights the significance for women's economic empowerment of decent work, full and productive employment and equal pay for work of equal value. These commitments are also reflected in recent normative milestones, including the Paris Agreement under the United Nations Framework on Climate Change (see FCCC/CP/2015/L.9/Rev.1) and the New Urban Agenda (A/CONF.226/4) and the Istanbul Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2011-2020.

Realizing women's economic empowerment requires transformative, structural change. However, the Asia-Pacific region is faced with increasing pressure and challenges, including the concentration of wealth in fewer hands, a regression of women's rights in some countries and competing priorities, such as climate change. Innovative measures are required to overcome these barriers and ensure women's economic empowerment in the changing world of work.

The recommendations presented here draw on group work and discussion of the Asia Pacific Policy Dialogue on "Women's economic empowerment in the changing world of work", organized by the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) and the Economic Commission of Asia Pacific (ESCAP) with the technical support and collaboration of the Thematic Working Group on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (TGW-GEEW) from 23 to 24 February 2017 in Bangkok. The recommendations further draw on the Report of the Secretary-General Women's economic empowerment in the changing world (E/CN.6/2017/3) of work recent research and data from

United Nations entities and other sources, including the Secretary -General's High-level Panel on Women's Economic Empowerment.

Key Recommendations

Strengthening normative and legal frameworks for full employment and decent work for all women

1. Reaffirm the central importance of, and consider ratifying the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, with particular references to articles 1, 4, 11, 13 and 15, and relevant ILO conventions and recommendations. In particular, consider ratification and implementation of ILO Conventions 100 on equal remuneration for men and women workers for work of equal value, 111 on discrimination (employment and occupation), 189 on Domestic Workers, 177 on Home Work, and 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labour; ILO Recommendations 202 that calls for universal social protection floors and 204 concerning the transition from informal to formal economy; and the Optional Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Furthermore, recognise and support CEDAW General Recommendations No. 34 on the rights of rural women, and No. 26 on the legal protection of migrant women workers. In addition, support the proposed ILO Convention on ending all forms of violence in the workplace, promote mandatory zero-tolerance on work place harassment and ensure that redress mechanisms are in place. In addition, the commitments to the SDGs including goals 5, 8, 1.3, 1.4, 10 and 16 foster intersectionality, stimulate coordinated action and track meaningful transformation in labour markets for women.
2. Promote and implement labour laws that improve the decision-making power, bargaining power and position of women in labour markets.
3. Remove barriers and constraints that restrict women from entering the labour force and from developing, leading and managing enterprises, such as discriminatory laws and regulations, lack of access to finances, and cultural norms.
4. Recognize and protect the rights of women workers, labour and human rights activists and defenders, as well as worker's organisations that include informal workers, from suppression and retaliation.
5. Recognise formal and informal workers' need for access to social protection, including occupational injury, disability insurance, paid sick leave, occupational health and safety, health, pension, and unemployment provisioning.
6. Ensure the portability of social protection, social security and labour rights, across sectors and national borders.
7. Combat constraining norms and attitudes towards women studying and working with ICTs and other technologies by promoting positive images of women in electronic, print, and audio-visual media.
8. Promote the value of work by workers in the care sector and the skills required, including through national advocacy campaigns to address cultural norms and attitudes. In particular, protect the labour and human rights of care workers, including by ensuring their fair wages and social protection.
9. In line with the Paris agreement, take action to address climate change and respect, protect and promote women and girls' human rights.
10. Support the elaboration of the binding instrument proposed by the Human Rights Council resolution on regulating transnational corporations in the context of human rights – whilst also ensuring that this instrument addresses violations against women's rights.

11. Undertake concerted and immediate efforts to eliminate gender-based violence (GBV) in the world of work, recognizing that this violence increase gender inequalities denies women workers voice and agency and imposes economic costs on women, families and economies.
12. Build a robust and gender-inclusive labour rights inspection, monitoring and adjudication system capable of identifying and remediating gendered labour rights violations, such as gender-based violence in the world of work and discrimination, while ensuring that it operates separately from immigration enforcement.

Implementing economic and social policies for women's economic empowerment

13. Enact macroeconomic, monetary and fiscal policies that promote and support decent work and full employment for women and men, which are in line with international human and labour rights standards at the regional and national levels. In addition, ensure that trade policies and agreements support the sustainable development goals and respect women's rights in particular and human rights in general.
14. Expand and reprioritize fiscal expenditures to foster significant investment in social protection and care infrastructure and support for the productive capacity of informal economy workers and women across other sectors, including in agriculture, enterprises or in formal employment. In particular, invest in human capital in Lower Income Countries and Middle Income Countries to enable workers to move higher up on the global supply chain, and raise basic floor rates for wages towards a minimum living wage.
15. Recognize that remittances create fiscal space for home governments and link this fiscal space to state obligations to invest in care and resolve care deficits exacerbated by migration.
16. Enact policies that support women's enterprise development in the context of decent work which will include financial inclusion of women, sectoral policies that unlock credit, including but not limited to micro-credit, training to enhance attitudes, skills and knowledge for confidence-building, positive government procurement commitments and access to markets for women's enterprises.
17. Support women's equal right to inheritance, right to own and use land, including collective and usufruct rights to land and common property and implement actions based on Free Prior and Informed Consent, as well as access to, and control over finance and other resources.
18. Recognize the importance of care for individual and collective wellbeing as well as for national economies, and urge that the following actions be taken:
 - a. Ensure that unpaid care work and social reproduction are fully integrated into the formulation and evaluation of macroeconomic policies.
 - b. Recognize, reduce, redistribute and respect care work between the market and the state and among men and women, including by collecting accurate disaggregated time use information on paid and unpaid work in national statistical systems, and implementing policies that support the equal distribution in the household of the provision of care.
19. Promote policies to ensure equal pay for work of equal value, access to paid maternity and paternity leave and parental benefits including for adoptive families, and regulate hours and ensure work-life balance.
20. Prioritise labour market access for older women and first-time female entrants to the labour market, by ensuring that they have access to appropriate education, technical and vocational skills; and opportunities for accessing high productivity and high pay sectors.
21. Build human capital of all women as a long term economic investment, whilst ensuring the safety and health of girls in educational facilities at all levels.

22. Whilst ensuring the full and seamless integration of informal economy workers in urban spaces, urban planning, particularly in developing countries, should ensure supportive and safe spaces and facilities for the economic activities of informal economy workers, without reinforcing their segregation.
23. Eradicate all forms of bonded labour, whilst also ensuring compensation and justice for anyone whose labour has not been properly rewarded during their lifetime.
24. Ensure that physical infrastructure and workplaces are accessible for all women, including safe toilet facilities for women, child care and breastfeeding rooms.
25. Develop and implement evidence-based policies addressing gendered impacts of macroeconomic policies, including trade mispricing, under-invoicing and specific trade and investment agreements including their effects on unpaid work, gender wage gaps, labour market segregation, women's access to decent work, women's access to and control over productive resources and economic decision-making at home, at work, nationally and globally.
26. Enhance the systematic collection of sex-disaggregated data to inform and monitor the impact of policies and programs within and beyond national boundaries, including within the context of the SDGs.
27. Carry out further research to examine the gender imbalance in unpaid care work, and the impact of gender-based violence on women workers. In addition, encourage efforts to create market indicators for unpaid care work.

Strengthening women's collective voice, leadership and decision-making

28. Protect civil, political, socio-economic and cultural rights including the right to freedom of association, assembly and speech, and the right to organize and collectively bargain, which allow women activists, women workers and women's organizations to organize unions and other collectives and be decision-makers in economic policies that affect their work.
29. Support the formation and growth of trade unions, particularly in women-dominated sectors, including the membership and leadership of women in trade unions. In particular, support tripartite engagement between policy makers, employers and women workers and their unions, organisations and allies to redress the particular systemic discrimination that women workers face.
30. Provide legal recognition of informal workers, domestic workers and informal workers' organizations—such as unions, cooperatives and voluntary associations—by creating an enabling environment for their registration, and recognizing their right to participation in tripartite fora.
31. Facilitate integration of gender equality issues in the Asia-Pacific regional network of trade unions, in order to enable them to monitor, share good practices and give input on ways to promote gender equality in the workplace.
32. Ensure that mechanisms are in place to prioritise the safeguarding of women's rights, such as fast tracking labour tribunals to address violations against women workers' rights.
33. Ensure women's leadership and gender balance in decision-making at all levels, especially pertaining to economic policy, programs and services including corporate boards, central banks, international financial institutions and governance mechanisms pertaining to the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and development banks, and the World Trade Organisation, including increasing the focus on gender equality through, for example the promotion of gender ambassadors in business institutions.
34. Support women cooperatives and women's groups as successful fora for entrepreneurship and access to loans and savings.

Addressing the mobility of women workers and particular needs of indigenous and rural women and girls

35. Enforce laws to protect the human rights of, and ensure the decent work for, migrant workers, laws against trafficking and against forfeiture of their assets.
36. Encourage bilateral agreements between countries of origin and destination in recognition of women's labour and human rights, gender equality and social protection.
37. Promote freedom of movement, safe migration and work choice for women and men of different skill groups.
38. Regulate the role of private intermediaries and labour brokers in migration, including eliminating recruiting fees for migrant women.
39. Promote networks of migrant women workers to support the exchange information on legal frameworks and share experiences of living and working in destination countries, as well as support the collective organisation of migrant workers to demand and protect their full labour rights.
40. Ensure adequate measures are taken to protect the rights of, and support the reintegration of returning women migrant workers.
41. Support the economic activities of rural and indigenous women by consulting with them and taking their traditional knowledge into account, so as to enhance their equal access to productive resources and agricultural inputs, as well as to ensure their representation and leadership in national and global policymaking.
42. Ensure access of rural and indigenous women to legal redress mechanisms, assistance and services.
43. Improve collection and analysis of information and data of women belonging to all marginalized groups, including in indigenous and rural communities.
44. Protect and strengthen the legal protection of child workers, providing for a minimum age for admission to employment, appropriate regulation of the hours and conditions of employment, and appropriate penalties or other sanctions to ensure the effective enforcement of those policies. Furthermore, take all measures to protect children from economic exploitation and from performing any work that is likely to be hazardous or to interfere with the child's education, or to be harmful to the child's health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development.

Managing technological and digital change for women's economic empowerment

45. Ensure access and participation for women and girls to STEM education, promote transition into employment of women into ICT sectors, and facilitate the reskilling of women to ensure their employability in order that they benefit equally from technological advancements and to prevent defeminisation of sectors.
46. Promote technological interventions that reduce women's disproportionate care burdens to promote women's economic empowerment. In particular, provide women with technological tools to be used in unpaid or care work that can enhance her health as well as promote ecological lifestyles, such as smokeless cooking equipment.
47. Bridge the technological gap between urban and rural areas, including promotion of women friendly-technology transfer, training and access to innovation, as well as through mobilisation of civil society organizations.
48. Enhance the number of women working in, and providing, ICT-related services, such as mobile operator services, technological dealerships, in particular in agricultural sectors.

49. Enhance the capacity of women entrepreneurs to use technology to enhance their efficiency and productivity, such as creating a portal for entrepreneurship.
50. Promote access to mobile technology as a right for migrant women workers and other women who may be denied access due to poverty, remote location or other reasons.
51. Promote the use of ICTs to ensure stronger safeguards and protection mechanisms for women against violence and abuse everywhere, including the workplace. In addition, combat online harassment, cyber bullying and other cyber threats to the security of women and girls, and protect the online rights to data protection, privacy, freedom of speech.
52. Ensure that life-saving technologies, including technology for use in early warning systems, is accessible by all women, especially in rural and remote areas.

Addressing impact of climate change on women's economic empowerment

53. Ensure gender-responsive implementation of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction and its commitments to gender equality and women's empowerment in all appropriate countries.
54. Develop and finance gender-responsive strategies to prevent, mitigate and manage the impact of climate change and its related disasters in line with international and regional agreements.
55. Ensure that the transition to low-carbon economies incorporates a just and equitable transition of the workforce by encouraging productive technological change in support of decent work in the public and private sector for women, especially in the area of climate change mitigation and adaptation. In this regard, recognise that a just and equitable transition to low carbon economies may support decent work opportunities for women, while redistributing care work.
56. Ensure that women and their organisations are meaningfully involved and engaged in climate change and disaster management discussions, in particular, through women's leadership.
57. Regulating industries to address the impact that climate change and land degradation has on the economy and women's economic empowerment and rights.
58. Promote investment in clean, environmentally friendly and gender-sensitive technology to scale up women's livelihoods, entrepreneurship and employment, and enhance agricultural and marine economy and eco-tourism outputs through robust value addition, access to market and cooperatives.

Strengthening role of private sector and other social actors in women's economic empowerment

59. Strengthen the UN guiding principles on business and human rights to make them more gender-responsive and strengthen their implementation. In addition, ensure that ISO 26000 on social responsibility is applied across all private sector activity.
60. Promote mandatory implementation of employment and labour standards at companies and organisations of all sizes and their outsourcing branches. Furthermore, strengthen and monitor regulation of the global supply chain and businesses to promote decent work for women, including promoting transparency and ethical labelling on private sector products.
61. Promote progressive taxation of multinational banks in order to redistribute resources towards women's empowerment. In this regard, support the momentum around global and regional tax bodies to help ensure sharing and tracking of global tax information.

62. Encourage private sector businesses to invest in women's technological skills development through their core budgets, such as human resources development budget, in addition to corporate social responsibility budgets. In this regard, whilst noting the importance of corporate social responsibility on all business levels, corporate social responsibility should not replace public investments in decent work for women, including childcare and prevention of gender-based violence.
63. Promote sharing of good practices amongst governments, private sector and other stakeholders, to strengthen the role of the private sector in promoting women's economic empowerment. In this regard, highlight the pivotal role and influence of advertisement and media by the private sector in promoting women's economic empowerment, positive female and male role models, transforming gender norms, non-traditional work roles for women and messages on gender equality and women's empowerment. Furthermore, encourage more collaboration between government, trade unions, NGOs, civil society and private sector to promote the private sector's promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment, in line with agreed regional and international legal and policy frameworks.
64. Ensure that women working in special economic zones or export processing zones are not subject to restrictions in regard to their rights and freedoms, and that these zones do not displace communities or affect the livelihood of women farmers and agricultural workers, and that special conditions for companies operating in those zones such as tax exemptions do not infringe on women's economic rights.