Fifth North and Central Asia Multi-Stakeholder Forum on Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals

Building Back Better from COVID-19 while Advancing the Full Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

Session 5:
Progress on Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment (SDG 5)

Virtual Meeting Format
6 October 2021, 14:00 – 15:40 hours (UTC+6)

CONCEPT NOTE

Context

The North and Central Asian (NCA) subregion is not on track for achieving the targets under Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which is focused on achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls. For some of the target indicators of SDG 5, data is missing altogether, such as for recognizing the value of unpaid care and domestic work, which due to prevailing gender roles disproportionally falls on women, or for measuring progress on women’s equal rights to economic resources, access to ownership and control over land and other forms of property, financial services, inheritance, and natural resources. For those SDG 5 target indicators that data is available at subregional level for North and Central Asia, Figure 1 below shows that the rate of progress is too slow (blue bars have not reached the 2020 line which would indicate ‘being on track’). This is particularly true for the
persisting gender wage gap, but also for gender parity in years of schooling, and numbers of women that hold positions of power – in public service and in business. For some target indicators, progress has even reversed as indicated by the red bars. This means that gender parity in labour force participation and in youth that are neither in education nor employment today is below the level of the year 2000.

**Figure 1: Progress of Goal 5 in North and Central Asia**

![Progress of Goal 5 in North and Central Asia](image)

*Source: Asia Pacific SDG Gateway*

On 17 September 2021, UN Women launched the ‘*Progress on the Sustainable Development Goals: The Gender Snapshot 2021*, which presents the latest evidence on gender equality across all 17 Goals, highlighting the progress made since 2015 but also the continued alarm over the COVID-19 pandemic, its immediate effect on women’s well-being, and the threat it poses to future generations. It recognized that the pandemic has tested and even reversed progress in expanding women’s rights and opportunities, and in the fight against poverty and inequality within and between countries. It is estimated that acting now to advance gender equality could add US$ 13 trillion to the global Gross Domestic Product in 2030. McKinsey estimates that unpaid work being undertaken by women today amounts to as much as $10 trillion of output per year, roughly equivalent to 13 percent of global GDP.ii

Also in September, UN Women and UNDP launched the final update for the COVID-19 Global Gender Response Tracker, which analyses government measures with a gender lens in three areas: those that tackle violence against women and girls, support unpaid care, and strengthen women’s economic security. Across the Europe and Central Asia region as a response to the first COVID-19 wave, 17 UN Women programme countries and territories adopted a total number of 82 gender-sensitive measures. Based on these findings, it is clear that the response remains inadequate, given the scale of COVID-19’s impact on women. In Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan) though, nearly or more than 50% of all measures may be classified as gender-sensitive.
The COVID-19 pandemic has put a spotlight on a key structural barrier to achieving SDG 5 – the paid and unpaid work of care and domestic work mostly done by women. In many countries, including from the NCA region, women had to leave their jobs or drastically reduce working hours to meet the growing demand for taking care of children, sick or elderly in their families due to childcare facility and school closures during the pandemic. These have led to a decline of women’s income and increased uncertainty in re-joining the labour market. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, women dominated in sectors with low pay and less opportunities for career development, and in the informal economy. To support governments’ efforts to scale up and expand their response to the immediate socio-economic impacts of the pandemic, the five UN regional commissions and UN Women are supporting countries in strengthening the care economy policies for a sustainable development. The regional and country studies across the ECE and ESCAP regions provide evidence on trends in the care economy and the linkages to women’s economic empowerment, policies and initiatives already undertaken as a response to COVID-19 and make recommendations for forward-looking action to empower women through closing the care gaps and investing in the care sector.

Quality gender data is critical for evidence-based policy making and implementation. Overall, there is a heavy under-investment in gender statistics globally and in NCA countries. The lack of reliable gender-sensitive data means that significant disparities are obscured, and policy-making is not based on clear evidence of where the gaps are greatest. There is no baseline against which to measure any potential loss of progress towards gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. NCA countries should continue to identify data gaps, progress on developing relevant indicators, and encourage national statistical agencies to conduct regular statistical monitoring of gender issues. This would also support informed policy reforms and provide a more holistic view of women in the economy and other spheres – making women and girls visible.

Governments of NCA countries jointly with all key stakeholders need to ensure that recovery from COVID-19 is inclusive and explicitly gender responsive, and need to reinvigorate and deepen their commitment to achieve SDG 5, which is also one of the main drivers to achieve most other SDGs.
**Session Objectives**

This session will discuss approaches to accelerate and deepen progress on SDG 5 overall and will particularly focus on the economic empowerment of women and girls in the context of COVID-19 recovery.

The Session is expected to contribute to:

- Sharing of national experiences in advancing gender equality and women’s empowerment;
- Identifying country-specific and subregional challenges in implementing SDG 5 and formulating potential solutions and mechanisms.

Key discussion points and recommendations from this Session will feed into the next Asia Pacific Forum for Sustainable Development (APFSD) and the 2022 High Level Political Forum (HLPF).

**Participants**

The session is open to all stakeholders interested in gender equality and women’s empowerment, including representatives from government, civil society, academia, business and international development partners.

**Co-organizers**

The session is co-organized by ESCAP, UN Women and ECE.

**Tentative Programme**

*all times in Almaty local time [UTC +6]*

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<td>14:00 – 14:25</td>
<td><strong>Housekeeping Announcements:</strong> Ms. Natalja Wehmer, Economic Affairs Officer, ESCAP [2 min]</td>
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<td><strong>Welcome by Moderator:</strong> Ms. Cai Cai, Chief, Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Section, Social Development Division, ESCAP [3 min]</td>
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<td><strong>Overview Presentations Setting the Stage:</strong></td>
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• Current Status and Trends for SDG 5 in North and Central Asia, **Ms. Nargis Azizova**, Programme Specialist UN Women Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia [*10 min*]

• Women’s Economic Empowerment, Care Economy and the COVID-19 Impact: Policy Challenges and Opportunities in North and Central Asia, **Ms. Malinka Koparanova**, Senior Social Affairs Officer and Gender Focal Point, United Nations Economic Commission for Europe [*8 min*]


Panelists:

• Women’s Economic Empowerment: Practical Insights from Establishing a Business that Leaves No-one Behind, **Ms. Akmaral Basirova**, “Aq Alem” Public Fund and company, founder, Kazakhstan [*6 min*]

• Opportunities for Girls and Young Women in Times of COVID-19: Overcoming Digital Gender Gaps in STEM, **Ms. Maral Hudaybergenova**, Principal Civil Engineer, TechWomen fellow 2018, initiator of Google Developers Group and WomenTechmakers Ambassador, Turkmenistan [*6 min*]

• Building a start-up company: challenges and opportunities for women-entrepreneurs, **Ms. Dinara Ruslan**, Founder and Managing Director at the IT company Codify, Chairman of the Board at the Kyrgyz Association of Software and Service Developers, Kyrgyzstan [*6 min*]

• Women business development: barriers, solutions and challenges, **Mr. Yevgeniy Son**, Women in Business Programme Coordinator, EBRD, Kazakhstan [*6 min*]

• Socio-political Rights and Voice of Women and Girls, **Ms. Dilfuza Kurolova**, Human Rights Lawyer, Uzbekistan [*6 min*]

Q&A and Discussions with Audience [*30 min*]

15:30 – 15:40 Wrap-up [*10 min*]

• Participant’s Feedback on the Session, **ESCAP** [*5 min*]

• Concluding Remarks, **Moderator** [*5 min*]

**Guiding Questions for the Session**

• Which best practices or innovative approaches can accelerate progress of North and Central Asia on SDG 5? How to prioritize support for those women and girls with intersecting disadvantages to leave no-one behind?
• How has the COVID-19 pandemic affected the ability of the relevant stakeholders to pursue SDG 5? Have national strategies/implementation processes or needs changed or shifted because of the pandemic?

Further Information and Registration

The 2021 subregional SDG Forum is taking place in virtual modality. It is conducted in English and Russian languages and is open to all interested participants.

• Online registration for the Subregional SDG Forum is possible here or via QR code
• Detailed information will be available on the official website here.
• For further information, please contact escap-sonca@un.org

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i ESCAP’s North and Central Asia (NCA) subregion includes the following nine ESCAP member States: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.


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