Vulnerable Groups and the Digital Divide in Asia and the Pacific

Social Development Division
ESCAP

Regional Breakout Session of The Expert Group Meeting on “Socially just transition towards sustainable development: The role of digital technologies on social development and well-being of all”
05 August 2020, Virtual, 2.00 – 4.30 pm.
Population ageing is very fast in Asia-Pacific

Old Age Dependency Ratio by Region and Sub-region, 1990-2050

Pension coverage varies in the region

Coverage of pensions as a percentage of the working-age population, latest available years

Women remain unequal in Asia-Pacific

**Labor force participation**

The labor force participation rate among those 25 and older is higher for men than women.

- Men: 84%
- Women: 50%

Based on 2018 data. Gap: 34%

The majority of working women in the Asia-Pacific region are employed in the informal sector.

- Formal sector: 36%
- Informal sector: 64%

Women are 21 per cent less likely than men to be employed on a full-time basis.

Mothers are 28 per cent less likely than men to be employed on a full-time basis.

**Unpaid care work**

Women do three times more unpaid care work in an average day than men globally, but four times as much in Asia-Pacific.

- Women: 262 minutes (Unpaid care work) + 198 minutes (Paid work) = 459 minutes
- Men: 67 minutes (Unpaid care work) + 348 minutes (Paid work) = 414 minutes

Time in minutes.

**Violence against women**

Worldwide, 30% of women experience violence by a partner.

Between 15 per cent and 68 per cent of women in a given Asian-Pacific country have faced physical and/or sexual violence by a partner.
For persons with disabilities, and compared to persons w/o disabilities ...

- Poverty rates differ by 3.9 to 20.6 per cent
- Employment is on average 2 to 6 times less likely
- Representation in national parliaments is only 0.4 per cent
- Coverage in government-funded disability benefit programmes is as low as 28 per cent
- At least 1/3 of children do not receive any early intervention services, including pre-school education
- Access to reproductive health services (women) is 2 to 3 times lower

COVID-19 makes some population groups more vulnerable

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>WOMEN</th>
<th>OLDER PERSONS</th>
<th>PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Increased risk</td>
<td>70% of workers in social and health sectors</td>
<td>Higher morbidity rate, underlying NCDs</td>
<td>Social distancing from support persons impossible</td>
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<td>of infection</td>
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<tr>
<td>Conditions of</td>
<td>Gender-based violence</td>
<td>Isolation and abuse</td>
<td>Essential support services unavailable</td>
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<td>lock down</td>
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<tr>
<td>Immediate economic</td>
<td>Loss of jobs due to increased unpaid care responsibilities</td>
<td>Survival dependent on savings and handouts</td>
<td>Further decrease in employment opportunities</td>
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<td>impact</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lack of access to health</td>
<td>Sexual and reproductive health and services</td>
<td>Treatment for NCDs and any other health services</td>
<td>Prescription medicines, respirators, oxygen tanks</td>
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<tr>
<td>care</td>
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ICTs support older persons

ICTs can contribute to the inclusion, health and wellbeing of older persons and facilitate active ageing, ensuring that no one is left behind.
There is a strong digital divide by age

Source: Based on the ITU's World Telecommunication/ICT Indicators database 2019 (23rd Edition/December 2019). Note: Countries are selected based on data availability.
Digital literacy and unaffordability are major barriers to the Internet in Asia-Pacific

Source: Based on the ITU’s World Telecommunication/ICT Indicators database 2019 (23rd Edition/December 2019). Note: Countries are selected based on data availability.
Digital skills are limited among older persons, in particular older women.

Proportion of Older Persons with Basic Digital Skills by Gender in Selected Countries in Asia and the Pacific

Proportion of Older Persons with Standard Digital Skills by Gender in Selected Countries in Asia and the Pacific

Source: Based on the ITU’s World Telecommunication/ICT Indicators database 2019 (23rd Edition/December 2019). Note: basic digital skills include knowledge in copying a file or sending an e-mail with an attachment. Standard skills include knowledge in using basic arithmetic formulae in a spreadsheet or downloading and installing new software.
Digital divide exacerbates exclusion of older persons, in the wake of COVID-19.
**Digital Divide**

There is a gap between women’s and men’s meaningful access to ICT.

- **Internet user gender gap**
  - **24%** Asia-Pacific
  - **17%** Worldwide

People tend to be offline if they are less educated, poorer, or live in rural areas, which are disproportionately women and girls.

**Meaningful Access**

- Digital competencies and applications that have the potential to transform individuals’ activities, opportunities and outcomes.

**Leave no one behind**

- **SDG Target 5.B**
  
  Enhance the use of enabling technology, in particular information and communications technology, to promote the empowerment of women.

- **SDG Target 9.C**
  
  Significantly increase access to information and communications technology and strive to provide universal and affordable access to the Internet in least developed countries by 2020.
The gender gap in mobile Internet use among low- and middle-income countries is largest in South Asia at 70 per cent.
Implications of the Divide for Social Development

**Challenges**
- Affordability
- Digital literacy
- Cultural barriers
- Security

**Opportunities**
- Financial inclusion
- Government services
- Healthcare and Education
- Entrepreneurship
WOMEN'S ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

- Poverty reduction
- Leadership
- Well-being
- Financial independence
- Economic growth
- Job creation

TECHNOLOGY-ENABLED OPPORTUNITIES

- Innovative financial services
  - Greater inclusion
  - Mobile banking
  - Building credit history

- Expanded geographic reach
  - Connecting with customers
  - Increased mobility

- Ease of business
  - Digital services
  - More time efficient
  - Policy reforms

- Building new networks
  - Professional networking
  - Building social capital
CATALYZING WOMEN’S ENTREPRENEURSHIP
Creating a Gender-Responsive Entrepreneurial Ecosystem

- 20,000 women entrepreneurs directly impacted
- 500,000 people indirectly impacted
- 6 enabling policies which support women entrepreneurs
- 50 policy makers and regulators actively engaged
- 10 innovative financing solutions brought to market
Disability digital divide

- Significant gaps in Internet & mobile phone usage
- Persons with disabilities have more difficulties affording and accessing ICT worldwide

Case in Point

Only **40 per cent of** government public websites are reported as accessible in the region, while the websites of some countries are completely inaccessible for persons with visual impairment.

Proportion of accessible government websites in selected countries

Persons with disabilities left behind in accessing information

Lack of…

• Accessible websites and applications (e.g., no user manipulation on color schemes/color contrast)

• Provision of accurate real time captioning in digital media and online conference platforms

• Provision of sign language interpreters in digital media (e.g., TV/radio/internet-based press conferences)

• Visual information in disaster warning

• Easy-to-understand language in digital media

…cannot access information

Persons with visual impairments and color blindness

Deaf and hard of hearing people

Persons with intellectual disabilities
Opportunities and challenges of ICT development for persons with disabilities

Opportunities:

• Multiple channels to access information and communicate
• Availability and affordability
• More inclusive development: education, employment, political participation, financial inclusion, disaster management, etc.

Challenges:

• Lack of enabling legal and regulatory frameworks
• Stakeholder awareness and knowledge
• Concerns about cost and affordability

ESCAP’s work on digital accessibility

- **Mandate**: Promoting the implementation of Incheon Strategy Goal 3 (accessibility)
- **Knowledge product**:
  - *Disability at a Glance 2019* - good practices on digital accessibility
  - Policy paper on disability-inclusive public procurement
- **Technical cooperation**: Promoting disability-inclusive public procurement, including for ICT products (supporting the Government of Thailand)
THANK YOU!

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