

**Recommendations of the Asia-Pacific Regional Preparatory Meeting for the
63rd Session of the Commission on the Status of Women
13-14 February 2019**

1. Asia and the Pacific has continued to be the main engine of the global economy, accounting for more than 60 per cent of global growth.ⁱ With 1.9 billion workers – 1.2 billion men and 700 million women, the Asia-Pacific region represented 60 per cent of the global workforce in 2017.ⁱⁱ More than 80 percent of its extreme poor have moved out of poverty during 1990-2015.ⁱⁱⁱ Asia and the Pacific is also undergoing rapid economic transition, urbanisation and demographic shifts, while persistent and emerging development challenges have the potential to exacerbate social inequalities and foster political instability. These challenges include increasing income inequalities, aging populations, vulnerabilities to the impacts of climate change and disasters, and technological disruptions (automation and digitalisation), which threaten to reverse hard-won development gains in the region.^{iv} Approximately 61 per cent of the population in the Asia-Pacific region has no access to social protection at all. On average, 38.9 per cent of the population in the region has effective access to at least one area of social protection, but there are considerable differences in terms of social protection coverage across the region.^v Whilst noting that some countries are making progress to formalise domestic workers, the majority of women in the region do not have access to paid maternity benefits, as per the minimal agreed requirements of international labour standards.^{vi} Most countries in the region spend, on average, less than one third of the global average on social protection, leaving the majority of the population without social protection and contributing to rising inequalities in the region.^{vii} These trends and issues call for the critical need to address inequality and increase social investment in this region. Reducing inequality is particularly important for women and girls who face greater disadvantage as a result of gender-based discrimination, which intersects with other forms of discrimination related to race, ethnicity, class, nationality, sexual orientation, religion, age, disability, migration and location (including rural and remote areas). Women and girls who experience multiple forms of discrimination are further marginalised and disadvantaged.

2. Despite progress in some areas of gender equality such as reducing maternal mortality and achieving gender parity in primary school enrolment rates, the region still has a disproportionate share of women in the informal economy (more than 8 out of 10 working women are in vulnerable employment), particularly in agriculture and rural sectors, and often have little or no entitlement to social protection and access to public services.^{viii} Further, women and girls in this region bear an unequal share of unpaid care and domestic work, on average four times more than men, adversely affecting their ability to move into higher quality jobs and opportunities as well as their likelihood to contribute to social security compared to other women and men.^{ix} Women and girls are affected by unacceptably high-levels of gender-based violence and harmful practices, poor access to quality sexual and reproductive health services, and low levels of representation and participation in multiple arenas of decision making. Women are also disproportionately affected by the impacts of climate change and disasters due to underlying gender inequality and socio-economic disadvantage, including unequal access to resources, opportunities, information and services.^x

3. The Asia-Pacific Regional Preparatory Meeting for the 63rd session of the Commission on the Status of Women considered “Social protection systems, access to public services and sustainable infrastructure for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls” as its priority theme. The theme is grounded in the economic, social and cultural rights (ESCR) of women and girls enshrined in the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and the Convention on Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, among other international agreements. It is also aligned with the regional priorities in the context of the Asian and Pacific Ministerial Declaration on Advancing Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment (ESCAP resolution 71/13).^{xi}
4. The participants of the Asia-Pacific Regional Preparatory Meeting for 63rd session of the Commission on the Status of Women jointly examined the linkages of social protection systems, public services and infrastructure. The Meeting discussed how each area of work can be enhanced in response to different gender-specific risks and vulnerabilities that cuts across different thematic areas, including but not limited to, health risks (e.g. infant mortality and diseases), life-cycle risks (e.g. childbearing, divorce, widowhood), household-economic risks (e.g. lack of access to finance and insurance services, increased expenditure for social obligations such as marriage and funerals), and social risks and vulnerabilities (e.g. exclusion, sexual and gender-based violence and crime). The Meeting identified and agreed on the following recommendations, building on the recommendations made by government representatives at the Asia-Pacific Policy Dialogue on Women’s Economic Empowerment in the Changing World of Work to inform the sixty-first session of the Commission on the Status of Women (61st session of the Commission on the Status of Women) in New York in March 2017 and the Report from the Expert Group Meeting in preparation for the 63rd session of the Commission on the Status of Women.^{xii} The Meeting called for a more comprehensive approach to strengthening systems of social protection, public services and sustainable infrastructure to address social and economic vulnerabilities within a broader development policy framework.
5. Taking into consideration the linkages of social protection systems, public services and infrastructure in the Asia-Pacific region, the participants of the Asia-Pacific Regional Preparatory Meeting for the 63rd session of the Commission on the Status of Women jointly identified and agreed on the following recommendations, with an emphasis on means of implementation, toward advancing the empowerment of all women and girls:

A. Strengthening policy and legislative frameworks to enhance interlinkages between systems of social protection, public services and sustainable infrastructure

1. Adopt a comprehensive system approach to social protection, public services and sustainable infrastructure that strengthens coordination across sectors and levels of government, and including consultation with social partners and relevant organizations for gender-responsive design and implementation.
2. Ensure that national social protection strategies and plans of action are informed by a gender lens and maximize synergies with public services, infrastructure, and other

- complementary programmes, particularly social protection plans and strategies that tackle social risks and vulnerabilities such as legal discrimination, rights awareness and discriminatory social norms and practices,, natural, economic and political shocks and
3. Build technical capacity and funding for national and sub-national gender equality mechanisms, as appropriate, to effectively support and monitor the mainstreaming of gender perspectives in the design and delivery of social protection systems, public services and sustainable infrastructure across and in coordination with other sectors and ministries.
 4. Take special measures to address and include specific groups of women who experience multiple and intersecting forms of inequality and discrimination and/or face vulnerabilities, into the social protection system.
 5. Ensure that social protection, public services and sustainable infrastructure investments are geared towards supporting the livelihoods and productivity of women in informal economy including street vendors, waste pickers, domestic workers, home-based and agricultural workers (both own account workers and wage workers).
 6. Provide women with equal and equitable access to social protection programmes such as public works and infrastructure jobs and/or other labour market interventions, including rights to decent work, measures to enable their upward mobility and career development.
 7. Strengthen the production, dissemination and use of data and evidence-based research on women and girls' participation, access to, and benefit from social protection systems, public services, and sustainable infrastructure, including data disaggregated by sex, age and other variables, as appropriate, on time use as well as reliable and comparable prevalence data on violence against women and girls to inform social protection, public services, and infrastructure policies that guarantee their safety and adequately respond to their needs.

B. Supporting gender-responsive implementation of social protection

8. Conduct a context-specific vulnerability assessment that incorporates gender and age dimensions to analyse risks and factors that drive exclusion and disadvantage of women and girls, including considerations of other vulnerable groups to inform the design and implementation of social protection schemes.^{xiii}
9. Support affordability and feasibility assessments to identify aspects of gender-responsive social protection measures that are immediately feasible and gradual steps for their full implementation.
10. Analyse the national/local specific context to identify pathways and inform strategies towards universal national social protection systems that ensure the income security of all women and girls throughout the life cycle.
11. Progressively increase the coverage and adequacy of social protection benefits, combining contributory and non-contributory mechanisms.
12. Increase investment in capacity building programmes tailored to implementers and local officials to integrate the gender perspective into daily work and practices.
13. Prioritise categorical targeting, based on age or geographical location over the narrow methods of poverty targeting based on means or proxy-means testing to avoid exclusion errors and stigmatisation.

14. Ensure that conditional cash transfers do not add pressure on care burden of women and girls or perpetuate gender stereotypes.
15. Ensure that pension systems are gender responsive, including by considering fair retirement policies and protection of the rights to pensions for women that survive their partners, given the aging population trends in the region.
16. Work towards formal and informal workers' access to social protection, including occupational injury, disability insurance, paid sick leave, parental leave, care leave, occupational health and safety, health, pension, unemployment provisioning, and maternity benefits.
17. Support employers' and workers' organisation, including their rights to organise, freedom of association and collective bargaining in advancing the implementation of work-family balance, including maternity protection, paternity leave and childcare.
18. Ensure maternity benefits are in line with the ILO Maternity Convention No. 183, as applicable, and extend the support to pregnant women, adolescent mothers, and mothers of young children, who have no access to formal social security system, including in the form of cash transfers.
19. Improve the adequacy of tax-funded benefits on which women and girls disproportionately depend due to their disproportionate responsibilities for unpaid domestic and care work, including child-related cash transfers and social pensions to prevent women's poverty in old age.
20. Maximise the impact of social protection on the empowerment of women and girls through parallel investments in labour market policies that incentivise decent work for women, provide vocational training, childcare and services that prevent and respond to violence against women and girls.
21. Ensure the portability of social protection, social security and labour rights across sectors and national borders in accordance with national laws and regulation.
22. Support implementation of international labour standards, including the right to equal pay and conditions for work of equal value to close gender wage gaps, ensuring non-discrimination and minimum wage support to workers with family responsibilities and the rights to freedom of association and collective bargaining.
23. Support national efforts to improve the collection and analysis of sex- and age-disaggregated data and other variables as applicable on access to key social protection benefits, including pensions, disability, maternity and unemployment benefits, disaggregated by sex and type of programme.
24. Develop and adopt gender-responsive social protection strategies to reduce and mitigate the risks and enhance resilience to the effects of climate change and natural disasters.

C. Promoting quality gender-responsive public services

25. Ensure affordable and accessible quality public services, particularly health and education for all.
26. Ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health-care services, including for family planning, information and education, in accordance with the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development.

27. Establish comprehensive, coordinated, inter-disciplinary, accessible and sustained multisectoral services, programmes and responses at all levels, that are adequately resourced and with the support of all available technologies, for all victims and survivors of all forms of violence against women and girls.
28. Identify and address access barriers, both financial and non-financial, faced by women and girls, including by lifting legal restrictions, changing discriminatory social norms and practices and adjusting physical infrastructure to meet the needs of all women including adolescent girls, older women and women with all disabilities.
29. Put in place measures that prevent and address institutional violence, discrimination, harassment and abuse of women and girls as users and providers of public services, including appropriate grievance mechanisms and support systems for victims.
30. Provide, fund and encourage rehabilitation programmes for the perpetrators of violence and promote research to further efforts in preventing its recurrence.
31. Invest in affordable, accessible, inclusive and gender-responsive quality services, including care services and facilities for children, persons with disabilities, older persons, refugees and internally displaced persons as essential public services in accordance with national laws.
32. Design and implement gender- and age-responsive trainings for public service workers.
33. Expand social and legal protections to cover all public service workers, including unpaid volunteer workers, community health and childcare workers.
34. Provide specific health and social care interventions for women and girls in prison to improve their health and well being.
35. Promote gender-balanced public service workforce, including parity in decision making and leadership positions, as well as effective mechanisms and tools, to ensure the meaningful voice, agency and participation of women.

D. Mainstreaming gender in infrastructure

36. Conduct systematic and transparent assessments of the environmental, human rights, gender and health impact of infrastructure projects with the inclusive participation of all women and girls in affected communities.
37. Ensure that physical infrastructures and workplaces are gender-responsive and inclusive including through the provision of clean water and sanitation, safe toilet facilities, child care and breastfeeding rooms.
38. Implement effective measures to guarantee safe sanitation for women and girls, including in schools and health clinics, transportation hubs, refugee camps, government offices and work sites.
39. Integrate menstrual hygiene management (MHM) as a mandatory feature of all public sanitation interventions, and as a feature of education curriculum for both girls and boys.
40. Promote household-level access, including in rural and remote areas, to adequate levels of electricity through grid and off-grid solutions, and to clean and safe water accounting for women's multiple roles and their specific livelihood needs, including pumped water and medium size electrical appliances.

41. Ensure that community energy systems, such as mini-grids, provide targeted support and incentives for women's participation and leadership as users, maintainers and producers.
42. Improve access to safe and clean cook-stoves and time-saving technologies designed in consultation with intended women users, to ensure their appropriateness and sustainability.
43. Ensure infrastructure development and investment to consider women's multiple roles as workers and caregivers and attend to the diversity of their needs, protecting their safety and promoting their mobility and economic empowerment.

E. Promoting measures to accelerate implementation of comprehensive systems of social protection, public services and sustainable infrastructure

44. Creating fiscal space for gender-responsive social investments

- a. Optimize fiscal expenditures for gender-responsive social protection and care infrastructure, such as equitable, quality, accessible and affordable early childhood education, childcare, elder care, health-care, and care and social services for persons with disabilities and persons living with HIV and AIDS, which meet the needs of both caregivers and those in need of care, bearing in mind that social protection policies also play a critical role in reducing poverty and inequality and supporting inclusive growth and gender equality.
- b. Work towards establishing or strengthening inclusive and gender-responsive social protection systems, including floors, to ensure full access to social protection for all without discrimination of any kind, and take measures to progressively achieve higher levels of protection, including facilitating the transition from informal to formal economy.
- c. Invest in gender-responsive budgeting and tracking of budget allocations and spending, particularly gender-responsive social protection, public services and infrastructure.
- d. Ensure that line ministries and relevant corporate sector entities in relevant sectors, including labour, social security and social welfare, health, education, planning, energy and transport, report on gender equality actions and spending.
- e. Develop equitable and progressive domestic resource mobilization strategies, including increased revenue from tax and non-tax sources, to advance gender-responsive social protection, improve the affordability and quality of gender-responsive public services, and invest in sustainable infrastructure at scale.

45. Strengthening governance and partnerships to improve coordination and accountability among different actors at the national, sub-national, and local levels

- a. Enhance governance and coordination between national and sub-national/local governments to optimize local-level engagement in light of growing decentralization to streamline coordination between line ministries and local governance to improve performance and delivery of frontline service providers for women and girls.^{xiv}

- b. Review the national policy frameworks and legislations and clarify roles and responsibilities of national and sub-national, local governments for delivering public services in general and social protection in particular, including reform process that is necessary to enhance service delivery particularly for women and girls of marginalised groups.
- c. Engage sub-national and local governments institutions and other relevant stakeholders in designing and creating gender sensitive, accessible grievance, complaint and redress mechanisms.
- d. Evaluate the cost and benefits of private sector participation in social protection systems, public service delivery and infrastructure developments.
- e. Ensure that private providers comply with the human rights principles of availability, accessibility, affordability and quality and do not discriminate by sex and other characteristics.
- f. Enhance cross-border collaboration to prevent and prosecute the abuse of migrant care workers, including bilateral agreements between countries of origin and destination in recognition of gender-responsive social protection as well as women's labour and human rights.

46. Strengthening capacity for gender-responsive monitoring and evaluation

- a. Systematically integrate gender indicators into the monitoring and evaluation frameworks of all policies and programs.
- b. Complement quantitative impact evaluations with qualitative studies that can reveal unintended consequences of social protection, public services and sustainable infrastructure on gender equality and women's empowerment.
- c. Develop gender- and age-specific indicators for monitoring the coverage and adequacy of social protection, public services and sustainable infrastructure across sectors, such as health, education, care, energy, transport, water and sanitation.
- d. Strengthening capacity for reporting and analysis of monitoring and evaluation data disaggregated by sex, age and other factors; explore how programme implementers can elicit gender-responsive data given current data shortcomings.
- e. Support community engagement, and women's organisations in piloting gender social audits and other participatory monitoring and evaluation methods to promote learning on gender-sensitive programme governance and accountability, including women's representation and participation in the bodies that supervise and administer social protection, public services and infrastructure including social security tripartite councils.

47. Advocacy and awareness raising for gender-responsive social protection, public service and sustainable infrastructure

- a. Use evidence to enhance recognition among policy and decision makers that public spending on gender-responsive social protection, public services and

- sustainable infrastructure is an investment that can enhance economic productivity, sustainable development and resilience against crises and shocks.
- b. 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, social security and pension schemes.
 - c. Transform gender norms and stereotypes through social protection interventions, such as the introduction of parental leaves benefits to incentivize fathers' participation in childrearing and retribution of care work.
 - d. Promote advocacy and dissemination of information with beneficiaries and wider communities to raise awareness of gender-sensitive programme features and the reasons behind them.

ⁱ IMF. 2018. *Regional Economic Outlook: Asia and Pacific*. May 2018.

<https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/REO/APAC/Issues/2018/04/16/areo0509> [accessed December 2018]

ⁱⁱ ILO. 2018. *Asia-Pacific Employment and Social Outlook: Advancing decent work for sustainable development*. https://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/newsroom/news/WCMS_649949/lang--en/index.htm [accessed January 2019]

ⁱⁱⁱ UNESCAP. 2018. *Social Outlook for Asia and the Pacific 2018: Poorly Protected*. Bangkok: UNESCAP.

^{iv} ADB and UN Women. 2018. *Gender Equality and the Sustainable Development Goals in Asia and the Pacific: Baseline and pathways for transformative change by 2030*. Bangkok: UN Women; and see, UNESCAP, *Frontier Technologies for Sustainable Development in Asia and the Pacific*, <https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/publications/Frontier%20tech%20for%20SDG.pdf> [accessed January 2019]

^v ILO. 2017. *World Social Protection Report 2017-19: Universal social protection to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals*. Geneva: ILO. https://www.ilo.org/global/publications/books/WCMS_604882/lang--en/index.htm [Accessed January 2019]

^{vi} ILO. *Maternity Protection Convention*. 2000 (No. 183).

https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=1000:12100:0::NO::P12100_ILO_CODE:C183 [accessed January 2019]

^{vii} UNESCAP. 2018. *Social Outlook for Asia and the Pacific 2018: Poorly Protected*. Bangkok: UNESCAP.

^{viii} See, ADB and UN Women. 2018. *Gender Equality and the Sustainable Development Goals in Asia and the Pacific: Baseline and pathways for transformative change by 2030*; ILO. 2018; *World Employment Social Outlook Women 2018*. Geneva: ILO; and ILO. 2018. *Care work and Care Jobs: For the Future of Decent Work*. Geneva: ILO. *Key findings and messages Asia and the Pacific* https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/documents/publication/wcms_633305.pdf [accessed January 2019]

^{ix} ILO. *Care Work and Care Jobs: For the Future of Decent Work*. Geneva: ILO.

^x See, Chapter 6, ADB and UN Women. 2018. *Gender Equality and the Sustainable Development Goals in Asia and the Pacific: Baseline and pathways for transformative change by 2030*.

^{xi} UNESCAP and UN Women. 2015. *Report of the Asian and Pacific Conference on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment: Beijing+20 Review*, Bangkok, Thailand, 17-20 November 2014

^{xii} UNESCAP and UN Women. 2017. *Asia and Pacific Policy Dialogue on "Women's Economic Empowerment in the Changing World of Work": Summary Report of Recommendation*, Bangkok, Thailand, 23-24 February 2017; and UN Women, Expert Group Meeting in preparation for the sixty-third session of the Commission on the Status of Women (63rd session of the Commission on the Status of Women) on "*Social protection systems, public services and sustainable infrastructure for gender equality*", New York, 13-15 September 2018.

^{xiii} Vulnerability assessments typically overlook gender-based violence and gendered impact of climate change or situation of women migrant workers, refugee and or stateless women.

^{xiv} Many countries in the region have fragmented schemes involving different government agencies, competing for limited funds, sometimes offering similar benefit packages and targeting the same beneficiaries. Lack of coordination and weak targeting mechanisms have led to duplication of efforts and wasted resources with high rates of leakages to the non-targeted beneficiaries. Local governments either already play a significant role in such services or are mandated to do so. However, there are a number of challenges that need to be carefully factored in. Government legislations and policies in many countries limit the mandates of local governments to implement social protection programmes.