



## JUST AND SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIES

*These briefs are intended for organizations and activists engaged in advocacy on SRHR, gender and sexuality in Asia and the Pacific. They aim to provide a snapshot how SRHR links to the new Agenda 2030 framework laid out by the [2019 Global Sustainable Development Report](#) and the six entry-points it identifies, provide brief evidence from the context of Asia Pacific, and illustrate how fulfillment of SRHR helps countries in the region achieve just and sustainable development using the development justice framework of Asia Pacific Regional Civil Society Engagement Mechanism (AP RCEM). The briefs have been developed by members of the Thematic Working Group on Gender, Sexuality and SRHR of the AP RCEM, and supported by the co-coordinator of the TWG, APA.*

### INTERLINKAGES BETWEEN GENDER SRHR AND ENTRYPOINT 2

Shifting towards sustainable and just economies is fundamentally about ensuring equality education (SDG 4); ensuring economic opportunities, especially jobs for growing populations, and decoupling economic systems from detrimental environmental outcomes, according to ESCAP.<sup>1</sup> It is not possible to achieve sustainable and justice economies without addressing all dimensions of poverty that shape the contours of capitalist and neo-liberal world economies today. These concern, more directly, poverty (SDG 1) and hunger (SDG 2); health and well-being (SDG 3); education (SDG 4); gender equality (SDG5); water and sanitation (SGD 6); clean and renewable energy (SGD 7); industry innovation and infrastructure (SDG 9); inequalities (SDG 10); safe and sustainable cities (SGD 11); consumption and production (SDG 12); and peace, justice and strong institutions (SGD 16).

Economies in the Asia-Pacific region rest on an increasingly informal, largely unprotected and highly feminized workforce. About 1.3 billion people work informally in the region, which is 68% of the total employed population, and 65% of the global informally employed.<sup>2</sup> And in the majority of Asian countries (56%), the percentage of women workers in the informal economy exceeds men.<sup>3</sup> Informal work is typically characterized by lack of protection for non-payment of wages, retrenchment without notice or compensation, unsatisfactory occupational health and safety conditions and an absence of social benefits<sup>4</sup> such as pensions, maternity and child support, protection from harassment and sexual abuse and exploitation, sick leave and pay and health insurance. Care work whether formal or informal, is frequently devoid of benefits and protections, involves low wages or non-compensation, and carries high exposure to physical, mental and, in some cases, sexual harm for women and girls.<sup>5</sup>

Often, women's labor force participation is inversely proportional to their domestic and childrearing work. Women are more likely to report unpaid care responsibilities as the main reason for inactivity in the labour force – 41.6% women compared to 5.8% of men. It is estimated that a 1% increase in women's fertility can decrease workforce participation by 2.6%, and that additional schooling of one year for girls can expand wages by 10-20%.<sup>6</sup> According to a recent study, childbearing, more than marriage, affects labour force participation amongst women and girls.<sup>7</sup>

In the paid workforce, women are concentrated in insecure and precarious jobs with grueling work hours and minimal breaks, gender gaps in compensation, little in the way of job security or social protection including lack of access to maternity leave, job protection during pregnancy, menstrual hygiene and sanitation; lack of support for day-care and child support benefits, and protection from workplace sexual harassment, abuse and exploitation. And LGBTI workers across Thailand, China and Philippines<sup>8</sup> face harassment, bullying and workplace discrimination due to their SOGIE and/or intersex status, and are frequently subjected to hostile work environments.

### POLICY COHERENCE

The 2030 Agenda places Decent Work for All at the heart of policies for sustainable, just and inclusive growth and development. The ILO's Decent Work agenda rests on four pillars: promoting decent jobs, guaranteeing rights at work<sup>9</sup>, extending social protection and promoting social dialogue. Countries across Asia Pacific have committed to achieving full, productive, and decent employment for all by 2030. The ILO's [Transition from the Informal to the Formal Economy Recommendation, 2015 \(No. 204\)](#)<sup>10</sup> in particular emphasizes decent work deficits that need urgent redressal, and the [Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 \(No. 190\)](#), recognizes the right of everyone to a world of work free from violence and harassment, including gender-based violence and harassment.

In 1979, [CEDAW](#) made strong reference to women's economic empowerment by highlighting rural women's rights to equal treatment in land and agrarian reform processes. The 1995 [Beijing Platform for Action \(BPfA\)](#), focused on



women's right to inheritance and ownership of land and property, credit, natural resources and appropriate technologies, to address feminized poverty.<sup>11</sup> It links women's poverty directly to lack of economic opportunities and autonomy, access to economic resources, lack of access to education, and participation in the decision-making process.<sup>12</sup> The 2019 [Asia Pacific Ministerial Conference on BPfA +25](#) also called for taking a lifecycle approach to addressing feminized poverty. The 1994 [International Conference on Population and Development \(ICPD\)](#) emphasized reducing and eliminating unsustainable patterns of production and consumption and promoting appropriate policies, including population-related policies. And the 2019 [Political Declaration on UHC](#), calls for 'scaling up efforts to promote healthier and safer workplaces and improve access to occupational health services'<sup>13</sup> and commits to providing 'better opportunities and working environments for women to ensure their role and leadership in the health sector'.<sup>14</sup>

## EVIDENCE FROM ASIA PACIFIC

- Asia-Pacific is the only region in the world where the participation of women in the labour force is decreasing<sup>15</sup>
- 60% of the Asia Pacific lacks access to social protection. Developing countries spend on average 3.7% of GDP on social protection compared to a global average of 11.3% (and below OECD recommended average of 20%)
- Women and girls on average spend up to 11 times more on **unpaid care and domestic work** than men and boys. In Pakistan, for example women and girls on average spend over 16 hours a day in unpaid domestic and care work.<sup>16</sup>
- The **gender wage gaps** range from 1.5 - 49.6%. In South and South-West Asia the rate of poverty amongst females in the working population is higher (30.9%) compared to males (25.4%).
- Women represent two thirds of the poor in Asia
- The **gender gap in the labour force participation** has barely improved since 2000. The male workforce participation rate exceeded the female rate by 30% in 2017, a decrease of only 1% point since 2000. The gap was lowest in East Asia at 14%, rising to 25% in South-East Asia and the Pacific and as high as 51% in South Asia. At 27.9%, the female labour force participation rate in South Asia is among the world's lowest.<sup>17</sup>
- Transpeople are significantly less likely than cisgender people to receive positive responses to job applications.<sup>18</sup> In Pakistan, for example, transpeople rely heavily on begging, sex-work and dancing for income on a daily-wage or work-performed basis, and are subjected to routine physical torture and murder, despite protective legislation.<sup>19</sup>
- Fewer women and girls have a chance of completing secondary education or joining full-time employment than men in the region.<sup>20</sup> In 2017, the gender gap in **economic participation, educational attainment, health and well-being, and political participation** was 29.4% in Central Asia; 32% in East Asia and the Pacific; 34% in South Asia.<sup>21</sup>
- A substantial proportion of youth – especially young women – are **not in employment, education or training (NEET)**. In 14 of 26 countries of the region with available data, more than one in five women are NEET.<sup>22</sup>
- Women play an important role in fishery value chains but are often confined to low-skilled, vulnerable jobs, jeopardizing their health while earning less than men for the same work. In the Pacific Islands, women account for around 56% of the annual small-scale **fishery** catches.
- Across Asia, in 2014 only 10.7% **women owned land** compared to the global average of 20% and 18.6% in Africa.<sup>23</sup> Women and girls suffer disproportionately from a **lack of housing**, which increases their vulnerability to eviction and exploitation.
- **Sex workers** are 13 times more at risk of HIV than the general population due to economic vulnerability, inability to negotiate condom use, violence, criminalization and marginalization in terms of access to health services.<sup>24</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Progress in the area of sustainable and just economies requires a commitment to decent work, universal implementation of a living basic wage,<sup>25</sup> universal social protection against shocks which often originate from health, environmental disasters and economic crises, and strengthening workers' unions and cooperatives. Investing in women's economic empowerment, guaranteeing their SRHR, ensuring political participation and ending violence and discrimination against women and girls are among the most urgent and effective means to drive progress on gender equality, poverty eradication, and ensuring inclusive and equitable economic growth.<sup>26</sup>

Discriminatory employment laws, policies and practices and lack of control over bodily autonomy that limit women, LGBTIQ, migrants, sex workers and other marginalized groups' labour force participation and perpetuate inequalities must be eliminated. Women workers need to be recognized, need better protection against occupational hazards, enabled to undertake collective organizing and bargaining, take on work in gender atypical sectors, unionize, lead and demand fairer work terms and conditions and just redistribution of care work, and be counted in all their diversity.



## END NOTES

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- <sup>1</sup> ESCAP (2020). [Seventh Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development, Secretariat Note on Acceleration along transformative pathways to deliver sustainable development.](#)
- <sup>2</sup> ILO News (02 May 2018). [More than 68 per cent of the employed population in Asia-Pacific are in the informal economy.](#)
- <sup>3</sup> ILO/WEIGO (2019). [Women and Men in the Informal Economy: A Statistical Brief.](#)
- <sup>4</sup> ILO (2018). [Informal Economy in Asia and the Pacific.](#)
- <sup>5</sup> UNWOMEN/ ADB (2018). [Gender Equality and the Sustainable Development Goals in Asia Pacific.](#)
- <sup>6</sup> Novaira Junaid et al. (2019). [Determinants of Female Labour Force Participation Rate in Pakistan.](#)
- <sup>7</sup> UN WOMEN/ILO (2020). [The Impact of Marriage and Children on Labour Market Participation.](#)
- <sup>8</sup> UNDP/ ILO (2018). [LGBTI People and Employment: Discrimination Based on Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression, and Sex Characteristics in China, the Philippines and Thailand.](#)
- <sup>9</sup> Eight core ILO conventions that support decent work include: Forced Labour Convention, 1930; Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organize Convention, 1948; Right to Organize and Collective Bargaining Convention, 1949; Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951; Abolition of Forced Labour Convention, 1957; Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958; Minimum Age Convention, 1973; Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999.
- <sup>10</sup> ILO (2015). [Transition from the Informal to the Formal Economy Recommendation, 2015 \(No. 204\).](#)
- <sup>11</sup> Para 60(f).
- <sup>12</sup> Para 51.
- <sup>13</sup> Para 38.
- <sup>14</sup> Para 63.
- <sup>15</sup> UNWOMEN (2018). Annual Report, [Asia and the Pacific.](#)
- <sup>16</sup> [SDG Gateway, Asia-Pacific](#) (2020).
- <sup>17</sup> ILO (2018). [Asia-Pacific Employment and Social Outlook 2018.](#)
- <sup>18</sup> Winter, S., Davis-McCabe, C., Russell, C., Wilde, D., Chu, T.H., Suparak, P. and Wong, J. (2018). [Denied Work: An audit of employment discrimination on the basis of gender identity in Asia.](#) Bangkok: Asia Pacific Transgender Network and United Nations Development Programme.
- <sup>19</sup> Sarah Zaman (2020). [Gender and Social Risks and Impact Assessment. Ministry of National Health Services Regulation and Coordination, Government of Pakistan.](#)
- <sup>20</sup> ESCAP (2018). [Inequality in Asia and the Pacific in the Era of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.](#)
- <sup>21</sup> World Economic Forum (2017). [The Gender Gap Report 2017.](#)
- <sup>22</sup> ILO (2018). [Asia-Pacific Employment and Social Outlook 2018.](#)
- <sup>23</sup> UNDP (2014).
- <sup>24</sup> UNAIDS (2018). [Miles to go closing gaps breaking barriers righting injustices.](#)
- <sup>25</sup> APRCEM Position Paper on HLPF Theme, 2020.
- <sup>26</sup> Women Engage for a Common Future (2020). [Beijing+25 Civil Society Forum Compilation Report on Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action for the UNECE Region.](#)