

ESCAP's input to the 2023 Report of the Secretary-General on Implementation of the Third United Nations Decade for the Eradication of Poverty (2018-2027)

Recognizing the importance of the long-term commitment to reduce poverty and vulnerability, but also to cushioning the negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, ESCAP has intensified its work on social protection, inequality of opportunity and LNOB, particularly in relation to women and persons with disabilities. Below is an overview of this work, its focus and relation to other UN entities.

Social protection is an effective mechanism for reducing poverty and promoting sustainable development. Acknowledging this fact, members and associate members of ESCAP adopted at the sixth session of the Committee on Social Development, in October 2020, the Action Plan to Strengthen Regional Cooperation on Social Protection in Asia and the Pacific. The [Action Plan](#) was further endorsed at the 77th Commission session in 2021 and played a central part in Resolution 77/1 and in the Bangkok Declaration, endorsed at the 78th Commission session in May 2022. The Action Plan is the region's first-ever framework on social protection. It contains 12 national and 3 regional actions to be implemented by 2030. At the regional level, the Action Plan serves as a shared vision, strategy and platform for ESCAP members and associate members to promote partnership, peer learning, the sharing of good practices and identify capacity-building and technical assistance needs.

To support countries in their implementation of the Action Plan, and their poverty-reduction efforts, ESCAP has taken a range of initiatives. First, the Social Protection Online Tool (SPOT) serves as an online one-stop-shop platform on social protection, hosting a range of resources such as intergovernmental information, knowledge and information products, as well as a Social Protection Simulator. ESCAP is developing online training modules on social protection, which will help member states build their knowledge and capacity to support the implementation of the Action Plan. Finally, the Social Protection Simulator, which estimates the impact of introducing social protection schemes on poverty, inequality and household consumption and computes the relative cost of simulated schemes, has been extended to include microsimulation results from 23 member states. The tool has built capacity on examining evidence-based policy options on social protection in three member states (Cambodia, Philippines and Maldives) through an ESCAP workshop with technical experts from relevant line ministries.

ESCAP supported and collaborated closely with member states to further the social protection agenda, through national consultations to take stock of the member states' readiness to implement the Action Plan. Between November 2022 and May 2023, ESCAP conducted national consultations in Cambodia, Philippines and Maldives with selected participants from different line Ministries working on social protection. In these consultations, Governments and stakeholders discussed initiatives to achieve more inclusive and comprehensive social protection systems and identified key progress and challenges as well as recommendations to implement the Action Plan. To foster greater inter-agency convergence and collaboration in sharing knowledge, promoting policy dialogue and providing technical assistance, ESCAP has also collaborated closely with RCs, UNCTs and other agencies to furthering the Action Plan on social protection. ESCAP will be undertaking national consultations in Mongolia in June and in Georgia and Türkiye in the last quarter of 2023.

To improve effectiveness of policies aiming to reduce poverty and improve inclusion, the ESCAP [LNOB platform](#) provides evidence on inequality of opportunity operationalized by 16 SDG indicators for 30 countries in 2009-2022 period. The LNOB analysis is designed to help policymakers and development practitioners access a quick, data-driven, reliable overview of the groups left furthest behind in a range of development areas in their country. The analysis explores inequality in key areas affecting a person's life prospects: access to clean energy, access to basic sanitation, access to information and communication technologies (ICTs), COVID-19 preparedness, education, women's access to sexual and reproductive health, violence against women, and children's nutrition. Work is in progress in adding more SDG indicators to LNOB platform including birth registration and ICT skills.

In relation to ESCAP's LNOB work, targeted training on country-specific findings and methodologies have been delivered to Fiji, Mongolia, the Philippines, Tonga, and Turkmenistan. Close collaboration has also been formed with several RCOs as well as UNCTs in the region. The main focus of this collaboration has been to enhance the understanding of strengthening the evidence base by using advanced methodologies of identification of population groups in poverty or at highest risk of being left behind in access to a range of fundamental opportunities and thereby falling into poverty. As such, capacity for identifying the furthest behind has been built and support in strengthening the evidence base in CCAs and VNRs have taken place. In 2023, the majority of VNR countries have considered LNOB results shared with them.

With the global care crisis emerging as one of the key challenges that hinder women's empowerment during the COVID-19 pandemic, continued priority was accorded to tackling this issue in line with SDG target 5.4, to build back stronger and more resilient societies and economies. Building on ESCAP's analytical work on the care economy (regional and sub-regional analytical reports), several country case studies on valuing and investing in the care economy were published (Cambodia, Indonesia, Philippines, and Uzbekistan) and technical assistance to member States are currently being provided, including developing national strategies and action plans to reduce the unpaid care burden for women and advocacy efforts on legislative reforms. A model framework for action on the care economy is also being developed together with capacity building handbooks and workshops targeted at policy makers at national level.

Furthermore, ESCAP's regional initiative on "Catalyzing Women's Entrepreneurship(CWE)" has locked in commitments from 7 ministries comprising SME agencies and women's machineries to design and implement targeted interventions for women entrepreneurs in six target countries in Asia and the Pacific. Initiatives to review and revise laws and policies have been launched. The CWE Programme has been catalytic in the development and reform of legislation, policies and processes to be gender-responsive by incorporating the specific priorities and needs of women entrepreneurs. Through collaboration with the ASEAN Coordinating Committee on MSMEs (ACCMSME), which is a dedicated group of SME Agencies from the 10 ASEAN countries, the programme has been able to convert and scale up the approach tested out at the country level to the sub-regional level. The Policymakers Toolkit on "Strengthening Women's Entrepreneurship in National MSME Policies and Action Plans" launched by the ASEAN Economic Ministers Group in late 2022, marks an extraordinary step for an economic community launching a gender initiative and the toolkit is slated as a priority deliverable for implementation. Over the past year, several institutional processes and policies have undergone reviews and reforms. For instance,

ESCAP conducted studies to review the challenges women in the informal economy face in two countries, Bangladesh and Samoa, to acquire business licenses. The reports highlighted critical aspects that point to gender-differential barriers in the process of registering a business, including restriction on travel, time poverty due to care responsibilities and domestic work, lower education and skills levels, high costs of business registration, lengthy and complex procedures, and an absence of women-specific support services and access to information. The recommendations from the studies have led to the design of a One-Stop Service Centre for women entrepreneurs in Bangladesh which will be launched in 2023.

Considering that many of the region's 690 million persons with disabilities live in poverty and have become more vulnerable as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, ESCAP conducted a range of activities to support members and associate members in developing disability-inclusive COVID-19 responses. ESCAP implemented technical cooperation projects to enhance protection and empowerment of persons with disabilities in Bhutan, Bangladesh, China, India, Malaysia, Philippines and Thailand, with focus on disability-inclusive employment, social protection and accessibility of physical infrastructure and digital services. ESCAP convened a high-level intergovernmental meeting on disability in Jakarta in October 2022, which adopted the Jakarta Declaration on the Asian and Pacific Decade of Persons with Disabilities, 2023-2032. The Declaration outlined six strategic areas for enhancing investments in disability-inclusive development in order to promote and protect the rights of persons with disabilities and leave no one behind.