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**Population and sustainable development, in particular
sustained and inclusive economic growth**

Statement submitted by Asian-Pacific Resource and Research Centre for Women, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council¹

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

¹ The present statement is issued without formal editing.



Statement

“Population and sustainable development, in particular sustained and inclusive economic growth”

The International Conference on Population and Development, Programme of Action identifies the critical challenges and interrelationships between population and sustainable economic growth in the context of sustainable development (International Conference on Population and Development, Programme of Action, Preamble 1.9) and calls for the need to integrate and address the interlinkages between population, sustained economic growth, poverty and environment.

The theme of the fifty-fifth session of the Commission on Population and Development – Population and sustainable development, in particular sustained and inclusive economic growth – is pertinent especially as countries in Asia and the Pacific region are facing the COVID-19 crises and its recovery and are in different epidemiological status, having profound impact on inclusive and sustained economic growth in the region.

The Asia and the Pacific Region is not on track to achieve any of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals by 2030, and alarmingly with the current trajectory the region will only achieve less than 10 per cent of Sustainable Development Goals targets. Maternal mortality could increase in 14 Asia-Pacific countries, there are 640 million multidimensionally poor people in the Asia and the Pacific region, and the pandemic will increase this number by an additional 636 million people vulnerable to multidimensional poverty. Unemployment increased by 15 million in the region in 2020 and lockdown measures impacted some 829 million informal workers in the region (ESCAP Sustainable Development Goals Progress report, 2021).

Evidence from the region also suggests that the COVID-19 pandemic has reversed many of the gains made around gender equality and sexual and reproductive health and rights with negative impact on most vulnerable women and has negatively exacerbated pre-existing vulnerabilities between and within countries in the region.

Women in the region have been nearly twice as likely to lose their jobs than men and have borne the impact of unpaid care work as an excessive burden. This calls for action to push for gender parity to kickstart recovery and advance economic sustainable growth in the region. (The Power of Parity, 2021).

Further to this, the challenges in accessing health care services, including sexual and reproductive health services, have exacerbated reproductive and productive care burdens for women. Women are facing increased violence against women and girls both in physical and online settings.

Demographic trends in Asia and the Pacific region point to each country in the region being in a different stage of demographic transition ranging from high to low rates of fertility and mortality (UNESCAP, 2021). The region, especially in South Asia and Pacific, has opportunities for demographic dividends, both from young people and ageing population (Asian and Pacific Population Conference, APPC Mid-term Review ESCAP 2018). Lower population growth, population ageing as well as youth bulge distinctly mark the demographic trends in the region. The low mortality demographic transition has resulted in the emergence of the large cohort of young people (10–24 years). At the same time, we also witness a large cohort of older persons in the region. These demographic trends provide both opportunities and challenges. Demographic dividends arising from younger persons and older persons, can lead to sustainable and inclusive economic growth only if they are harnessed well through appropriate population and sustainable development policies and their implementation. Recognising these demographic trends into the planning of

population and sustainable development policies is crucial for sustainable and inclusive economic growth.

Our recommendations for population and sustainable development including sustained and inclusive economic growth calls for:

- Upholding gender equality and human rights in population and sustainable development policies and uphold women's reproductive autonomy.
- Implement sustainable development policies and programmes and ensure such policies advance sustainable equity between and within generations across the social, economic and environmental sustainable development pillars.
- Address poverty in all its dimensions including multidimensional poverty. Evidence in the region points to higher levels of poverty among adult women than adult men, which is mostly driven by educational attainment, gainful employment and gender inequality. Multidimensional poverty among non-binary persons is not reported, and it is important report on multi-dimensional poverty beyond the binary.
- The Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development calls for recognizing and valuing unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies and the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family as nationally appropriate (International Conference on Population and Development, Programme of Action 5.4). Addressing the blind spots of unpaid care work, mostly borne by women, will have a positive impact on sustainable and inclusive economic growth. It is important to ensure that we invest more in developing the paid care economy.
- Harness demographic dividends with gender dimension including fair compensation to care work and reduce and compensate the double burden of work women face.
- Focus on young persons, especially the adolescent's well-being, education and opportunities for sustainable and inclusive economic growth.
- In the context of the fourth industrial revolution and enhanced digitalisation we foresee a significant change in the future of work, where the relationships of labour will change drastically. Such technology-enabled developments should be inclusive of women, young people and older persons in all their diversity.
- Access to internet and digital technologies has become more than ever a lived necessity and inequality in access to digital technologies can further exacerbate inequalities. The importance of the internet goes beyond education, work and encompasses all dimensions of human well-being and sustainable development. Digital technologies and advancements should be inclusive of all age groups through the enhancement of physical and cognitive capacities, enabling people to work longer and enjoy better quality of life. At the same time, such digital technologies should enable women and young people in all their diversity in acquiring necessary education and training for participating in the labour market.
- The population ageing phenomenon in the region calls for restructuring of our economic systems to harness better the second demographic dividend. This can include strengthening development programs for older persons and improving labour and retirement policies to enhance older persons' gainful employment. Increased investments on education and health including long-term care of older persons can help to harness the second demographic dividend which many countries in the region will be facing.

- Institute and improve social protection policies and universal health coverage and extend access to health care, education, and other services to ever broader segments of the population.
 - Increase investments in data and monitoring for inclusive and sustainable economic growth. Disaggregated data on national economic activity (including care work and informal labour) by population groups and background characteristics (income, sex, age, race, ethnicity, migratory status, disability, rural-urban location) will allow for monitoring, and ensuring no one is left behind in inclusive and sustainable economic growth.
 - Strengthen inclusive and functioning health systems with focus on primary health care and accelerate progress towards universal health care including sexual and reproductive health services to enable women, young people, persons with disabilities and older persons in all their diversity to contribute and enjoy inclusive economic growth and sustainable development.
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