
Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
Committee on Statistics

Sixth session

Bangkok, 16–19 October 2018

Item 2 of the provisional agenda*

Review of overall progress with respect to the document entitled “Advancing official statistics for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: a collective vision and framework for action by the Asia-Pacific statistical community”

Towards a transformation in how gender data and statistics are promoted, created and used**

Summary

The present document highlights the need for renewed efforts, commitment and transformation in the Asia-Pacific region to meet the needs for gender-sensitive and disaggregated data in the context of the 2030 Agenda and beyond. The document highlights the approach adopted by the secretariat to transform how gender data and statistics are promoted, created and used, which involves a combination of structuring user-producer engagement to identify data needs that directly respond to policy demands as well as promoting analysis and use of existing gender-sensitive and disaggregated data to monitor progress and inform decision-making.

The Committee is invited to express its views on implementation of a Gender Policy-Data Integration Initiative, and give guidance on how the Initiative could build gender-sensitive data and statistics across all domains of statistics (social, economic, environmental and institutional).

1. Gender-sensitive data and statistics are essential for rigorous policy analysis and advocacy to promote gender equality and women’s empowerment in the context of the 2030 Agenda and beyond. The findings of the recent Global Gender Gap Report 2017 highlights two facts regarding gender equality and women’s empowerment across member States of ESCAP¹. First, while the report ranks New Zealand and Philippines among the world’s top ten countries in reducing the gender gap, it also highlights a third of ESCAP member States fall behind the global average based on a total of 144 countries. Secondly, the report highlights only 33 out of 58 ESCAP member States had enough data to be part of the ranking. In other words, many countries in the region have a long way to go in monitoring gains and gaps to achieve the ambition of gender equality and women’s empowerment, and at the same time, a substantial number of countries simply do not have the basic data for meaningful gender analysis.

* ESCAP/CST/2018/L.1/Rev.1.

** This present document is being issued without formal editing.

¹ World Economic Forum (2017). *The Global Gender Gap Report*.

2. In recent years, a lot of attention has been drawn to women's economic empowerment issues and related data in particular. The first report of the United Nations Secretary-General's High-level Panel on Women's Economic Empowerment (2016) pointed out the lack of relevant and reliable gender-sensitive and disaggregated data, including comparable cross-country data are severely constraining the understanding of issues pertaining to women's empowerment to "succeed and advance economically and to make and act on economic decisions". The report emphasized not only must key economic data be disaggregated by sex and other relevant characteristics to highlight causes of gender gaps, but improved data production and analysis is needed on issues of particular relevance to women's economic empowerment, including unpaid care, informal, part-time, and domestic work.

3. A gender data gaps mapping exercise by Data2X, covering censuses, surveys, administrative sources and big data, pointed out data availability and coverage was particularly poor for economic indicators, with less than a third of countries globally disaggregating data by sex in areas such as informal employment, entrepreneurship, and unpaid work, among others.² At the same time, the region-wide review of the Core Set of Gender Indicators for Asia and the Pacific conducted in 2014 revealed wide variations across Asia-Pacific subregions in the collection of data and production of indicators in domains such as poverty, participation in productive activities and participation in unremunerated productive work.³

4. The call for improving data on women's economic empowerment was also reiterated at the sixty-first session of the Commission on the Status of Women (2017), which focused on the theme of "Women's economic empowerment in the changing world of work."⁴ The Commission raised attention to the need for development of standards and methodologies at the national and global levels to improve the collection, analysis and dissemination of gender-sensitive data on such issues as the formal and informal economy; women's poverty, intra-household income and asset distribution; unpaid care work; women's access to, control and ownership of assets and other productive resources; and women's participation at all levels of decision-making. It called for a combination of strengthening national statistical capacity as well as mobilizing financial and technical assistance to enable systematic design, collection, and access to high-quality, reliable and timely data disaggregated by sex, age, income and other characteristics relevant in national contexts.

5. The first Report of the UN Secretary-General's High-level Panel on Women's Economic Empowerment (2016) also emphasized the "data revolution called for in the 2030 Agenda must have women and girls at its heart". Harnessing digital technologies, as well as the presentation of data in formats useful for policymakers, advocates and researchers was highlighted as critical in this context.

Commitments, ongoing efforts and continuing challenges to improve gender-sensitive data in the Asia-Pacific region

6. In endorsing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, heads of states and governments around the world committed "the goals and targets be met for all nations and peoples and for all segments of society", which is captured by the term "leave no one behind". The Sustainable Development

² Data 2X (2014). *Mapping Gender Data Gaps*.

³ See E/ESCAP/CST(4)/10 for the list of indicators.

⁴ 2017 Commission on the Status of Women. *Women's Economic Empowerment in the Changing World of Work. Agreed Conclusions*.

Goals not only have gender equality and women's empowerment as a stand-alone goal, but gender equality targets are embedded in several other goals. For instance, several issues pertaining to women's economic empowerment are embedded in goals 1 (no poverty), 5 (gender equality), 8 (decent work and economic growth) and 10 (reduce inequality).

7. At the same time, the 2030 Agenda is cognizant of the fact not all women have access to the same advantages or face the same disadvantages, and to the same extent. This is captured in the principle of the global indicator framework that indicators should be disaggregated, where appropriate, by a range of characteristics such as age, race, ethnicity, migratory status, disability, geographical location etc., in addition to sex, to help identify population groups falling farthest behind.

8. Commitments towards achieving gender equality and women's empowerment have also been made by Governments in the Asia-Pacific region through the Beijing +15 and Beijing +20 review processes in recent years.⁵ The need to enhance the development of gender-sensitive indicators, including the collection and dissemination of data disaggregated by sex was reiterated in these reviews. This is to ensure gender-sensitive data are available and adequately used to advocate for, and monitor policies across, the twelve priority areas of the Beijing Platform for Action⁶

9. In the last few years, national statistical systems have been making efforts to improve the production and dissemination of data disaggregated by sex as a standard practice. Also, quite a number of countries in the region have appointed gender focal points in governments, national statistical offices and statistical units in line ministries. At the same time, various United Nations agencies with statistics programmes, including UN-Women, UNFPA, FAO, ILO, UNEP, UNICEF, UNESCO, and ESCAP have consistently made efforts to integrate gender in their work programmes to varying degrees.

10. While countries and development partners across Asia and the Pacific have been striving to improve statistics and data to support policies and programmes to promote gender equality and women's empowerment, there are still a number of persisting and emerging challenges to be overcome in producing, disseminating and using gender-sensitive data to support evidence-based decision-making regarding gender equality. These challenges include: a) sufficient capacity to produce a basic range of economic, social and environmental statistics required for national development policies and programmes, which is the basis for producing sex-disaggregated data; b) data collection on key issues of gender equality are not part of official statistical programmes, such as unpaid work and domestic care, violence against women and girls, gender-based asset ownership and entrepreneurship etc., most of which are emerging issues; and c) large amounts of existing statistics and data, including those that are sex-disaggregated, are not analysed, interpreted and used.

Needs and opportunities to step up support at regional level (ESCAP's approach)

11. Leveraging on the country commitment to monitor the 2030 Agenda and ongoing efforts by governments, civil society organizations, academia and development partners, countries in the region can benefit from stepped-up investment for quick-wins as well as long-term capacity development.

⁵ Beijing +15 <<https://www.unescap.org/ESID/GAD/Events/HLM-2009/index.asp>>; Beijing +20 <<https://www.unescap.org/events/asian-and-pacific-conference-gender-equality-and-womens-empowerment-beijing20-review>>

⁶ <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/pdf/BDPfA%20E.pdf>.

Transformation in how gender-sensitive data and statistics are promoted, created and used can be clustered into three broad areas.

- i. Creating an enabling policy environment at the national level to establish demand for data:** Existing national development strategies and plans are often not specific about population groups and issues for intervention. In addition, they lack supporting monitoring and indicator frameworks specifying data disaggregation requirements by sex and other population characteristics. While these may be partly attributed to the lack of comprehensive and high-quality statistical evidence, this in turn hampers the provision of the necessary level of political, institutional and financial support required to enhance the availability of gender-sensitive statistics, thus causing a vicious cycle of inadequate demand and insufficient statistics.
- ii. Enhancing availability and quality of gender-sensitive data:** While in recent years statistical standards have been/are being deliberated and agreed upon by the international statistical community in several areas such as unpaid work, asset ownership, women's entrepreneurship, informal sector and informal employment, and violence against women, the application and use of these standards by national statistical systems has not kept pace and requires capacity development and uptake at the national level. This may again be due to lack of effective demand for, and consequently insufficient support to, gender-sensitive statistics and data.
- iii. Accessibility and use of existing data:** While there are gaps in the availability and quality of gender-sensitive data, a lot of existing data remains unused or inadequately used, which limits the availability and robustness of gender policy analysis at the national level.

The Gender Policy-Data Integration Initiative in the Asia-Pacific region

12. The Gender Policy-Data Integration Initiative is designed to respond to the above needs and challenges through awareness raising, advocacy and capacity building for the statistical and user communities at the national level. The Initiative is designed along the lines of the approach formulated by the Regional Steering Group on Population and Social Statistics, but with a specific focus on gender equality and women's economic empowerment.⁷ It also directly contributes to the regional Collective Vision and Framework for Action by the Asia-Pacific as outlined in ESCAP/CST/2018/2.

13. The first phase of the Initiative (April 2018 – March 2019) will contribute mainly towards goal 1 and goal 3 of the Regional Steering Group on Population and Social Statistics and is funded through the 10th Tranche Global Development Account Programme (DA10). It will enhance the responsiveness of national statistical offices to policy needs/demands by providing tools for structured user-producer engagement; and enhance capacity of relevant government stakeholders at the national level to analyse and use existing gender-sensitive and disaggregated data for progress monitoring and policy advocacy. This first phase of the Initiative will center around the use and application of two sets of tools:

⁷ The Regional Steering Group on Population and Social Statistics has adopted a work plan covering three broad areas (i) Goal 1: creating an enabling policy environment at the national level (ii) Goal 2: enhancing data production and (iii) Goal 3: enhancing data analysis and use. See details in ESCAP/CST/2018/2 and ESCAP/CST/2018/CRP.1.

- i. **The generic Policy-Data Integration Tool (EPIC):** EPIC facilitates the identification of information needs through policy content analysis for strengthening the responsiveness of national statistical systems to policy demands for implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. The Regional Steering Group on Population and Social Statistics recognized the importance of providing member states in the region with a generic tool national statistical offices can use to engage policy makers to enhance understanding and support for disaggregated statistics in the context of “Leave No One Behind” and the 2030 Agenda.⁸ EPIC is applicable for a wide range of sectors covering the economic, social, environmental and institutional dimensions of sustainable development.
- ii. **The draft template and guidelines for progress assessment and gender analysis on issues related to women’s economic empowerment:** The template will facilitate the conceptualization and production of a data-driven publication/analytical report to enhance analysis, dissemination and use of gender-sensitive data in the context of women’s economic empowerment. The 2030 Agenda has emphasized Governments have the primary responsibility for follow-up and review in relation to the progress made in implementing the goals and targets. In response, ESCAP will work with countries and independent experts to develop a generic template and corresponding guidelines to support countries in planning and implementing a systematic and effective progress assessment and gender analysis process, focusing on gender equality and in particular, women’s economic empowerment.

Progress on implementation of the Gender Policy-Data Integration Initiative in the Asia-Pacific region

14. An Inception Workshop for the Gender Policy-Data Integration Initiative was organized in April 2018 in Bangkok involving four countries in the region, Armenia, Philippines, Sri Lanka and Thailand, who are members of the Regional Steering Group on Population and Social Statistics. These countries had previously expressed interest, during the first meeting of the Regional Steering Group on Population and Social Statistics in August 2017, in piloting initiatives contributing toward the goals the Regional Steering Group on Population and Social Statistics had adopted for itself.

15. The Inception Workshop invited country teams from each of the four countries involving a combination of representatives from the national statistical office, national women’s machinery, and department of planning or a relevant line ministry in the context of women’s economic empowerment. The Inception Workshop focused on raising awareness and enhancing familiarity on the concept and importance of policy-data integration to establish and sustain demand for data (in general and on women’s economic empowerment in specific), and how it can contribute to conducting progress assessment and more indepth analysis of women’s economic empowerment issues at the national level.⁹

⁸ See details in ESCAP/CST/2018/2 and ESCAP/CST/2018/CRP.1.

⁹ See workshop materials at <https://www.unescap.org/events/unescap-gender-policy-data-integration-initiative-inception-workshop>.

16. The Inception Workshop marked the first step of the Gender Data-Policy Integration Initiative, and was followed by national implementation of the tools to develop two sets of national outputs:

- Output A: Development of a country report based on the results of applying the Policy-Data Integration tool (EPIC) on a selected women's economic empowerment policy/plan/strategy in the country. The report consists of a set of outputs resulting from the application of the tool including a preliminary consolidated national indicator set on women's economic empowerment.
- Output B: Development of an analytical report/publication on progress assessment and gender analysis on a selected women's economic empowerment issue, on which further exploratory and investigative research is considered valuable in order to provide policy recommendations.

17. The first national workshop under the Initiative was conducted in the Philippines in August 2018 in collaboration with three core agencies, the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA), the Philippine Commission on Women (PCW), and the National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA). A range of other national government agencies relevant for women's economic empowerment also participated in selected sessions of the workshop. The workshop resulted in preliminary identification of data and information needs, including disaggregation requirements, as outlined in the Philippine Magna Carta of Women, a comprehensive women's human rights law that seeks to eliminate discrimination against women in the Philippines;¹⁰ preliminary national indicator set for women's economic empowerment, by aligning relevant national, regional, global indicators, including those under the Sustainable Development Goals; preliminary concept, plan and outline for production of a data-driven publication/analytical report on a selected women's economic empowerment issue; and plan for the completion of national outputs for the project and wider uptake of the tools at the national level.¹¹

The way forward

18. There are plans to conduct similar technical assistance/national workshops in the other three pilot countries, Armenia, Sri Lanka and Thailand. The outcomes of the Initiative, in terms of statistical/analytical products as well as staff capacity of key national agencies, would contribute to developing a regional resource pool to ultimately support a wider range of countries in the region to achieve similar outputs. The experiences and lessons learned from the implementation of the Initiative will also support the identification of opportunities for inter-agency work and can complement the work being led by other statistics development partners in the region, including UN Women.¹²

¹⁰ <http://pcw.gov.ph/law/republic-act-9710>.

¹¹ See workshop materials at <https://www.unescap.org/events/national-workshop-gender-policy-data-integration-context-women-s-economic-empowerment-issues>.

¹² See ESCAP/CST/2018/INF/1.