



ESCAP Gender Equality Policy

15 April 2025

Foreword

As the United Nations agency dedicated to fostering collaboration among 53 member States in the Asia-Pacific region, the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) remains steadfast in its commitment to sustainable development. Guided by the principle of “leaving no one behind,” we work to ensure that our efforts align with the shared aspirations of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development—a vision that upholds universal respect for human rights and human dignity.

Achieving gender equality requires a world where women, men, girls, and boys can exercise their fundamental human rights equally, access opportunities equitably, fulfill their potential, and participate equally in shaping their societies. At ESCAP, we recognize that the responsibility to advance this crucial objective is a collective endeavor involving all members of the ESCAP community.

It is with great pride that I introduce the 2025 ESCAP Gender Equality Policy—a milestone in our enduring commitment to gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls across the Asia-Pacific region. This policy builds on the foundations laid by the previous 2014 Gender Equality Policy and the 2019 Gender Equality Policy and Implementation Plan, reflecting lessons learned and the progress achieved.

This updated policy aligns with the United Nations System-Wide Action Plan for Mainstreaming Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-SWAP 3.0) and the United Nations System Wide Gender Equality Acceleration Plan (GEAP) and serves as a framework for advancing gender equality both within ESCAP and in our engagements with member States. It emphasizes the integration of gender considerations into all aspects of our work, including focused analysis, targeted programming, technical assistance, and capacity-building initiatives to strengthen institutional gender policies.

We are committed to addressing intersecting vulnerabilities and barriers by recognizing the diverse experiences among women based on factors such as age, disability, race, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, and gender identity. This approach ensures that our policies and programmes are tailored to the unique needs and contexts of all women and girls.

As we embark on this journey, let us harness the transformative potential of this Gender Equality Policy. Gender equality is not only a goal in its own right but also a cornerstone for achieving all 17 Sustainable Development Goals. Together, we can build a more equitable and inclusive future for all.

Armida Salsiah Alisjahbana

Executive Secretary of ESCAP

Background

Central to the full realization of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and other relevant United Nations mandatesⁱ, the advancement of gender equality and women's empowerment is the unfinished business of our time. While significant strides in women's education, health and political representation have been made across Asia and the Pacific in recent decades, the realization of gender equality remains a distant goal. Women in the region continue to face the consequences of deep-rooted discriminatory social norms and gender stereotypes, unacceptably high levels of gender-based violence, a heavy and disproportionate share of unpaid care and domestic work responsibilities, and inadequate levels of political will to address – and redress – these issues.

Gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls lies at the heart of ESCAP'S daily work and serves as a driving force towards positive and transformative change. ESCAP'S progress towards achieving gender equality and the empowerment of women has expanded over the years to deliver highly efficient and gender-responsive interventions at regional and national levels. Our commitment has been demonstrated by our active implementation of the United Nations System-wide Action Plan (UN-SWAP) on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women. ESCAP has consistently surpassed the overall performance of the Secretariat and the UN System across all 17 gender equality performance indicators under UN-SWAP 2.0.

Purpose and scope

The 2025 Gender Equality Policy constitutes ESCAP'S institutional commitment to the realization of gender equality and the empowerment of women as a precondition for inclusive, equitable and sustainable development and the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2030 Agenda), in line with member States' international commitments and international and regional agreements. Gender equality will be evident when women, men, girls and boys fully and freely exercise their fundamental human rights and freedoms, with equitable access to opportunities, the realization of their full potential and equal influence in shaping their societies. This Policy:

(a) Takes forward the significant achievements made by ESCAP'S 2014 and 2017 Gender Equality Policies, with a distinct focus on mainstreaming gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls at both programmatic and institutional levels.

(b) Builds on the recommendations emanating from the 2023 independent evaluation of ESCAP'S previous Gender Equality Policy as well as incorporating insights from SWAP reviews, GEAP actions, assessments, audits and consultations with ESCAP staff.

(c) Reflects the commitment stated in the 2019 Asia-Pacific Ministerial Declaration on Advancing Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment that requests the Executive Secretary of ESCAP "To accord priority, in the programme of work of the secretariat, to the full and effective implementation of the [Beijing Declaration and] Platform for Action and the present Declaration".

(d) Is grounded in the guiding principles of the universality of human rights; participation and inclusion; equality and non-discrimination; leaving no one behind and results-based management.

(e) Applies to everyone working at ESCAP, in all locations and all types of arrangements.

Enabling Factors

In the pursuit of effective implementation of the Gender Equality Policy, several enabling factors are crucial for success:

Allocation of human and financial resources- Adequate, sustained financing and dedicated resource allocation is required to achieve gender equality and women's empowerment. Every effort will continue to be made to mobilize human and financial resources to promote the integration of gender equality throughout ESCAP's subprogrammes, operations and organizational culture.

An active gender architecture- Maintaining a gender mainstreaming support structure is a critical factor for the success and sustainable implementation of gender mainstreaming. The role of Gender Focal Points will be strengthened, supported by senior management and the Gender Equality Steering Committee who lead by example and are responsible for providing the resources and time needed for all staff to spend time on gender equality.

Gender data and statistics - Gender data is a vital prerequisite to ensure a sound basis for the implementation of gender mainstreaming. Continued efforts will be made to collect, analyse and disseminate sex, age and disability disaggregated data, as well as to produce analytical products that can support evidence-based policymaking.

Partnerships - ESCAP will assess opportunities for enhancing strategic partnerships for gender equality and build strategic partnerships with Governments, community-based organizations, civil society organizations, youth organizations, academia, the private sector, philanthropy, United Nations entities, independent experts and other relevant stakeholders in support of our transformation. Working with partners to support gender equality may include receiving resources, mutually raising awareness of gender equality issues, collaborating and exchanging technical knowledge, joint marketing and communications, and innovative programmes and products.

Effective Oversight

To support individual and collective responsibility for gender equality, effective and reliable systems for monitoring, evaluation, and reporting will continue to be employed to ensure that ESCAP staff at all levels, are held accountable for ensuring progress towards mainstreaming gender within ESCAP, in line with the ESCAP Monitoring and Evaluation Policy and Guidelines.

Implementation of the Gender Equality Policy and Action Plan will be monitored on an ongoing basis, as well as reported on an annual basis to the Executive Secretary in conjunction with the reporting requirements of the UN-SWAP 3.0 and GEAP.

The Policy and Action Plan will be updated as required, in accordance with the requirements of the UN-SWAP 3.0 and GEAP.

Strategic Goals and Commitments

In recognition that realizing gender equality requires concerted and resourced attention by both ESCAP member States and the ESCAP secretariat, the Policy identifies two principal strategic goals - programmatic and institutional – and their corresponding commitments and policy actions. The means of operationalizing the Policy are articulated in a separate costed action plan which contains a series of time-bound activities that deliver lasting, transformative change for women and girls in the region.

Goal 1: ESCAP advances the Sustainable Development Goals by delivering transformative results on gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls across local, national, regional, and global levels.

ESCAP will continue to work towards the achievement of transformative, intersectional gender-related results on the Sustainable Development Goals across all substantive divisions, regional offices and regional institutes by including gender equality considerations universally across the ESCAP policy and programme cycle, stretching from strategic planning and design through resource allocation and implementation to monitoring, evaluation and reporting. In support of this goal, ESCAP is committed to:

1A - Working with member States to advance gender equality in the Asia and Pacific region. ESCAP will

- i. Provide support to member States to uphold normative gains on women's rights and gender equality in all intergovernmental spaces.
- ii. Provide technical knowledge and capacity-building support to member States, upon their request, to develop, adopt and implement gender-responsive laws and policies.
- iii. Facilitate multi-stakeholder dialogues and partnerships among governments, civil society organizations, etc. as well as regularly consult and engage with organizations or associations that promote gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls to inform programming and intergovernmental processes and for their active participation in activities.

1B - Ensuring the availability of adequate financial resources to achieve gender transformative results. ESCAP will

- i. Strengthen implementation of the gender marker to track financial allocation of resources towards the achievement of gender-related SDG Results.
- ii. Apply the gender equality marker through the strategic programme management processes and ensure and support quality assurance for the marker.
- iii. Continue to discourage gender-blind funding and advocate for a gradual increase in expenditures across all programmes, with the ultimate goal of allocating a minimum of 15% to initiatives where gender equality is the principal objective.
- iv. Enhance the mobilization of both existing and additional resources for gender equality aiming to secure consistent and sustainable funding to support and expand gender equality initiatives.
- v. Maintain and fully fund a gender unit, with senior level staff and direct access to senior leadership, responsible for advancing dedicated work on gender equality and supporting gender mainstreaming across the work of the organization.

1C - Integrating gender equality considerations across all its programmes, from strategic planning to project design, to achieve and communicate gender-transformative results. ESCAP will

- i. Include expected accomplishments and high-level results on gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls in ESCAP strategic planning documents, relevant workplans and subprogrammes, ensuring alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly Goal 5 targets.

- ii. Provide guidance on measuring and reporting gender-related SDG results, conduct comprehensive intersectional gender analyses and utilize sex-disaggregated data to enhance the planning and design of gender-responsive policies, programmes, and initiatives.
- iii. Consistently apply the gender marker for results-oriented planning, ensuring gender outcomes are a primary focus from the initial stages of project design.
- iv. Communicate gender-transformative results and research and advocate for gender equality and the empowerment of women to member States and partners.

1D - Diligently monitoring, evaluating and reporting on activities to ensure the effective implementation of gender equality initiatives. ESCAP will

- i. Establish and maintain a Gender Equality Steering Committee to drive progress, learn and enhance accountability for results.
- ii. Ensure regular reporting by senior managers on their contributions to the promotion and achievement of results on gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls.
- iii. Monitor and verify implementation of the gender marker to ensure that projects align with designated marker coding and ensuring their effective contribution to gender-transformative results.
- iv. Effectively integrate gender equality in evaluations commissioned by the Secretariat in line with the ESCAP Monitoring and Evaluation Policy and Guidelines and the relevant UNEG guidelines.
- v. Conduct an independent evaluation of ESCAP performance in gender mainstreaming once every 5 years as per UN-SWAP requirements.
- vi. Include progress on Gender Equality Acceleration Plan in annual reporting, reporting to the governing body.
- vii. Effectively mainstream a gender perspective into inter-agency coordination mechanisms, participate in and implement agreed recommendations from UN-SWAP peer review processes and support the implementation of UN-SWAP performance in another entity.

Goal 2: The institutional capacity and effectiveness of ESCAP is strengthened to enhance the delivery of gender-transformative results

ESCAP will continue to strengthen institutional capacity to deliver transformative results through integrating gender into the corporate operations of ESCAP, encompassing the entire span of management, administrative and human resource services, to strengthen a gender-responsive and gender sensitive organizational workplace environment that is respectful of diversity, supports work-life balance, and sustains gender parity in staffing. Building the capacities of all staff is prioritized to ensure that all staff are able to effectively mainstream gender in their respective areas of work. In support of the goal, ESCAP is committed to:

2A - Ensuring all ESCAP staff are involved in advancing gender equality in the workplace and in all external activities, while simultaneously stressing that accountability for gender equality priorities and results rests at the senior leadership levels. ESCAP will

- i. Encourage senior managers to lead by example by actively championing gender equality and the empowerment of women in their activities and acting as visible catalysts for organizational change.
- ii. Embed knowledge and experience in gender equality into recruitment processes at all levels and require a proven track record in gender equality and the empowerment of women in senior appointments.
- iii. Strengthen the role of gender focal points to promote greater awareness of gender issues and a gender-sensitive work environment.

2B - Cultivating a positive organizational culture that values diversity and ensures an equitable work-life balance for all staff, regardless of gender. ESCAP will

- i. Strengthen a gender-responsive organizational workplace environment that is respectful of diversity, including through addressing the results of gender and power analysis.
- ii. Support work-life balance, staff wellbeing and acknowledge and accommodate the needs of caregivers to foster a supportive and inclusive work environment.
- iii. Implement an action plan on protection from sexual exploitation and abuse and protection from sexual harassment, using a victim-centered approach, and report on the actions taken to the governing body.

2C – Achieving and sustaining gender parity for all staff levels and fostering an inclusive environment where every individual, regardless of gender, has equal opportunities for growth and success. ESCAP will

- i. Implement fair and unbiased recruitment practices to attract a broad range of talent, including women in all their diversities, using varied recruitment channels that mitigate bias at each stage of the recruitment, hiring and promotion process.
- ii. Support the retention of female staff by developing supportive workplace policies and practices that address the unique needs of women employees, including flexible work arrangements and equitable parental leave policies.
- iii. Encourage the advancement of women through providing targeted leadership development programmes and initiatives.
- iv. Ensure that having delivered measurable gender equality results is a key consideration for the career advancement of staff at senior levels.

2D - Promoting continuous learning and professional development for all staff, empowering them with the knowledge and capacity needed to effectively integrate gender perspectives across all areas of work. ESCAP will

- i. Strengthen gender-responsive leadership by providing senior management with unconscious bias and gender-responsive leadership training and integrating measurable gender equality, diversity, and inclusion objectives into managers' workplans, and performance evaluations.
- ii. Empower gender focal points with specialized training and resources to enhance their capacity to mainstream gender considerations across policies, programmes, and initiatives.
- iii. Conduct a capacity assessment and create a costed development plan to provide mandatory ongoing training on gender and the empowerment of women for all staff, to ensure they have the necessary knowledge and skills to incorporate gender considerations across all areas of work and decision-making processes.
- iv. Allocate adequate budget for gender capacity development across the organization.

2E - Fostering a diverse and inclusive communications approach that promotes equitable representation and contributes to a gender-responsive organizational culture. ESCAP will

- i. Promote transformative change in relation to gender equality and the empowerment of women through the entity's communication channels and products.
- ii. Emphasize the use of gender-sensitive language and mainstream gender perspective in all communication, including high-level reports and briefings, to promote inclusivity and respect for diverse gender identities.
- iii. Ensure diverse representation in communications by featuring a range of voices, experiences, and perspectives to reflect our commitment to inclusiveness.
- iv. Systematically capture, document, share and leverage gender-related information and research internally, fostering transparency and promoting a gender-responsive approach in all aspects of communication.

ⁱ The Universal Declaration of Human Rights; the Charter of the United Nations, particularly the Preamble and Article 8; the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women; the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action; the United Nations General Assembly Resolution A/RES/70/1 on "Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development"; United Nations Security Council Resolutions 1325v and 1889vi; the United Nations Millennium Declaration A/RES/55/2vii wherein equality is listed as one of six stated fundamental values; the 2005 World Summit Outcome A/RES/60/1viii, specifically paragraphs 12, 58, 59, 116, and 166; ECOSOC Resolutions 2004/4ix, 2010/29x, 2013/16xi, and 2018/8; the 2010 United Nations General Assembly Resolution 65/247xii on "human resources management" with reference to "the goal of gender parity in the UN Secretariat" (paragraph 69); 2017 United Nations Gender Assembly Resolution 71/243 on "Quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system"; the Administrative Instruction of the UN Secretariat, ST/AI/1999/9xiii which articulates "special measures for the achievement of gender equality"; ESCAP resolution 73/9 Regional Road Map for Implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in Asia and the Pacific; ESCAP Resolution 71/13; the United Nations System-Wide Policy on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (CEB/2006/2) and the associated System-Wide Action Plan (UN-SWAP) (2012-2017) and System-Wide Action Plan 2.0 (2018-2023) (UNSWAP 2.0).