



ASEM HIGH-LEVEL DIALOGUE ON WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT AMID THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Viet Nam, 12 – 13 October 2020

SUMMARY REPORT

1. The ASEM High-Level Dialogue on “Women’s Economic Empowerment Amid the COVID-19 Pandemic” – a joint initiative by Australia, China, Denmark, Finland, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Norway and Viet Nam, was organized in the city of Ha Noi, Viet Nam, on 12 – 13 October 2020. The event was endorsed by ASEM Foreign Ministers at the 14th ASEM Foreign Ministers’ Meeting held in Madrid in December 2019. Taking place at a time when the COVID-19 pandemic has moved beyond a global health crisis with far-reaching social and economic consequences, the Dialogue aimed to provide a venue for richer discussions and broader perspectives in promoting regional and inter-regional cooperation on women’s economic empowerment and inclusive growth in the digital age, as well as building more equal, inclusive, responsive and resilient societies in the post COVID-19 recovery.

2. Organized in a hybrid format of virtual and physical meeting, the Dialogue gathered about 100 participants, including ASEM government officials, researchers, experts, and representatives from the World Bank, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UNWomen), Asia – Europe Foundation, etc. H.E. Mr. To Anh Dung, Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of Viet Nam addressed the Opening Session.

3. In his address, the Deputy Minister noted the emerging challenges that are hindering efforts of achieving gender equality and advancing women’s economic empowerment. He stressed that the immeasurable health, economic and social crisis arising from the COVID-19 pandemic is putting decades of progress on women’s economic empowerment at risk with exacerbation of existing barriers and inequalities to women. He thereby highlighted the urgent need for ASEM’s consolidated actions to fight gender inequalities and advance women’s empowerment so that women can continue to be a critical driver of economic growth and a foundation for a sustainable future. He and other keynote speakers called on the participants to explore new approaches and concrete measures to enhance women’s economic resilience, address the long-standing gender inequalities, tackle prevailing gender bias related to economic and social inclusion to achieve inclusive and sustainable growth with far-reaching impacts across Asia and Europe.

4. During the discussions, participants highlighted that the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development had set the world on a collective journey to combat gender inequality within and among countries, to build peaceful, just and inclusive societies. Members thereby renewed their commitment to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. They also stressed the determination to take bold and transformative steps urgently needed to bridge the digital gender divide, overcome systematic barriers against women’s participation in the digital economy, foster women’s financial inclusion, facilitate MSMEs participation in a higher global value chain and enable women’s potential fully and equally. Delegates also highlighted the need to ensure that women are placed at the heart of the post COVID-19 socio-economic recovery responses. They underscored that actions to address women’s economic and social inequalities must be incorporated into appropriate national strategies and called for an integrated approach at local, national, inter-regional and international level, with broad-based concerted actions from all levels of society, public and private and the engagement of all stakeholders. Furthermore, participants emphasized the importance of ensuring peace and stability as a prerequisite.

5. The Dialogue highlighted the importance of developing a holistic set of policies and measures to promote the multiple dimensions of women's economic empowerment. The roles played by various stakeholders, including government officials, senior policy-makers, researchers, universities, media, businesses, regional, international organizations and other stakeholders in achieving gender equality and enhancing women's economic empowerment was also underlined. Participants also stressed the significance of capacity development, good governance at all levels, innovation and technologies application, development finance, public – private partnership enhancement, labour market integration, etc. They also highlighted the many best practices and lessons learned as well as local, bilateral, sub-regional and regional cooperation from both regions, including ASEAN.

6. Participants discussed and proposed a number of recommendations to enhance the tangible cooperation between ASEM partners to tackle global issues relating to gender equality and women's economic empowerment, and to reinforce ASEM partnership in the new era of development, including:

- (i) Enhancing ASEM contributions to global efforts in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, with a focus on Goal 5;
- (ii) Establishing short-term emergency relief measures to mitigate the immediate and disproportionate harm on women from COVID-19, and shaping crisis policy response with long-term solutions to protect equal rights and opportunities for women and better adapt to potential disruptions in the future;
- (iii) Developing eco-systems for harnessing the benefits of digitalization and globalization and promoting economic opportunity by fostering structural reform, addressing economic biases against women, removing gender policy barriers, bridging the digital gap, facilitating access to capital and technologies, encouraging corporate social responsibility and public-private partnership, fostering women's financial inclusion, facilitating MSMEs participation in a higher global value chain;
- (iv) Improving the social and economic empowerment of women and girls by ensuring progress in poverty reduction, supporting full and non-discriminatory access to quality education and skills development at all levels, providing better health care and social protection, building stronger resilience to global issues including climate change, and promoting policies and social investments to enhance human capital development, especially those in the rural and remote areas;
- (v) Making every effort to eliminate all forms of violence and discrimination against women and girls, and recognizing that these forms of violence are significant impediments to the achievement of women's economic empowerment and economic growth;
- (vi) Strengthening active policies to build a more inclusive labour market by targeting gender wage gap, enhancing recruitment, retention, integration and advancement of women of diverse backgrounds, and addressing the persistent barriers women face in the workplace;
- (vii) Furthering exchange of views on institutional mechanisms, strategies, guidelines, implementation measures pertaining to women's empowerment, and promote the integration of women's economic empowerment into development plans from a long-term and cross-sectorial perspective;
- (viii) Promoting assistance in narrowing the development gap and fostering sub-regional and regional cooperation among ASEM members on gender issues; providing support from developed ASEM members to developing ones in gaining access to financing, technology transfers, smart investment and capacity building, to implement international agreements and commitments to leave no one behind;
- (ix) Advancing multi-stakeholder partnership and strengthening an ASEM network of experts, government officials, academic circles, cities and/or local governments, international institutions and private sectors to share experiences, update new initiatives and make recommendations for ASEM's cooperation on promoting women's economic empowerment;

- (x) Facilitating and strengthening linkages to various initiatives, projects and cross-cutting and interrelated ASEM's Tangible Cooperation Areas on Women's Empowerment, Poverty Reduction, Education and Human Resources Development, Vocational Training & Skills Development, Sustainable Water Management, Food safety issues, Youth cooperation, etc.;
- (xi) Strengthening dialogue, collaboration and synergies between ASEM and other regional and international organizations and/or forums, especially those working in the areas of fostering gender equality and women's empowerment, including the United Nations, G20, APEC, ASEAN.

7. Participants commended Viet Nam for successfully hosting this important Dialogue under the current circumstance, and encouraged ASEM partners to participate in/organize future events to further promote the ASEM tangible cooperation in women's empowerment to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals as well as to enhance the visibility of ASEM cooperation.

8. The outcomes and recommendations of the Conference will be reported to the 13th ASEM Summit in Cambodia in 2021.

Ha Noi, Viet Nam, 13 October 2020.
