Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
4 October 2018

Original: English

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

Fifth session
Bangkok, 28–30 November 2018
Item 2 of the provisional agenda*
**Strategies for leaving no one behind in the implementation
of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**

Leaving no one behind: supporting vulnerable groups in the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

Note by the secretariat

Summary

Leaving no one behind is a clarion call of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Promoting equity and ensuring inclusive participation of marginalized and disadvantaged groups is critical for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. Persons with disabilities, older persons and migrants are classified as disadvantaged and vulnerable groups. Members of those groups are among the individuals most likely to be left behind because of the multiple barriers they face with regards to economic, social and political participation. Consequently, policymakers should address their needs.

The present document contains an analysis of the key trends and challenges concerning vulnerable groups in the Asia-Pacific region, and strategies and policy recommendations to address such challenges in support of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The Committee on Social Development is invited to review the issues and recommendations presented in the document and provide the secretariat with guidance on the future direction of its work related to social development, particularly regarding vulnerable groups.

I.   Introduction

1.   Despite high and enduring economic growth and significant progress made towards ending poverty in all its forms, inequality persists in the Asia-Pacific region. Inequalities among groups are multidimensional, affected by income and access to opportunities, and are typically determined by, for example, gender, age, ethnicity, disability and migrant status. Persons with disabilities, older persons and migrants are examples of disadvantaged and vulnerable groups. Members of those groups are most likely to be among the

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individuals left behind because of the multiple barriers they face with regards to economic, social and political participation.

2.   In 2017, vulnerable groups comprised a considerable proportion of the more than 4.5 billion people residing in the Asia-Pacific region. An estimated 690 million people – about 15 per cent of the population – were living with one or more disabilities. The interplay between the prevalence of disability and the demographic megatrend of population ageing warrants particular attention for policymakers in the region. In many countries, more than 50 per cent of the population with disabilities are at least 60 years old. Older persons, those 60 years or older, totalled 571 million in 2017. Unprecedented population ageing has placed increasing pressure on the working-age population to support non-working groups, which includes older persons with disabilities.[1]

3.   International migrants often find themselves in vulnerable situations. For example, irregular migrants frequently face exacerbated vulnerabilities. Migrant status is often a compounding factor, particularly in cases in which it intersects with other potential disadvantages associated with, for example, gender, disability or age. Indeed, intersectional discrimination and disadvantages perpetuate already existing inequalities – inequality associated with outcomes, opportunities and impacts for vulnerable and marginalized groups. The Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), accordingly, pursues its work in a multidisciplinary manner that evaluates the dimensions of sustainable development for the progressive realization of an adequate standard of living for all, which includes, for example, an older person with a disability, a female migrant or a disabled mother.

4.   The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is based on a pledge to leave no one behind and to reach the furthest behind first. This clarion call has been reiterated at the regional level, most notably in the regional road map for implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in Asia and the Pacific.[2] Meeting those ambitions require approaches and policies initiated by government and society in general that promote inclusive and social development, increasingly engaging all sectors of society in partnership and cooperation at all levels. With its strong mandate to enhance the social dimension of the 2030 Agenda, and in supporting the vulnerable and marginalized population groups, ESCAP is being further guided by the following regional and global mandates: Commission resolution 67/8 on strengthening social protection systems in Asia and the Pacific; the International Labour Organization Social Protection Floors Recommendation, 2012 (No. 202); the Incheon Strategy to "Make the Right Real" for Persons with Disabilities in Asia and the Pacific and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities; the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing; the Asian and Pacific Ministerial Declaration on Population and Development; and the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, which was finalized by the General Assembly on 13 July 2018 for formal adoption by

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[1]   The old-age support ratio in Asia and the Pacific is expected to more than double between 2015 and 2050. In 2015, every 100 persons of working-age supported 12 persons aged 65 and older; by 2050, those 100 persons will have to support 29 persons aged 65 and older (ESCAP calculations based on United Nations, World Population Prospects 2017. Available at https://population.un.org/wpp/ (accessed on 31 August 2018)).

[2]   E/ESCAP/73/31, annex II.

Member States at an intergovernmental conference to be held in Marrakech, Morocco, on 10 and 11 December 2018.

5.   The present document provides an analysis of key trends and challenges concerning persons with disabilities, older persons and international migrants, and strategies and policy recommendations with a view to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

II.   Persons with disabilities

A.   Key trends and challenges

6.   In Asia and the Pacific, an estimated 690 million people live with at least one disability.[3] The population of persons with disabilities is likely to increase because of the combined effects of factors affecting the occurrence of impairments and environmental barriers, such as population ageing, poverty, the rapid spread of non-communicable diseases, natural disasters and humanitarian crises.

7.   The Midpoint Review of the Asian and Pacific Decade of Persons with Disabilities, 2013–2022, conducted in 2017, reveals that persons with disabilities in the region continue to be excluded from accessing opportunities and benefiting from social, economic and environmental development outcomes. Persons with disabilities face multiple barriers that prevent them from fully and progressively realizing their human rights, including the lack of effective participation across all sectors of society, such as employment, political participation, education and social protection, making them particularly vulnerable to being left behind in the mainstream development process.

1.   Persons with disabilities face significant barriers to employment and are more likely to live in poverty

8.   There is growing evidence that disability and poverty are highly correlated. Data available for a few countries and areas in Asia and the Pacific show that persons with disabilities continue to face extreme poverty and are disproportionately represented among the poorest.[4] The difference in poverty headcount ratios between persons with disabilities and the overall population ranges from 4 to 21 per cent (figure I). The cost of living for a person with a disability may be higher than for a person without a disability because of extra costs required for health care, assistive devices or personal support. As a result, the vulnerability of poor persons with disabilities exacerbates if they have little or no access to social protection.

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[3]   World Health Organization (WHO) and World Bank, *World Report on Disability* (Geneva, WHO, 2011).

[4]   Jean-Francois Trani and Mitchell Loeb, "Poverty and disability: a vicious circle? Evidence from Afghanistan and Zambia", *Journal of International Development,* vol. 24 (January 2012), pp. S19–S52.

Figure I
Difference in poverty headcount ratios between persons with disabilities and the overall population
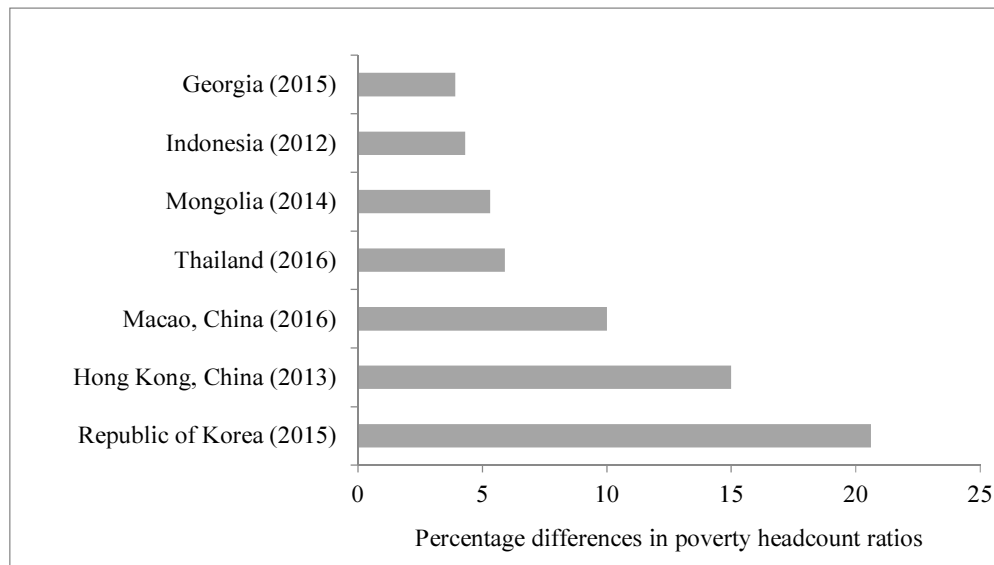
Source: Building Disability-Inclusive Societies in Asia and the Pacific: Assessing Progress of the Incheon Strategy (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.18.II.F.4).

Note: Estimates are based on national poverty lines.

9.   A large proportion of economically active persons with disabilities are either not employed, underemployed or earn lower wages.[5] Persons with disabilities are two to six times less likely to be employed. Inequality of employment, expressed as the ratio of employment rates of persons with disabilities to those of persons without disabilities, varies greatly, between 0.18 to 0.87. This inequality tends to be greater for women than for men in most countries (figure II).[6] Furthermore, an estimated 80 per cent of persons with disabilities in developing countries are self-employed, as this is often their only option.[7] The exclusion of persons with disabilities from the labour market results in losses in productivity and human potential, which imposes significant costs for society and on the economy at large.[8]

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[5]   Nora Groce and others, "Disability and poverty: the need for a more nuanced understanding of implications for development policy and practice", *Third World Quarterly*, vol. 32 (2011), pp. 1493–1513.

[6]   Normally, inequality falls within the range of 0 to 1, where 0 means perfect inequality and 1 means perfect equality.

[7]   Anne Leymat, "Inclusive microfinance: reaching disabled people through partnership development", *Enterprise Development and Microfinance*, vol. 23, No. 1 (March 2012), pp. 25–37(13).

[8]   International Labour Organization (ILO), "The price of excluding people with disabilities from the workplace", 1 December 2010.

Figure II
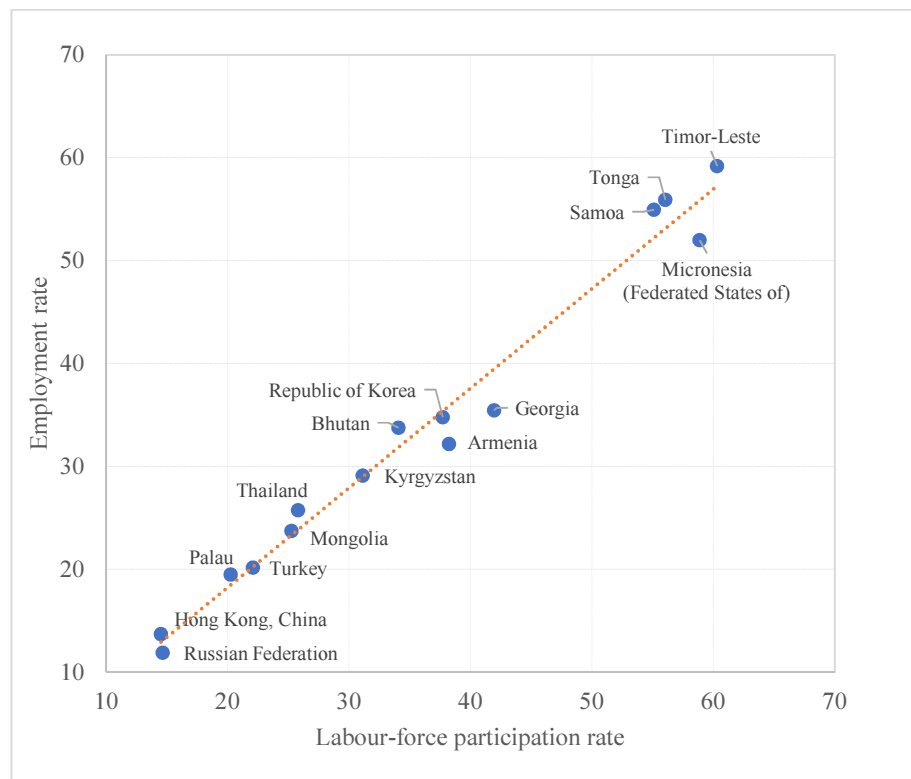**Employment inequality between persons with disabilities and the overall population**
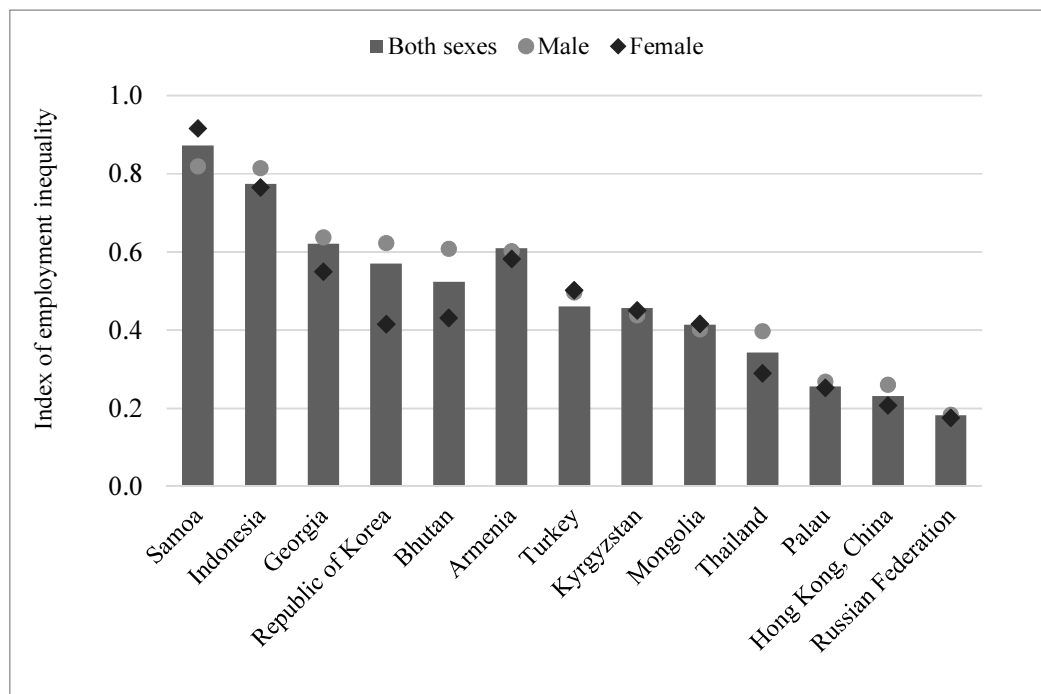
Source: Building Disability-Inclusive Societies in Asia and the Pacific (see figure I).

10.   Disability and barriers in the workplace affect a person's capacity and will to work. Discriminatory attitudes and inaccessible environments prevent persons with disabilities from entering the labour market. In general, the labour-force participation rate is much lower among persons with disabilities. Yet, an ESCAP study illustrates that there is a positive correlation between labour-force participation and employment for persons with disabilities, which indicates that in countries where efforts are made to create inclusive and accessible working environments, more persons with disabilities desire to participate in economic activities and are employed (figure III).

11.   Technology and innovation are critical factors in breaking down barriers for persons with disabilities, not only in the workplace, but also with respect to improving access to affordable and relevant services. Harnessing technology and innovations facilitate job creation and create conducive environments for trade and business. For example, technology that facilitates remote work by persons with disabilities is an enabling instrument for the social inclusion of individuals and groups who have been, or who are at risk of being, left behind. The increased access to a wide range of educational opportunities in an accessible format online is making it easier for individuals to upgrade their skills, particularly persons with disabilities.

Figure III
Correlation between employment and labour-force participation of persons with disabilities
(Percentage)

Source: Building Disability-Inclusive Societies in Asia and the Pacific (see figure I).

2. The lack of comprehensive and comparable disability data renders persons with disabilities invisible to policymakers

12.   Persons with disabilities remain unidentified and uncounted in national official statistics because of a dearth of reliable and comparable data. Prevalence of disability in the region ranges widely from 1.1 per cent of the population in Brunei Darussalam, to 24 per cent in New Zealand, because of the varying definitions of disability and ways of collecting data across countries. Aside from affecting the measurement of participation of persons with disabilities, failure to identify and account for persons with disabilities poses a serious obstacle to the effective design, implementation and evaluation of disability policies and programmes.

3. Intersectional discrimination and disadvantage perpetuates existing inequalities

13.   Children with disabilities experience multiple forms of discrimination, which leads to exclusion from schools and their communities. Attitudes towards them and the lack of resources to accommodate their needs at the early stage of their physical development and education compound the challenges they face in accessing education. Some of the barriers preventing them from accessing education are inaccessible schools and transport, lack of social protection and assistive devices, and inability to access health care. Statistics on the number of children with disabilities not participating in the education system in any given country are scarce. However, a direct comparison of the

size of cohorts of children with disabilities who attend primary schools to those who attend secondary schools in some countries exhibits an average drop by 50 per cent in the number of children when they transition from primary to secondary education. This change is likely to be relatively higher for mainstream schools than for special schools.

14.   Women and girls with disabilities in the region experience additional barriers in accessing development opportunities. More than 50 percent of the region's persons with disabilities are women. The double burden of being a woman with disability hinders access to labour markets, educational opportunities and health services. Countries that have recorded access of women with disabilities to reproductive health services indicate that the figure is two to three times lower for women with disabilities compared to their counterparts without disabilities.

B.   Strategies and recommendations for action

1.   Promoting disability-inclusive development through the 2030 Agenda, the Incheon Strategy, the Beijing Declaration and Action Plan, and other ESCAP frameworks

15.   ESCAP has been the regional engine promoting disability-inclusive development by facilitating the implementation of three consecutive regional decades since 1993 aimed at making societies more disability-inclusive. The Incheon Strategy to "Make the Right Real" for Persons with Disabilities in Asia and the Pacific provides the first set of regionally agreed disability-inclusive development goals to be achieved during the Asian and Pacific Decade of Persons with Disabilities, 2013–2022. The Incheon Strategy is a disability-specific, multisectoral development blueprint for improving the quality of life and empowering and promoting participation of persons with disabilities. The midpoint review of the implementation of the Incheon Strategy, which was held at a high-level intergovernmental meeting in Beijing from 27 November to 1 December 2017, led to the adoption of the Beijing Declaration, including the Action Plan to Accelerate the Implementation of the Incheon Strategy, which provides strategic guidance on disability inclusion policy measures to member States to enhance the operational synergy between the Incheon Strategy and the 2030 Agenda.

16.   Given the synergies of the Incheon Strategy and the 2030 Agenda, substantive linkages of the agendas for the implementation, monitoring and review processes can ensure the inclusion of those at risk of being left behind across various areas of development, and provide a basis for measuring progress in attaining sustainable development from the disability perspective. Within that context, Governments could capitalize on those synergies particularly by, for example, adopting policy and legal measures to support a disability-inclusive approach to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, including by establishing a multi-stakeholder consultation mechanism involving organizations that represent persons with disabilities in the monitoring of the implementation of the Incheon Strategy and the 2030 Agenda.

17.   Disability perspectives should also be mainstreamed in other ESCAP frameworks to effectively foster disability-inclusive development. Given the high correlation between disability and poverty, it is integral that regional cooperation initiatives on social protection also contain disability inclusive principles.

2. **Advancing a paradigm shift to a more comprehensive approach to disability**

18. To advance the implementation of disability-inclusive development in Asia and the Pacific, Governments are encouraged to apply a twin-track approach in disability policy: developing and implementing disability-specific policies and mainstreaming disability perspectives in policies and programmes in all development areas. Examples of possible disability-specific policies are anti-discrimination laws on disability, laws and standards on accessibility and assistive devices, and social protection benefits for persons with disabilities. Examples of disability-inclusive policies are mandating inclusion of accessibility criteria in public procurement and international development projects and expanding support for entrepreneurs with disabilities.

3. **Strengthening national efforts to uphold the rights of persons with disabilities across all sectors of society**

19. Governments should seek to ensure that policies and programmes help to fulfil the rights of persons with disabilities and ensure their full participation in society, through all stages of the life cycle. National efforts in that regard include, but are not limited to, establishing or strengthening a national coordination mechanism on disability, strengthening collaboration and no-gap policies within and among ministries and sectors on disability inclusion, and checking whether principles of accessibility, universal design and non-discrimination are duly reflected in laws, policies and regulations. Opportunities for harmonizing domestic legislation based on the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities should also be carefully considered.

4. **Enhancing disability data and statistics**

20. To enhance availability and the quality of data for the Incheon Strategy indicators, disability focal points, national coordination mechanisms on disability and national statistical offices are encouraged to work together to establish a coordinated interministerial plan to improve the collection of disability data and the generation of disability statistics. This makes it possible to map the status of disability statistics across ministries and formulate a national action plan for improving the collection and use of disability data, in line with the requirements specified by the indicators of the Sustainable Development Goals and the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health.

III. Older persons

A. Key trends and challenges

21. Older persons are among the most vulnerable in society. In 2017, the number of older persons was 571 million in Asia and the Pacific. This group faces compounding inequalities and barriers, which worsen as they get older. In the coming decades, the population of persons aged 60 and above is expected to increase significantly to reach 1.3 billion in 2050 and comprise 25 per cent of the population.[9]

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[9] United Nations, World Population Prospects 2017. Available at https://population.un.org/wpp/ (accessed on 31 August 2018).

22.   For many countries in the region, the population of older persons is growing at a more rapid rate than that of the working-age population. For example, in China and Thailand, the population of older persons grew at an annual rate of 4.0 and 4.3 per cent, respectively between 2012 and 2017, while the working-age population remained constant. In the five subregions of Asia and the Pacific, old age support ratios (ratio of working-age population to older population) have been declining, and are projected to continue to decline until 2050.[10]

1.   The rapid pace of population ageing negatively affects income security and the provision of social protection for older persons

23.   Many countries in the Asia-Pacific region are at risk of becoming an aged society[11] before they become affluent and have little time to adjust. Important ramifications of the demographic transition that affect the lives of older persons need to be addressed as a priority as countries strive to meet the Sustainable Development Goals.

24.   A key concern for older persons is income security. While most countries in the region have implemented some form of a pension system, in many societies less than 50 per cent of the older persons receive a pension (figure IV). Pensions that provide higher payouts tend to be contributory ones, skewed towards the public sector and formal employment. Given the high rates of informal employment in the region, many individuals are not eligible for contributory pensions, and accordingly lack income security in their old age. Social protection measures implemented for the benefit of older persons is, therefore, a key policy instrument to ensure inclusive and social development for all.

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[10]   Ibid.

[11]   An aged society is defined as a population in which the proportion of older persons exceeds 14 per cent, while an ageing society is defined as a population in which the proportion of older persons exceeds 7 per cent.

Figure IV
Proportion of older persons receiving a pension, latest available year
(Percentage)
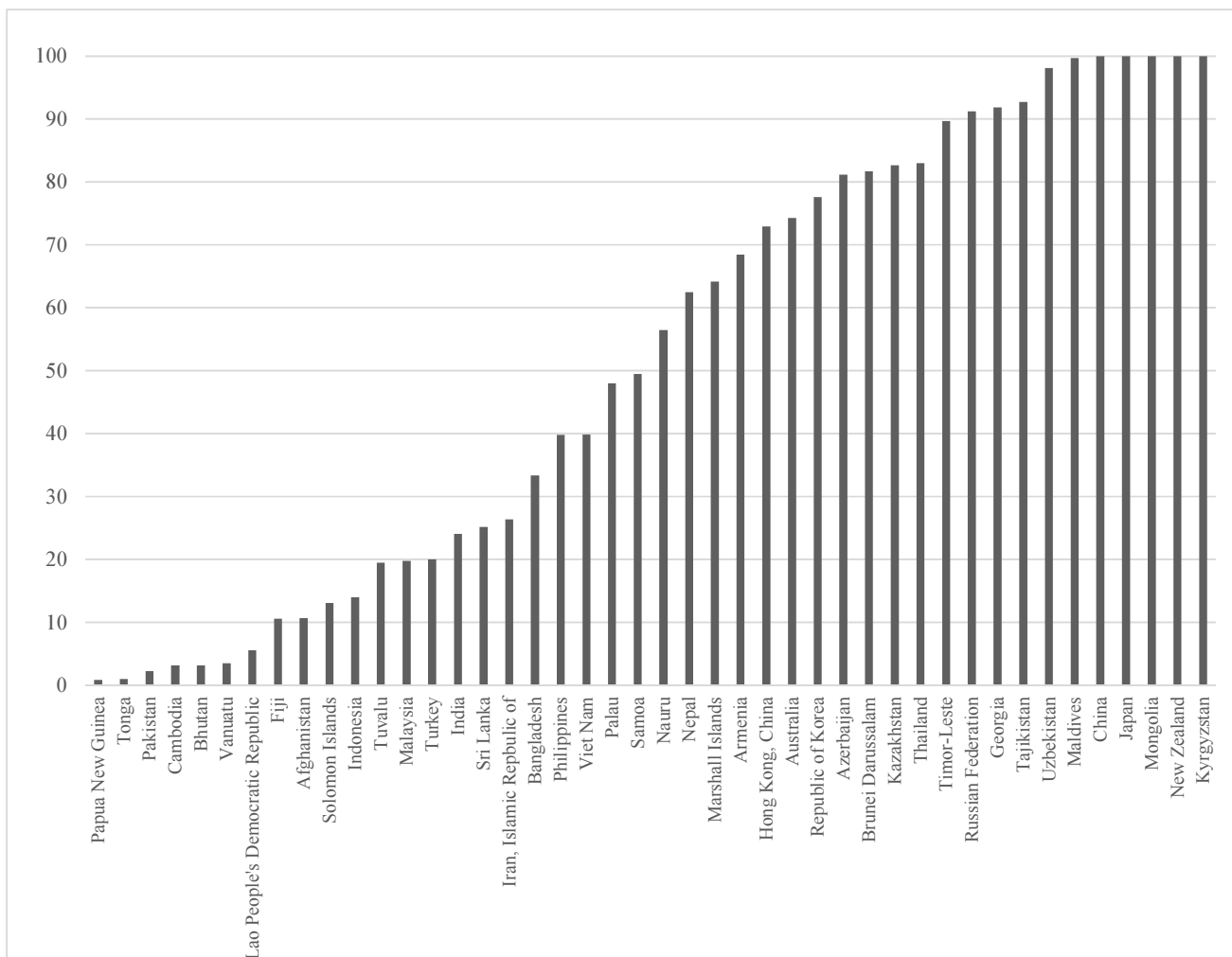
Source: ILO, *World Social Protection Report 2017–19: Universal Social Protection to Achieve the Sustainable Development Goals* (Geneva, 2017).

25.   Women are often at a disadvantage, as they tend to be employed for less years than men, particularly in the formal sector. Consequently, they are less likely to be covered by a contributory pension scheme, or receive lower benefits. This gender gap can be observed when comparing net pension replacement rates (ratio of net pension payout to net pre-retirement income) between men and women. In China and the Russian Federation, net pension replacement rates are 15 percentage points lower for women than for men.[12] In Asia-Pacific countries that offer non-contributory social pensions, benefit levels tend to be low, and are often insufficient for those who have no other sources of income (figure V).

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[12] Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), Pensions at a Glance 2018 database. Available at https://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx?DataSetCode=PAG (accessed on 31 August 2018).

Figure V
Social pension benefit levels and coverage, latest available year
(Percentage)
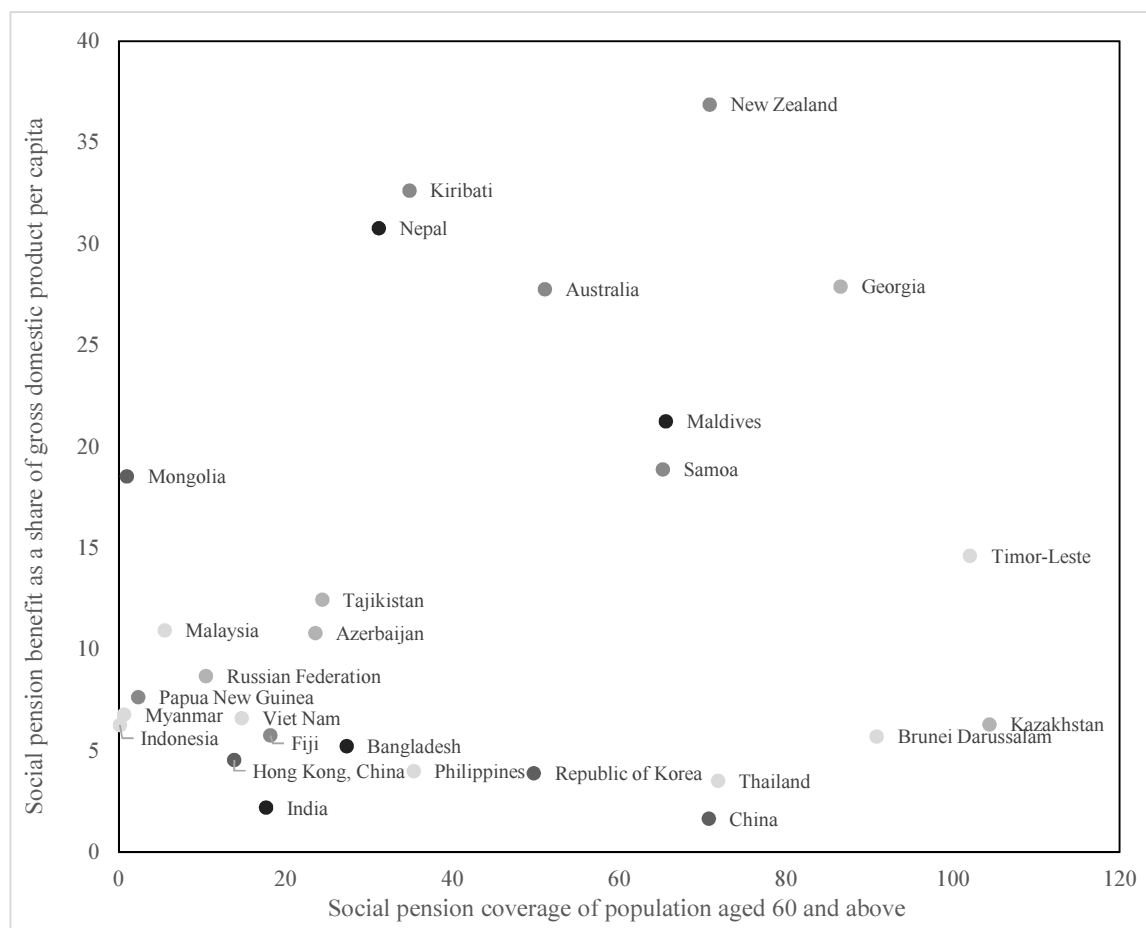
Source: HelpAge International, Social Pensions database. Available at www.pension-watch.net (accessed on 31 August 2018).

26. Without sufficient income security, many older persons must continue to work. However, they often face limited employment options and discrimination, work less hours because of deteriorating health and receive lower salaries. In 2014, 26 per cent of the population aged above 65 in Australia lived below the OECD poverty line (half the median household income of a country), twice the rate for the total population.[13] In the Republic of Korea, the old-age poverty rate in 2015, at 46 per cent, was more than three times higher than that for the overall population.

2. **Older persons are at risk of falling into poverty in the absence of comprehensive health-care reforms**

27. Life expectancies have increased across the region. However, healthy life expectancy has risen by a lesser extent; people are living longer, but spend a longer period of their lives with a disability. Women are more severely affected, tending to spend more years in old age with a disability than men. In Viet Nam, women aged 60 are expected to spend 6.3 years with impairments,
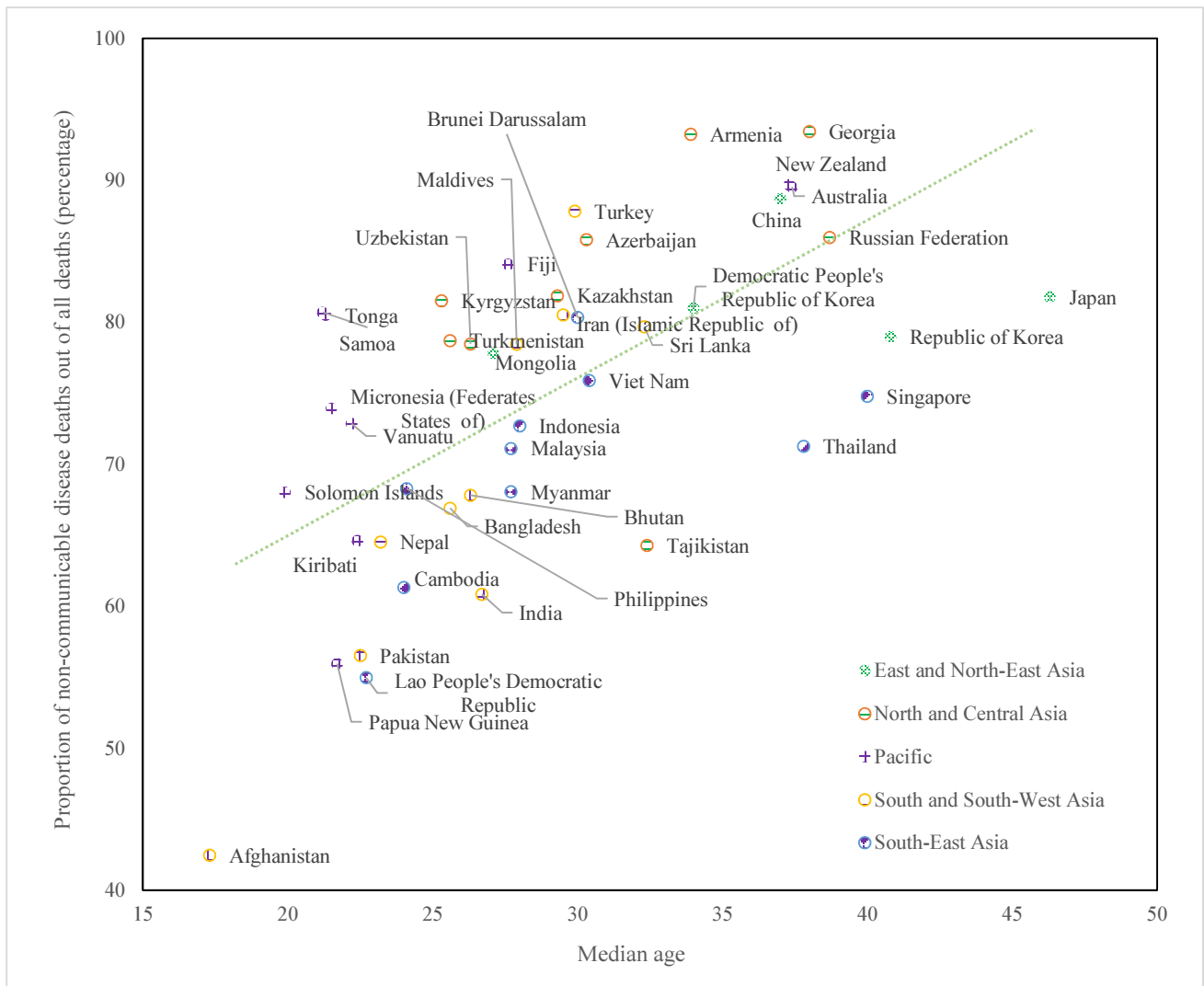
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[13] OECD, Poverty rate, OECD Data. Available at https://data.oecd.org/inequality/poverty-rate.htm (accessed on 31 August 2018).

compared to 4.5 years for men.[14] Within that context, harnessing technology and innovation is becoming increasingly critical to reducing inequalities and ensuring that those furthest behind are being reached. The use of information and communications technology to access health-care services by older persons living in rural areas is one example of innovation in service delivery. The increasing use of automated service delivery and artificial intelligence to dispense medication and check blood pressure for care to older persons is another.

28.   As populations age, a major factor contributing to higher incidence of old-age disability is the health transition from infectious to non-communicable diseases, such as cancer and diabetes. The relevance of that issue to ageing is reflected in higher non-communicable disease mortality in countries with higher median ages (figure VI). It is also an important concern for the region as a whole: in most countries, non-communicable disease deaths make up more than 50 per cent of all deaths, reaching above 80 per cent not only in the demographically older countries of Australia and the Russian Federation, but also in the countries with much younger populations, such as Kyrgyzstan and Samoa.

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[14]   WHO, Global Health Observatory data repository. Available at
http://apps.who.int/gho/data/?theme=main (accessed on 31 August 2018).

Figure VI
Proportion of non-communicable disease deaths out of all deaths and median age, 2015

29.   As the population of the region becomes older, demand for health-care services will increase. This is made difficult by already-high levels of out-of-pocket health expenditure, constituting more than 40 per cent of total health spending in 2015 for many countries, and reaching above 70 per cent in such countries as Armenia and Bangladesh.[15] Older persons are also more likely to experience unexpected catastrophic health spending: health expenses comprising such a large portion of a household's income that the household is pushed into poverty. In a WHO study, households with older persons were found to be more vulnerable to catastrophic health spending than households with no older persons (figure VII).

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[15]   WHO, Global Health Expenditure Database. Available at http://apps.who.int/nha/database (accessed on 31 August 2018).

Figure VII
Share of households with out-of-pocket health spending equal to or greater than 40 per cent of the household's capacity to pay, 2007–2010, selected countries
(Percentage)
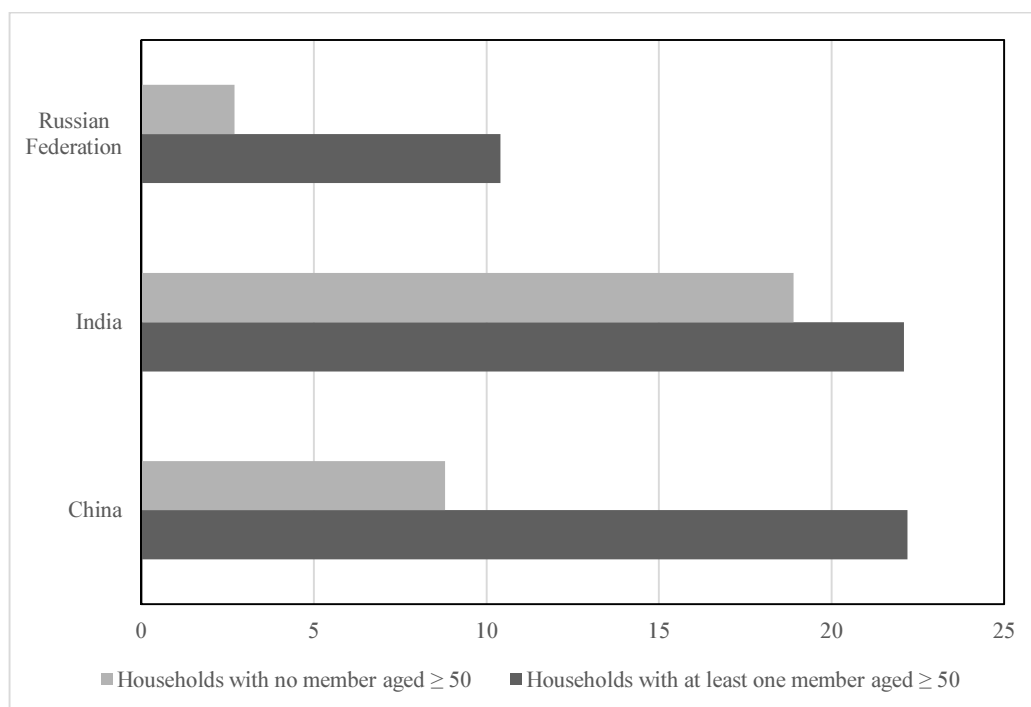
Source: WHO Study on global AGEing and adult health (SAGE), Wave 1. Available at www.who.int/healthinfo/sage/en/ (accessed on 31 August 2018).

30.   The trend of shrinking household sizes and increasing numbers of older persons living alone further amplifies that problem. With fewer or no family members close by, older persons increasingly must rely on care services. They also have lesser access to familial sources of financial support. Without sufficient public provision, including the provision of universal health coverage, and social protection, rising care expenses will increasingly become a source of financial burden for older persons, particularly women, who have longer life expectancies and are more likely to live alone for longer.

3.   Intersectional discrimination and disadvantage perpetuate already existing inequalities

31.   Population ageing is associated with broader social dynamics that could increase the risk of older persons facing social exclusion, poverty and poor health. Vulnerabilities linked to social markers of difference, such as gender, caste, and disability, are intensified in old age. In India, for example, it was found that for persons aged 50 and above, members of disadvantaged tribes and castes reported poorer health than those not belonging to such groups, while there was no difference across tribes and castes for individuals aged 18 to 49.

32.   Older persons also face discriminatory attitudes in the labour market, at home and even in health-care settings. Regarding health care, the perception that older persons are incapable of decision-making may result in them not being consulted on their preferences for care.

33. Older persons, particularly women, are at risk of facing violence and abuse. Abusive acts can be physical or psychological, and result in serious injuries, emotional distress and even death. When treatment is sought, damage incurred may have long-lasting detrimental effects; victims of elder abuse are two times more likely to die prematurely. Global estimates indicate that 16 per cent of individuals aged 60 and above were subjected to elder abuse in 2017. That statistic is likely to be underestimated, as many victims are unwilling or afraid to report cases of abuse. [16] Relevant and reliable data are of critical importance for designing appropriate policy responses to promote the rights and well-being of older persons.

B. Strategies and recommendations for action

34. Measures to address the vulnerabilities of older persons should be bolstered by a rights-based approach incorporating a gender perspective, secured through legislation and overarching national frameworks. Older persons should be involved in all phases of the process. Given the cross-cutting nature of those issues, national coordinating mechanisms may be necessary to advance a concerted effort from different government ministries, the private sector and civil society. Two national coordinating bodies in the region are the China National Committee on Ageing, comprising representatives from central and state departments and people's groups, and the Ageing Planning Office of Singapore, which oversees the planning and implementation of national ageing initiatives.

1. Enhancing social protection mechanisms and employment opportunities

35. Strengthening social protection ensures that older persons continue to have access to essential health care and enjoy income security through contributory and non-contributory social protection schemes.

36. Pensions should continue to be reviewed to increase the breadth and depth of coverage. Increasing contributions and raising the minimum retirement age is inevitable, although not popular, to keep pension systems sustainable. In the Russian Federation, individuals choosing to receive their pensions five or 10 years after reaching pension age attain increased benefit levels of up to more than 200 per cent.[17]

37. Improvements to non-contributory social pensions are especially relevant, given the high proportion of the population working in the informal sector. Categorical targeting is an option when resources are limited. For example, China has been expanding assistance to disadvantaged older persons living in rural areas. In Myanmar, a universal social pension scheme was recently introduced for citizens older than 90 years.

38. Enhancing labour-market mechanisms and employment programmes promote much needed decent work opportunities for older persons. Examples of those measures are eliminating age barriers, financially incentivizing employers to hire older workers and implementing age-friendly work arrangements. Training programmes also can be tailored to assist older persons in upgrading their skills and raising their employability. In Japan, the

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[16] WHO, "Elder abuse – fact sheet", 8 June 2018. Available at www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/elder-abuse.

[17] *Addressing the Challenges of Population Ageing in Asia and the Pacific: Implementation of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.17.II.F.17).

Government-supported Silver Human Resource Centers serve as community-based employment agencies for older persons, arranging temporary work opportunities and providing skills training and job interview coaching in partnership with the private sector.[18]

2. Strengthening health and long-term care

39.　Countries should bolster health-care systems and enhance infrastructure for long-term care through, for example, ensuring universal health coverage by enhancing the coverage, making good quality public care systems accessible and affordable, training professionals in gerontology and geriatrics, and focusing on disease prevention and healthy ageing. When universal health care is not available, subsidized or free public health care could be targeted for older persons.

40.　Countries should consider changing how care is delivered to older persons, focusing on the individual and providing a continuum of care. In the integrated community care system in Japan, the needs and schedules of older persons are overseen by a manager. Care is centred on one's own residence, and managers arrange home-based services and coordinate transfers between facilities in the community, as necessary.

3. Combating elder abuse and violence

41.　Specific provisions protecting older persons should be specified in legislation on their rights, including in laws on domestic violence. Operationally, institutional mechanisms are needed for older persons to report cases of abuse safely and confidentially. In addition, support arrangements should be made available to help victims of abuse recover from their circumstances. Public education campaigns can be useful for raising awareness in that regard.

42.　Some related actions in the region are the establishment of the Aged Care Complaints Commissioner in Australia, which handles reported grievances and advises on the protection and rights of older persons in those situations, and the provision of professional counselling, including family counselling, and shelter to victims of elder abuse in the Republic of Korea. [19]

IV. International migrants

A. Key trends and challenges

43.　The Asia-Pacific region is an important source and destination for international migration. As of 2017, about 102 million people from the region lived outside their countries of birth, while the countries of the region hosted more than 62 million migrants. In particular, migrants from South and South-West Asia, and South-East Asia had been increasing and the number of migrants from North and Central Asia remained constant (figure VIII). More

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[18] International Longevity Center Japan, "Japan's Silver Human Resources Centers: undertaking an increasingly diverse range of work". Available at http://longevity.ilcjapan.org/f_issues/0702.html (accessed on 31 August 2018).

[19] *Addressing the Challenges of Population Ageing in Asia and the Pacific.*

than 52 per cent of migrants from the Asia-Pacific region lived in developing or least-developed countries.[20, 21]

Figure VIII
Migrants in Asia and the Pacific, 1990–2017
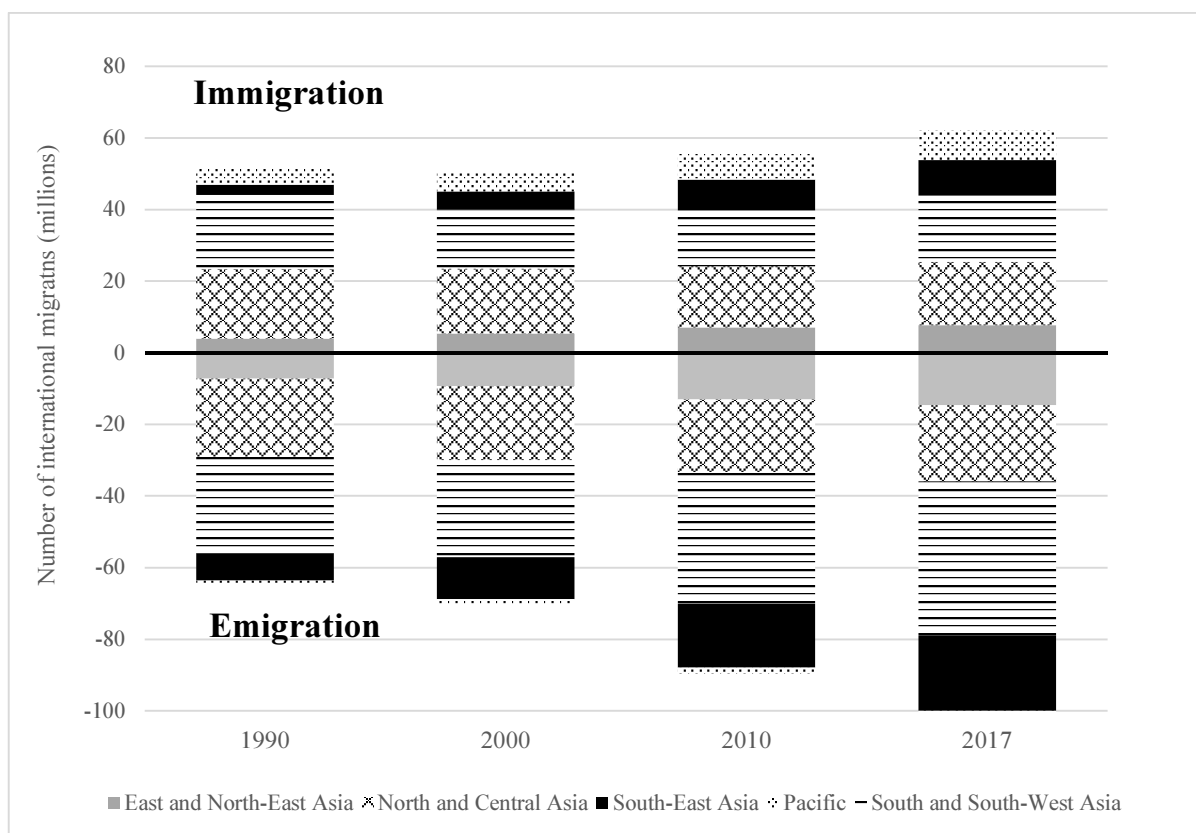
Source: ESCAP calculations based on United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, *Trends in International Migrant Stock: the 2017 Revision.*

44.   People migrate for many reasons, including to seek protection or opportunities. Most migrants from Asia and the Pacific are looking for employment opportunities usually in other developing countries in the region or in the oil-producing countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council.

1.   International migrants may face many vulnerabilities

45.   Migration reshapes economies and societies in countries of origin and destination. In 2017, the Asia-Pacific countries received almost $284 billion in remittances, which helped migrant households cover living expenses, such as food, housing and health care. In general, remittances are used to fund better quality education, repay debt and diversify incomes, as well as to help to raise living standards above subsistence and vulnerability levels and thereby reduce poverty. Migrants also make important contributions in countries of destination

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[20]   *Towards Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration in the Asia-Pacific Region: Challenges and Opportunities* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.18.II.F.3).

[21]   *Sustainable Social Development in Asia and the Pacific: Towards a People-Centred Transformation* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.17.II.F.15).

by filling jobs not wanted by national workers or for which they lack necessary skills.

46. Despite their contributions in countries of origin and destination, migrants remain a group at risk of being left behind. Laws, policies and practices in Asia and the Pacific, or the lack thereof, often put migrants at a disadvantage. For example, women migrants are often employed as domestic workers, making them particularly vulnerable because their workplace is often isolated, and the sector is usually not covered by labour regulations.[22] Lower-skilled temporary migrant workers, the predominate group of migrants in South Asia, are another example of migrants who are vulnerable to rights violations, given their temporary status and lower skill levels.[23]

47. A considerable proportion of international migration within and from the Asia-Pacific region is irregular, which also plays a role in marginalizing migrants. Data on such migrants are inherently difficult to capture, but indicative figures exist. For example, according to a survey of experts in the Russian Federation, the country had at least three million irregular migrants in 2010.[24] A survey of returned migrant workers from Cambodia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Myanmar and Viet Nam indicated that more than 70 per cent of them had migrated through irregular channels.[25]

2. International labour migrants face barriers to obtaining decent work

48. The conditions under which people migrate in the region play an important role in increasing their vulnerabilities. Migrant workers tend to be employed in low-status and low-skilled occupations. For example, of the more than 1.4 million migrant workers from South-East Asian countries in Thailand in 2016, more than 1.3 million were classified as engaging in elementary occupations,[26] while more than 300,000 of the almost 750,000 migrant workers deployed from Bangladesh in 2016 were classified as unskilled.[27]

49. The low status attached to the work of those migrants means that regular migration schemes are limited and often have restrictive conditions, such as limitations on the sectors in which migrants can work, restricted labour-market mobility, limited access to social protection, and restrictions on family migration and long-term settlement. Many migrant women employed in domestic work face further limitations, as several countries explicitly exclude domestic work from labour laws and apply additional requirements, such as living with their employers.

50. Restrictions may be implicit; for example, exclusion of migrants from social protection systems may be the result of conditions requiring minimum contribution periods or requirements that benefits be paid in the countries in

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[22] *Towards Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration in the Asia-Pacific Region.*

[23] ESCAP, *Situation Report on International Migration in South and South-West Asia* (ST/ESCAP/2622).

[24] Sergey V. Ryazantsev, "The Role of Labour Migration in the Development of the Economy of the Russian Federation", Facilitating Migration Management in North and Central Asia Working Paper, No. 1 (Bangkok, ESCAP, 2016).

[25] ILO and International Organization for Migration (IOM), *Risks and Rewards: Outcomes of Labour Migration in South-East Asia* (Bangkok, 2017).

[26] ILO, ASEAN Labour Migration Statistics, International Labour Migration Statistics Database of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations. Available at http://apmigration.ilo.org/asean-labour-migration-statistics.

[27] *Towards Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration in the Asia-Pacific Region.*

which they were accrued. They may also be exacerbated by practical factors, such as physical isolation of migrants on construction sites, homes or agricultural farms, which are difficult for labour inspectors to access, and language barriers, which limit interactions with authorities.

51.   Bureaucratic procedures required by many labour migration schemes impose costs on migrants, which may require them to secure loans to fund migration, or incentivize migrants to remain in conditions that are exploitative. For example, surveys of Indian and Filipino migrants to Saudi Arabia have found that the cost to them to migrate is, on average, $803. The involvement of private agencies in recruitment inflates those costs: migrants in Malaysia, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates from Asian countries who had used an agent in 2015 paid, on average, about $440 more than those who had not.[28]

3.   Intersectional discrimination and disadvantage perpetuate existing inequalities

52.   The gendered segmentation of work in countries of destination often downplays the importance of women's work, while policies and social norms in countries of origin have led to restrictions on women's migration. As a result, many women migrate irregularly and work informally.

53.   Victims of human trafficking, asylum seekers, refugees, unaccompanied migrant children and labour migrants often form part of the mixed flows of irregular migrants. Those groups have specific vulnerabilities and protection needs, and their mixed composition and unclear status adds complexity. As a result, many of them fall into protection gaps.[29]

54.   Irregular migrants often face exacerbated vulnerabilities, especially those involved in mixed flows, as they face heightened risks during migration. It is estimated that 380 migrants died in transit in Asia and the Pacific between July 2017 and July 2018.[30] In countries of destination, unscrupulous employers may make use of their irregular situation to exploit them, knowing that they are unlikely to alert authorities.

55.   Underpinning those difficulties is xenophobia. Hostile media coverage of migration and migrants reflects and shapes attitudes towards migrants. In a study conducted in 2015, it was found that coverage of migration was more likely to be unfavourable, with media in key countries of destination, such as Malaysia and Thailand, as it focuses on irregular migration and often frames migration in terms of security.[31]

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[28] ESCAP calculations based on World Bank, World – KNOMAD - ILO Migration Costs Surveys 2016. Available at http://microdata.worldbank.org/index.php/catalog/2944 (accessed on 31 August 2018).

[29] *Towards Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration in the Asia-Pacific Region.*

[30] IOM, "Map tracking migrant deaths and disappearances" (n.d.). Available at https://gmdac.iom.int/map-tracking-migrant-deaths-and-disappearances.

[31] Marie McAuliffe, Warren Weeks and Khalid Koser, "Media and migration: comparative analysis of print and online media reporting on migrants and migration in selected countries (phase II)", Occasional Paper Series, No. 17/2015 (Belconnen, Department of Immigration and Border Protection, Australia, 2015). Available at www.homeaffairs.gov.au/ReportsandPublications/Documents/research/mcauliffe-weeks-koser.pdf.

56.   Migrant status, therefore, often constitutes a disadvantage throughout the region; when it intersects with other disadvantages, such as gender, disability or age, it can be a compounding factor, heightening existing risks of vulnerability and marginalization.

B.   Strategies and recommendations for action

1.   Enhancing national and subregional initiatives to ensure safe, orderly and regular migration

57.   In the 2030 Agenda, Member States have committed themselves to cooperate internationally to ensure safe, orderly and regular migration involving full respect for human rights and the humane treatment of migrants regardless of migration status. Such an approach rests on principles and rights laid out in conventions that deal with, for example, international human rights, labour or transnational organized crime. Those include respect for the sovereign right of States to determine their national migration policy and their prerogative to govern migration within their jurisdiction, in conformity with international law;[32] non-discrimination and recognition that migrants are rights holders regardless of their migration status; gender-responsiveness; addressing the needs of migrants in vulnerable situations; and providing access to services and decent work.

58.   Bilaterally, countries of destination have entered into memorandums of understanding along key migration corridors to regulate migration. For example, the Republic of Korea, Malaysia and Thailand have entered into bilateral agreements with Bangladesh, Cambodia and Myanmar to regulate labour migration flows. The country of origin in the region with the most bilateral agreements is the Philippines.[33] Countries of origin have also adopted laws and developed instructions to provide support and services to migrants throughout the migration cycle. Indonesia, Nepal and the Philippines, for example, have extensive pre-departure training programmes that help migrants transition into the labour markets and societies of countries of destination and maximize the benefits of their overseas employment.[34] Countries of destination have adopted laws and policies to ensure the protection of migrants across different dimensions, such as employment protection, access to health care and education. The Republic of Korea and Singapore, for example, have policies in place to protect migrant workers during employment.[35]

59.   Many countries have also launched subregional initiatives, ranging from informal dialogues, which are intended to promote a common understanding of shared migration issues, to formal regional cooperation initiatives. The founding treaty of the Eurasian Economic Union, a political and economic union comprised of the following countries in North and Central Asia: Armenia; Belarus; Kazakhstan; Kyrgyzstan; and the Russian Federation, contains provisions for free movement of labour between member States, and includes guarantees of access to social protection for migrants and members of

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[32] See A/CONF.231/3, annex.

[33] ILO, "Bilateral agreements and regional cooperation" (n.d.). Available at www.ilo.org/asia/areas/labour-migration/WCMS_226300/lang--en/index.htm.

[34] Maruja M.B. Asis and Dovelyn Rannveig Agunias, "Strengthening pre-departure orientation programmes in Indonesia, Nepal and the Philippines", Issue in Brief, No. 5 (Bangkok and Washington D.C., IOM, 2012).

[35] Asian Development Bank Institute, ILO and OECD, *Labor Migration in Asia: Building Effective Institutions* (Tokyo, Bangkok and Paris, 2016). Available at www.adb.org/sites/default/files/publication/178966/adbi-labor-migration-asia.pdf.

their families; also in the treaty, member States have committed to adopting an agreement regulating pensions for migrant workers within the Union.

2.   Implementing the principles of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration

60.   In September 2016, the General Assembly adopted the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants in which Member States committed to launching a process of intergovernmental negotiations leading to the adoption of a global compact for safe, orderly and regular migration at an intergovernmental conference to be held in 2018. Implementing the global compact will provide an opportunity for Member States to reinforce the benefits of migration and to deal with its challenges through cooperation based on a comprehensive approach to migration founded on a common understanding and respect for the human rights of migrants.

61.   In support of the stocktaking phase of the global compact process, ESCAP, in collaboration with United Nations partners, organized the Asia-Pacific Regional Preparatory Meeting for the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration in Bangkok from 6 to 8 November 2017.[36] Participants at the Meeting highlighted the perspectives and priorities of the Asia-Pacific region for the global compact and made many recommendations. They also proposed that existing regional intergovernmental processes be used for follow-up and review of the global compact, including through the regional economic commissions of the United Nations.

62.   As part of the 2030 Agenda and the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, Member States have called for disaggregation of data by migratory status to facilitate a comparative assessment of outcomes related to relevant Sustainable Development Goals. Evidence-based policies and programmes require timely, comparable and disaggregated data for all countries in the world. Disaggregation by migratory status is particularly relevant for the goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda that refer to persons in vulnerable situations.

63.   The finalized text of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration was agreed by the General Assembly in New York on 13 July 2018. It contains 23 principles (see box 1). The regional economic commissions are mandated to review the implementation of the Global Compact within their respective regions, beginning in 2020, alternating with discussions at the global level at four-year intervals, in order to effectively inform each edition of the International Migration Review Forum, with the participation of all relevant stakeholders.[37]

64.   Under Sustainable Development Goal 10, the global community is called on to facilitate orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people, including through planned and well-managed migration policies. The Global Compact will be key to achieving this goal and the broader agenda of achieving sustainable development. By implementing the objectives of the Global Compact in partnership with civil society, the private sector and migrants, Member States will be able to address the vulnerabilities that migrants face. Measures may be considered at national, bilateral and regional levels to address key issues, such as increasing regular pathways for migration for migrant workers reflecting demographic and labour-market conditions;

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[36]   For the Chair's summary, see ESCAP/74/21/Add.1.

[37]   See www.un.org/pga/72/wp-content/uploads/sites/51/2018/07/migration.pdf.

addressing high recruitment costs and unethical practices; strengthening access to and the portability of social protection; and ensuring the full and equal coverage of all migrant workers, especially women migrant workers, under labour laws.

Box 1
Objectives for safe, orderly and regular migration

(1)   Collect and utilize accurate and disaggregated data as a basis for evidence-based policies

(2)   Minimize the adverse drivers and structural factors that compel people to leave their country of origin

(3)   Provide accurate and timely information at all stages of migration

(4)   Ensure that all migrants have proof of legal identity and adequate documentation

(5)   Enhance availability and flexibility of pathways for regular migration

(6)   Facilitate fair and ethical recruitment and safeguard conditions that ensure decent work

(7)   Address and reduce vulnerabilities in migration

(8)   Save lives and establish coordinated international efforts on missing migrants

(9)   Strengthen the transnational response to smuggling of migrants

(10) Prevent, combat and eradicate trafficking in persons in the context of international migration

(11) Manage borders in an integrated, secure and coordinated manner

(12) Strengthen certainty and predictability in migration procedures for appropriate screening, assessment and referral

(13) Use migration detention only as a measure of last resort and work towards alternatives

(14) Enhance consular protection, assistance and cooperation throughout the migration cycle

(15) Provide access to basic services for migrants

(16) Empower migrants and societies to realize full inclusion and social cohesion

(17) Eliminate all forms of discrimination and promote evidence-based public discourse to shape perceptions of migration

(18) Invest in skills development and facilitate mutual recognition of skills, qualifications and competencies

(19) Create conditions for migrants and diasporas to fully contribute to sustainable development in all countries

(20) Promote faster, safer and cheaper transfer of remittances and foster financial inclusion of migrants

(21) Cooperate in facilitating safe and dignified return and readmission, as well as sustainable reintegration

(22) Establish mechanisms for the portability of social security entitlements and earned benefits

(23) Strengthen international cooperation and global partnerships for safe, orderly and regular migration

V. Conclusion

65. The clarion call to leave no one behind is at the heart of the 2030 Agenda, which means that to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, countries must ensure that their policies and programmes are designed to help the most vulnerable and marginalized groups, such as persons with disabilities, older persons and international migrants, realize an adequate standard of living.

66. In the present report, it is shown how intersectional discrimination and disadvantages perpetuate already existing inequalities. The inequalities and vulnerabilities found among persons with disabilities, older persons and migrants are not inevitable. In fact, most of those vulnerabilities result from a wide array of disempowering barriers, which, in turn, lead to poverty and social exclusion.

67. Those barriers can be lifted. In the 2030 Agenda, Member States recognized that people who are vulnerable must be empowered. As each of the groups discussed in this report face particular barriers, strategies and recommendations to empower them have been included in each of the preceding sections. The recommendations below address common concerns that should be considered within a broader policy landscape with a view to empowering all persons who have been, or who are at risk of being, left behind.

68. The Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing, 2002, and the Incheon Strategy are strong normative frameworks in which the priority actions to respect, protect and promote the human rights of older persons and persons with disabilities are spelled out. Older persons and persons with disabilities often live in vulnerable situations and face intersectional discrimination that contribute towards deepening and widening the divide among population groups in Asia and the Pacific. Those frameworks offer – when implemented in concert with legal frameworks, such as the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and other existing normative frameworks – promising social development strategies for policy action at national and local levels. The Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, to be formalized in December 2018, has the same potential to help migrants realize an adequate standard of living.

69. Universal social protection is a powerful development policy tool, which can be used to alleviate poverty, inequality and social exclusion. In Sustainable Development Goal target 1.3, Member States stress the role of social protection in ending poverty in all its forms, and seek the implementation of nationally appropriate social protection systems and measures for all, including floors, and by 2030 achieve substantial coverage of the poor and the vulnerable.

70. Few countries have been able to reduce poverty and improve living conditions on a broad scale without having comprehensive social protection systems in place. To promote inclusion, social protection systems must be sensitive to the needs of the population groups that are at the highest risk of poverty including, but not limited to, persons with disabilities, older persons and international migrants in vulnerable situations.

71. Given the critical role social protection plays in reducing poverty, inequality and exclusion, there are great opportunities for the countries in Asia and the Pacific to strengthen regional cooperation to bolster the development of comprehensive social protection systems in support of vulnerable and disadvantaged population groups.

72. Technology is recognized throughout the 2030 Agenda as a key enabler for development, including across the social dimension. Technology and innovation can be harnessed to reduce inequalities by helping to identify and bridge gaps in service provision and thereby reach the most marginalized members of society.

73. Differential access to technology can exacerbate inequalities. To facilitate meaningful and tangible changes, it is essential that a social dimension be integrated into technology-related policies, so that they contribute to the reduction of inequalities. A broadening of such successful development and application of technologies requires thorough research based on the context and needs, using a collection and analysis of disaggregated data.

74. In the absence of data that are relevant, reliable, high-quality and timely, individuals and groups in vulnerable situations are rendered invisible. Data and statistics disaggregated by population groups are essential for designing and implementing socially inclusive policies and programmes.

75. Strategic implementation of the 2030 Agenda is contingent on the collection, analysis and dissemination of good-quality, timely and reliable quantitative and qualitative data, disaggregated by, at a minimum, sex, age and geographic location. Such data are needed to take the first step in making informed policy decisions that place the rights and needs of vulnerable individuals and groups on the map of national social policies.

76. Understanding the situation of vulnerable groups is often challenging; because they are marginalized, it is often difficult to reach them through regular means, such as censuses and household surveys. In addition, many people in those groups are suspicious of official initiatives and hard to locate. Using big data may provide alternative means of finding out about the size and challenges faced by members of those groups, ensuring that safeguards to maintain privacy and confidentiality are maintained.

77. Only with relevant, reliable, high-quality and timely data will it be possible to develop tailored interventions to ensure that no one will be left behind, and that those furthest behind are reached first.

VI. Considerations for the Committee

78. In view of the progress made and the issues presented in this document relating to the objective of leaving no one behind, the Committee on Social Development may wish to take note of the present document, in particular with respect to policy issues and related recommendations, and provide the secretariat with guidance, including on the following:

(a) Modalities for strengthening collaboration mechanisms at the national and regional levels towards increasingly inclusive and sustainable development efforts for the benefit of particularly vulnerable groups at risk of being left behind;

(b) Effective social protection measures in support of vulnerable and disadvantaged groups;

(c) Prioritization of the systematic collection of relevant, reliable, high-quality and timely data on vulnerable groups;

(d) Suggestions for future research, policy support and capacity-building needs.

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