

8th Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development

23-26 March 2021, Bangkok, Thailand

Virtual

Report of Roundtable on SDG 8 on Decent Work and Economic Growth



1. **Main moderator:** Sara Elder
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1. Feedback received on the content of the goal profile during the Q&A sessions

- With regard to target 8.7, continued progress has been made with the ratification of fundamental ILO Conventions. Universal ratification of the Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No. 182) was achieved in 2020 when ratifications came through in the last remaining Asia-Pacific countries. Alliance 8.7, the global partnership on SDG target 8.7, is increasingly active in the region with the Pathfinder Countries – Fiji, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Viet Nam - taking on leadership roles both regionally and globally. With the COVID-19 pandemic posing a real risk of reversing decades of progress in the elimination of child labour, the 2021 UN Year on the Elimination of Child Labour is an opportune moment to continue efforts on the elimination of child labour in the region and to highlight some of the impacts of the pandemic on children.

2. Policy recommendations on priority for action to make further progress on SDG 8 in Asia and the Pacific

The round table on Sustainable Development Goal 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) highlighted several recommendations for advancing progress on this SDG in Asia and the Pacific.

1. Be inclusive in setting and strengthening the institutional mechanisms for decent work-led sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth. Given its breadth, making progress on SDG 8 necessitates the integrated planning of a broad array of actors including ministries of economy, environment and labour, local governments, trade unions, employers' organizations, and the private sector, international organizations, non-governmental organizations, and civil society. A particular emphasis should be made to ensure that also the voices of marginalized groups are included in the decision-making process. Gender-responsive economic stimulus packages and other economic support should target not only big business but also be channeled to self-employed workers and affected employees, including in the informal sector, and to small and medium enterprises (SMEs) who underpin the economy in Asia and the Pacific. Specific attention should be aimed at sectors such as manufacturing, tourism, and hospitality, which have been particularly vulnerable to the economic consequences of the COVID-19 crisis.
2. Strengthen labour market institutions for effective and inclusive labour market governance. Key labour market institutions (LMIs) include legislation and regulations on employment and social protection, freedom of association, anti-discrimination, occupational safety and health, unacceptable forms of work, minimum wages, and collective bargaining. These LMIs, when properly enforced, are critical to supporting recovery from the current COVID-19 crisis and serve as the basis for the achievement of SDG 8 and also interlinked Goals such as the eradication of poverty (SDG 1), achieving gender equality (SDG 5), reducing inequalities (SDG 10), climate action (SDG 13) and promoting just institutions (SDG 16). Special consideration is needed to extend the reach of labour rights and promote safe and secure working environments for vulnerable groups, such as women, youth, persons with disabilities, home-based workers, and migrant workers. Governments in countries of destination and countries of origin as well as employers and hiring agencies should provide all migrant populations, irrespective of their migration status, the full protection of their human rights during the COVID-19 crisis and beyond, without prejudice and discrimination and in compliance with international law and relevant UN and ILO Conventions. Particular focus is warranted on the promotion and ratification of: Migration for Employment Convention (Revised), 1949 (No. 97), Migrant Workers (Supplementary Provisions) Convention, 1975 (No. 143), and Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189). Also related to strengthening institutions is the call to increase the capacity of national statistics offices to ensure regular collection of regular labour force surveys, or other household surveys needed to monitor decent work and inclusive growth, with adequate disaggregation for monitoring SDG indicators as applicable to all target groups.

3. Accelerate occupational safety and health as a fundamental labour right. The COVID-19 pandemic has magnified the importance of proactive occupational safety and health (OSH) preventive measures. Upgraded OSH measures and renewed commitment for protecting all workers, including informal workers, migrant workers, and frontline health care providers, from future pandemic and emerging OSH hazards and risks are required. Governments, workers' and employers' organizations and civil society organizations must work together to ensure the activation of prevention and mitigation strategies in outbreak areas with inadequate resources, such as in informal settlements of migrant populations. Collaborative interventions should include the provision of essential emergency needs such as food, medical treatment, and water sanitation and hygiene (WASH), including sanitary products as well as consideration for the provision of flexible working arrangements, paid leave, and housing.

4. Step up investments in human capital to provide all people the opportunities to realize their full potential throughout the lifecycle. While education for all, lifelong learning and building technical and core skills are themes featured under SDG 4, they also serve as key input to human development as well as the decent work and economic growth outcomes of a country. The pandemic has elevated the importance of inclusive reskilling, especially for workers in impacted sectors like tourism and manufacturing who could be trained for future growth sectors. What is more, the crisis has laid bare the situation of youth not in employment, education, or training (NEET) as well as the persistent inequality in education and training systems throughout the region linked to the digital divide. For this reason, and in the context of rapid technological advances, progress in SDG 8 will necessitate increasing investments in people's capabilities and strengthening formal and non-formal education and training capacities with particular attention to boosting capabilities within vulnerable populations including women. This can include a universal entitlement to lifelong learning that enables people to acquire market-relevant skills and to reskill and upskill, while also increasing investment in the institutions, policies, and strategies for delivery of labour market programmes and employment services that will support people to navigate the increasing number of labour market transitions over the course of their lives.

5. Progressive policy reforms through social dialogue are required to promote a "just transition" towards environmentally sustainable economies and societies for all. With economic prosperity and social progress in the region threatened by environmental degradation and climate change, there is an urgency to act on climate change. The transition to a low greenhouse gas economy is expected to lead to a net creation of jobs, including green jobs. Substantial progress can be made to reduce the global material footprint through greater resource efficiency in the key sectors of agriculture, food, construction, and infrastructure. Reversing the increased rate of material extraction requires an adoption of a new economic model that decouples economic growth from environmental degradation. To achieve a positive impact at the required scale, decoupling needs to be at the heart of national economic planning. Green and inclusive policies should therefore be integral to COVID-19 socio-economic recovery plans and stimulus packages. This may require technical, legal, and financial assistance and the implementation of public industrial policies in support of the transition to low greenhouse gas economies, with increased levels of research, innovation, and enhanced social, environmental,

and economic sustainability. As more countries are encouraged to adopt broad and comprehensive policy frameworks on the green economy, attention will need to focus on implementation especially in view of ensuring that no one is left behind in the transition process.

6. Design coherent and integrated strategies to ensure the dignity of work for all, including for informal workers and those in precarious employment. Certain countries in the region have initiated strategies to formalize the informal economy in line with the ILO Transition from the Informal to the Formal Economy Recommendation, 2015 (No. 204), adopted by the International Labour Conference in 2015. The guidelines of R.204 highlight the formulation of appropriate macroeconomic and skills policies; simplified registration procedures; extended scope of, and compliance with, labour laws; improved access to credit; and offering incentives, such as tax incentives, and extending social protection coverage to all categories of workers, including migrant and domestic workers. Technological advances and the growing digital economy demand the further extension of digital infrastructure, social protection, and regulation of new forms of work that have the potential to erode the quality of jobs for an increasing number of workers. More immediately, as part of their short- and longer-term COVID-19 recovery, companies must include gender-sensitive measures to ensure that women are not left behind in the workplace and across their entire value chains at a challenging time. The Women's Empowerment Principles, established by UN Women and the UN Global Compact since 2010, provide guidance and tools for companies that are committed to this agenda.

7. Develop and implement frameworks to recognize, reduce, and redistribute unpaid and underpaid care work, advance equal pay and enhance public investment in care infrastructure. There is an opportunity to professionalize and create secure and decent work opportunities in the care economy in the region. This can be accomplished by creating women-led/owned enterprises in care work and supporting the transition of care workers from informal to the formal economy through training, education, and certification. To remove barriers that prevent women's labour force participation and free more women up to work for pay requires: promoting gender-just skills training; expanding affordable childcare; ensuring safe public spaces, transport and workplace facilities; sharing unpaid work more equally between men and women through, for instance, policies promoting parental leave and flexible working; deploying digital technologies; and, most importantly, creating incentives to shift social norms that perpetuate women and girl's roles as family caregivers towards shared responsibilities between women and men. Also linked to Goal 8 and the aim for inclusive growth is the call for accelerated action to put in place and enforce equal pay with gender-based anti-discrimination legislation, including pay transparency measures. Particular focus is warranted on the promotion and ratification of the Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 (No. 190) and the Violence and Harassment Recommendation, 2019 (No. 206).