



Asia-Europe Meeting

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

*(Co-sponsored by Australia, China, Denmark, Finland, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Norway
and Viet Nam)*

BACKGROUND

The year 2020 marks the 75th year of the Charter of the United Nations, the first international agreement to affirm the principle of equality between women and men and the 25th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, a historic roadmap that envisioned a world where each woman and girl can exercise her choices. This year was intended to be a pivotal and ground-breaking year for the accelerated realisation of gender equality and women's empowerment everywhere.

Despite clear economic and social imperative for women's economic empowerment with remarkable progress on women's rights and leadership, the gains are far from complete and consistent. According to the United Nations, gender gaps cost the global economy around 15 percent of total GDP every year, with the digital divide remains a gendered one. Furthermore, the rapid spread of the COVID-19 pandemic so far has caused more social and economic impacts on women's livelihood than on men's, as women are exposed to persistent and profound gender inequalities which put them at greater risks of infection and economic insecurity.

Despite the pandemic's unparalleled impacts, putting women and girls at the centre of economies will result in a more rapid socio-economic recovery and achievement of the relevant Sustainable Development Goals. Reports from the International Labour Organization indicate that increasing women's economic and financial resilience can be a key factor in ensuring more comprehensive distribution of the benefits of economic growth. According to the United Nations, gender-responsive economic and social policies and recovery plans are crucial to building more equal, inclusive and sustainable economies and societies, during and after the COVID-19 crisis.

In such an uncertain and unprecedented time, enhanced regional and international cooperation in addressing the well-being of women and girls are more essential than ever before. At the 12th ASEM Summit (Brussels, 10/2018), as well as in the Vilnius Declaration of the "1st ASEM Conference on Women's Economic Empowerment: Creating Equal Opportunities in the World of Work" (Vilnius, Lithuania, 5/2017), ASEM members reiterated that gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls are crucial to sustainable development and must be mainstreamed in all three pillars of ASEM. ASEM members also stressed the need to implement comprehensive and gender-responsive measures, strengthen actions to involve women's participation in all stages of decision-making process and mainstream a gender perspective in the COVID-19 response and recovery.

In response to these commitments, Viet Nam's initiative on "ASEM High-Level Dialogue on Women's Economic Empowerment Amid the COVID-19 Pandemic" provides a platform for ASEM members to promote regional and inter-regional cooperation on women's economic empowerment and inclusive growth in the digital age, as well as rebuilding more equal, inclusive and resilient societies in the post-pandemic recovery. The event will also highlight the connectivity between Asia and Europe in tackling prevailing gender bias related to economic and social inclusion by putting women at the centre, and enhance ASEM's effectiveness, relevance and in-depthness in the third decade of development.

DESCRIPTION

In order to engage both Asia and Europe in our concerted effort and bold action to ensure women's economic empowerment and capacity building, as well as equal representation in COVID-19 response planning and decision making, the "ASEM High-Level Dialogue on Women's Economic Empowerment Amid the COVID-19 Pandemic" will consist of a hybrid-format event over the course of two half-days, to facilitate exchanges of views and experiences among policy makers and multistakeholders.

OBJECTIVES

- To acknowledge the importance of women's economic empowerment and gender equality in the current global situation, in order to identify the policies needed and provide recommendations at national, regional and global level to prioritise equal and meaningful involvement and representation of women in decision-making processes, with regards to COVID-19 responses, relief and recovery.
- To broaden and deepen Asia - Europe cooperation in promoting post-pandemic economic recovery measures and placing women's economic empowerment at the heart of pandemic response plans.
- To promote global partnership, regional and inter-regional cooperation on sharing best practices and experiences among ASEM members and relevant institutions in tackling the COVID-19 global crisis, and to foster ASEM cooperation in overcoming the severe consequences brought on by the pandemic.
- To raise awareness for politicians, researchers, experts, media and society on the importance of outlining immediate and long-term recovery efforts, by placing the inclusion, representation and equality of women and girls at the centre of COVID-19 response planning and decision-making, with regards to a more resilient and equal future.

EXPECTED PARTICIPANTS

The High-Level Dialogue is expected to attract approximately 200 online and offline participants, including government officials, senior policy-makers, researchers, practitioners, entrepreneurs and representatives from private sectors, universities and related regional and international institutions in Asia and Europe and other stakeholders.

EXPECTED RESULTS

The outcome of the event will be presented at the 13th ASEM Summit (2021), the 8th ASEM Education Ministers' Meeting (tba), as well as the 6th ASEM Labour and Employment Ministers' Conference (tba), and the 8th ASEM Economic Ministers' Meeting (tba).

CO-SPONSORS

ASEM members are invited to co-sponsor the initiative. Co-sponsors will be responsible for assigning chairs/speakers, giving comments on the concept paper, provisional agenda and the tentative program as well as coordinating with the host in inviting the guest speakers. Any contributions either in cash or in-kind, on a voluntary basis, are mostly welcomed.

COSTS

Viet Nam, as the host, will cover organising costs. Further information on both online and offline participation will be sent out in due course.

CONTACT DETAILS

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