

# Chapter 8

## Engendering ASEAN Economic Community

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## 8.

# Engendering the ASEAN Economic Community

Mia Mikic

## 1. Introduction

The notion that gender equality and women's economic empowerment (WEE) are not just ethically right but also economically smart has been supported by empirical evidence that shows how much economic potential is lost if gender inequality persists (World Bank Group, 2012 and 2023; WEF, 2017; McKinsey & Company, 2015; amongst others). For Southeast Asia another calculation estimates that, if gender inequality were eliminated, the region could boost their collective gross domestic product by \$370 billion<sup>1</sup> a year by 2025 (McKinsey & Company, 2018). These organisations argue that empowering women leads to broader economic benefits, such as increased productivity, economic diversification, and improved income equality. Despite such compelling evidence and widespread advocacy, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Economic Community (AEC) still does not include specific key measures related to WEE that are obviously instrumental to deliver overall economic objectives (ASEAN, n.d.a). Whilst some indicators linked to economic activities across ASEAN Member States (AMS) show relatively good performance, there are still significant gender gaps in employment, income, and in particular, leadership positions, suggesting that WEE is still far from being realised.

The AMS individually and collectively have been active, however, and have responded to the challenge of addressing gender inequality.<sup>2</sup> At the national and whole-community level there have been many documents, declarations, and strategies adopted that reference gender equality.<sup>3</sup> In the post-2015 era, the 2017 Action Agenda on Mainstreaming Women's Economic Empowerment (ASEAN, 2017a) aimed to encourage greater gender-responsiveness throughout the AEC and to encourage AMS to mainstream

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<sup>1</sup> In this chapter, \$ refers to United States dollar.

<sup>2</sup> On gender equality ASEAN also collaborated with intergovernmental institutions such as the European Union, the United Nations, and bilateral development partners. Its Member States adopted many policies targeting different aspects of gender equality. Significant improvements were made related to domestic violence, access to education, improved healthcare, and gender-based wage gaps.

<sup>3</sup> As often is the case, the number of instruments/policies enacted may not be as crucial as their quality. The operative parts and implementation of these declarations are what matters the most. For a full list of all ASEAN-level instruments and measures, see Appendix 4.

WEE through innovation, trade and inclusive business, and human capital development. Post-2020, several more actions were taken; three deserving our attention. The ASEAN Gender Mainstreaming Strategic Framework 2021–2025 (AGMSF) was agreed in 2021 (ASEAN, 2021). It laid out an ambitious roadmap towards achieving gender equality. With its four broad goals, the AGMSF sought to embed gender equality across the spectrum of ASEAN's community pillars. However, the specificity of actions to take, especially within the AEC, were missing. The AGMSF was followed by Policy Recommendations to Accelerate AGMSF Implementation, (ASCC, 2023) endorsed in 2023.<sup>4</sup> The document attempted to provide general recommendations for integrating gender mainstreaming in ASEAN. Also in 2023, the Declaration on Gender Equality and Family Development (ASEAN, 2023a) was adopted. Whilst aiming high in terms of its objectives and commitments, it undershoots in its operative part (Appendix 1).

Despite a relative rush of new recommendations and declarations, there was no significant change in what has been seen as the ASEAN 'funnelled gender policies' that continued to omit clearly articulated WEE objectives. The approach to gender policies in ASEAN largely remained 'framed in terms of protection, rather than empowerment' (PHILWEN and Oxfam, 2021).

This neglect<sup>5</sup> is particularly troubling in the economic sphere given the evidence suggesting that the AEC's implementation, whilst beneficial overall, has not adequately addressed the needs of women and other marginalised gender groups. Research from ASEAN (2016) and Dominguez (2019) indicates that whilst the AEC's implementation has spurred overall economic gains, it has done little to specifically uplift women and other under-represented gender groups. Moreover, the principles and objectives of the AEC Blueprints (ASEAN, 2008 and 2015) have largely overlooked the gender dimension, with the notable exception of entrepreneurship. The example in this regard is the AEC 2025 Consolidated Strategic Action Plan (ASEAN, 2018). Out of the 153 strategic measures listed (and numerous key action items), women are mentioned 12 times within eight measures, and gender equality is mentioned once (in relation to climate change). Considering the AEC's comprehensive coverage of economic governance within ASEAN, this omission of gender-targeted measures and actions represents a significant missed opportunity for promoting good economics and providing an environment to encourage gender-responsible business and investment.

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<sup>4</sup> In a note accompanying this document, the ASEAN Commission on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children points that, 'This policy recommendation refers to the result of the Chairman Statements at the 42nd ASEAN Summit that is in line with the targets of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and ASEAN Community Vision 2025. Specifically, for this Socio-Cultural Community Policy Recommendation, it refers to the ASCC Blueprint 2025, the ASEAN Declaration on the Gender-Responsive Implementation of ASEAN.'

<sup>5</sup> The word 'neglect' is used carefully and projects a bracketed statement in point 4.2 (page 10) of the Declaration: '[However, the AEC and APSC Blueprints pay relatively less attention to these issues.]'

This chapter aims to contribute to the ongoing ideation<sup>6</sup> about how to fill the gap between what the AEC could deliver for gender equality and WEE in future and its actual contribution. It will indicate how to go about setting gender-informed and gender-responsive options for the future AEC blueprint.<sup>7</sup> By integrating gender perspectives into the core of ASEAN's economic policies and strategies, we can foster a more inclusive and equitable economic environment for all in the ASEAN Community. This is *conditio sine qua non* for sustainable development (UN, 2021).

The chapter has six sections. After this introduction, Section 2 reviews the status of gender equality and women's empowerment in ASEAN focusing on economic activities. The review is based on six established international sources. The section also refers to the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Women and the Economy Dashboard (APEC, 2023) (with Appendix 2) and points out the possibility of adopting the approach to complement what is available from ASEANStats on gender equality and women's empowerment, which seems to be limited to few infographics and Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) 5 indicators (ASEANStats, (n.d.)).<sup>8</sup> Section 3 introduces the concept of gender mainstreaming and reviews ASEAN's commitments towards gender mainstreaming. This entails a review of the main policy documents in the recent period to establish gaps in policy commitment towards gender mainstreaming. Section 4 focuses on the AEC and considers some options for incorporating gender mainstreaming into the future AEC. Section 5 discusses the linkages between AEC and the other two ASEAN communities, the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC) and the ASEAN Political Security Community (APSC) in the context of necessary cooperation for a cohesive strategy towards integrated gender mainstreaming, and Section 6 closes with a summary and a few takeaways for policymakers. It also shares hope that further work on gender mainstreaming throughout the ASEAN community intensifies and deepens, including by adopting a gender parity for women's participation in ASEAN leadership (including in the Secretariat).

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<sup>6</sup> The author benefited from the workshops organised in preparation of this volume and discussions that covered this and other topics. She has also consulted six ASEAN-based experts and former government officials to brainstorm about several aspects of this topic. The insights from these colleagues have been thoroughly considered and taken on board as appropriate deemed by the author, with thanks and usual disclaimers. The drafting of the chapter was completed in April 2024.

<sup>7</sup> There is sparse public information about the ASEAN process towards formulation of its Post-2025 Vision. Typically, these forward-looking vision strategies span a decade, but it appears that the Post-2025 Vision might extend to cover the next two decades, up to 2045. No publicly available materials are available, although the ASEAN website shared images from a couple of meetings of the High-Level Task Force on ASEAN Economic Integration (ASEAN, 2023c), including seeking the views from business community (ASEAN, n.d.b).

<sup>8</sup> In addition to a few indicators based on sex-disaggregated data on population, education, health, and labour force.

## 2. Status of Gender Equality and Women's Economic Empowerment in the ASEAN/ ASEAN Member States

For this section, it is useful to understand two concepts: gender equality and women's empowerment. Gender equality is a fundamental human right and a multidimensional concept. Gender equality occurs when people of all genders have equal rights, responsibilities, and opportunities to exercise power. Gender relates to the various roles, responsibilities, command of resources, and attributes that a society ascribes to women and men, girls and boys, and persons of diverse gender identities. Equality does not mean that women and men are the same, must become the same, or must be treated identically all the time, but that an individual's rights, responsibilities, and opportunities do not depend on whether they are born male or female. It can be seen as a precondition for people-oriented and people-centred development.

The concept of women's empowerment refers to both an outcome and a process by which women gain power and control over their own lives and acquire the ability to make strategic choices. Women's empowerment has five components: (i) women's sense of self-worth; (ii) their right to have and to determine choices; (iii) their right to have access to opportunities and resources; (iv) their right to have power to control their own lives both within and outside the home; and (v) their ability to influence the direction of social change to create a more just social and economic order, nationally and internationally (EIGE, n.d.).

Furthermore, WEE specifies empowerment in the economic sphere and in the world of work. When the qualifier 'economic' is added, the term covers better choices to expand economic opportunities and rights at work, and women's meaningful participation in economic decision-making.

Measurements of gender equality and WEE range from economic factors, such as participation in the labour market and the extent of wage gaps, to healthcare, educational, and other socioeconomic statistics, and to the number of leadership roles in politics and business. There are many approaches to measurement; most use simple or composite indicators based on quantitative and qualitative data and analyses. These indicators are (mostly) publicly available through several well-established and cited databases maintained by international organisations or think tanks. In this paper we use the measurements of gender equality only to indicate results of many years of efforts made by the AMS and to confirm that there is still a great range of results amongst them.<sup>9</sup> The task of this chapter is not to comment on methodologies and the quality of individual indices since there is a separate body of literature dealing with these issues and necessary improvements of measurements.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> This chapter does not provide longitudinal data series and does not comment on the existence (or not) of convergence within ASEAN or between AMS and the other countries.

<sup>10</sup> For example, Buvinic, Pryor, and O'Donnell (2020).

We use six global indices in this chapter:<sup>11</sup> (i) the Gender Development Index (GDI) and (ii) the Gender Inequality Index (GII), both by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (UNDP, n.d.a. and n.d.b.); (iii) the Global Gender Gap Report (GGG) by the World Economic Forum (WEF) (WEF; 2023) (iv) the Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI) by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (OECD, n.d.); (v) the Women, Business, and Law Index (WBL) by the World Bank (World Bank, n.d.); and (vi) the Sustainable Development Goal Gender Index (SDG GI) by Equal Measures 2030 (Equal Measures 2030, n.d.). These indices collectively provide a multifaceted view of gender equality and women's empowerment for individual economies, regionally and globally, each with a unique focus area, from legal frameworks to economic and political participation disparities. A brief description of these six indices' characteristics precedes the findings for AMS for the latest year available. The results for AMS are summarised in Figure 8.1 and Table 8.2.

The UNDP GDI measures gender inequalities (female and male achievements) across three dimensions of human development: health, education, and command over economic resources. Gender-disaggregated data is used in each dimension. The health dimension is captured by female and male life expectancy at birth. Education is measured using two indicators – female and male expected years of schooling for children and female and male mean years of schooling for adults aged 25 and older. Command over economic resources is measured by female and male estimated earned income. The GDI is calculated as the ratio of female human development index to the male one. The values of the index range from 0 to 1; values below 1 indicate higher human development for men than women, whilst values above 1 indicate the opposite. In Figure 8.1 and Table 8.2 we have multiplied the original results by 100 to ease the comparisons with other indices (therefore, the results should be read as the value of 100 indicating developmental equality between genders, values below 100 as lower human development for female and values above 100 higher human development than for men).

The latest GDI report is for 2021 and AMS have all scored relatively high; the lowest score of 92.6 is for Cambodia, the highest is for Thailand at 101.2; and ASEAN averages 97.2. The global average was 95.8, putting ASEAN women ahead with respect to human development (UNDP, n.d.a).

The UNDP GII is a composite measure reflecting inequality in achievement between women and men in three dimensions: reproductive health (maternal mortality ratio and adolescent birth rates), empowerment (share of parliamentary seats and secondary education attainment), and labour market participation.<sup>12</sup> Overall, the GII reflects how women are disadvantaged in these dimensions. The GII ranges between zero and one. Higher GII values (i.e. closer to 1) indicate higher inequalities between women and men and thus higher loss to human development. In Figure 8.1 and Table 8.2 we have multiplied the results by 100 to ease the comparisons with other indices (therefore the results should be read as the value of 0 indicating that women and men fare equally, whilst at 100 one gender fares as poorly as possible in all measured dimensions).

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<sup>11</sup> It is necessary to comment (whilst outside the scope of this chapter) that there is still a gap between a rhetoric on gender equality and the way results of policies are measured and reported. For example, we regularly speak of the importance of including gender diverse individuals in efforts to achieve gender equality, recognising the need for all individuals, regardless of gender, to have equal rights, opportunities, and access to resources. Yet these are hardly, or not at all, specifically integrated into the metrics. Consequently, in most cases indicators refer to women and men (boys and girls), and to binary sex-disaggregated data.

<sup>12</sup> Technical note with details about how both Gender Development Index and Gender Inequality Index are calculated is available at [https://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/2021-22\\_HDR/hdr2021-22\\_technical\\_notes.pdf](https://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/2021-22_HDR/hdr2021-22_technical_notes.pdf)

The latest report of GII is for 2021 and AMS have scored in the range between the worst score of 49.8 (Republic of the Union of Myanmar) and best score of 22.8 (Malaysia); with an average of 34.6 for ASEAN. The global average was 46.5, much worse than the ASEAN average. However, it is important to note that the best scores globally were around 15.5 and no AMS were scoring less than 22. On the other hand, 6 out of 10 AMS scored above 40, leaving much to be done to close the gender inequality gap (UNDP, n.d.b).

The WEF GGG assesses gender gaps across four key areas: economic participation and opportunity, educational attainment, health and survival, and political empowerment, highlighting countries' progress towards gender parity. Within these four dimensions, 15 indicators are used to calculate the overall performance index per country.<sup>13</sup> The GGG Index measures scores on a 0 to 100 scale and scores can be interpreted as the distance covered towards parity (i.e. the percentage of the gender gap that has been closed). Thus, the higher the score, the closer to gender equality a country is. In addition to the country performance indices, there are more detailed indices that allow tracking of countries per each of the four index components. Globally, countries perform better in areas of health and survival and educational attainment than in economic participation and opportunities. The worst results are in area of political empowerment.

The latest WEF GGG Report was issued in June 2023. Results for AMS are shown in Figure 1 and Table 2. They range from the worst at 65% (Republic of the Union of Myanmar) and the best at 79.1% (Philippines), with the ASEAN average at 71%. The GGG index results are much more uniform for AMS than the other indices, and they are closer to the global average (68.1%), thus signalling that ASEAN is not performing to its aspirations. When it comes to the performance in the four components of the index (not shown in Figure 1 and Table 2), the disparities between the AMS are larger but in some of them ASEAN is doing much better than the global average:

- Health and survival: globally 96% and the range amongst AMS is from 94.6% (Viet Nam) to 97.8% (Cambodia); the ASEAN average is higher than the global average by almost a whole percentage point.
- Educational attainment: globally 95.2% and the range amongst AMS is from 96.4% (the Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR)) to 100% (Malaysia, Philippines); the ASEAN average is higher than the global average by 3 percentage points.
- Economic participation and opportunity: 60.1% globally and the range amongst AMS is from 60% (Republic of the Union of Myanmar) to a high of 85.1% (Lao PDR); with an ASEAN average of 73.3%, considerably higher than the global average.
- Political empowerment: 22.1% globally and the range amongst AMS is from 4.7% (Republic of the Union of Myanmar) to 40.9% (Philippines); the ASEAN average of 15.3 comes well short of the global average by almost 7 percentage points (WEF, 2023).

The OECD SIGI measures discrimination against women, considering legislation, social norms, and practices that lead to women's discrimination in the family and may restrict their physical integrity, access to productive and social resources, and civil liberties. It uses 27 different indicators to calculate

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<sup>13</sup> More about methodology is available at WEF (2017).

the country level index. SIGI scores range from 0 to 100, with 0 indicating no discrimination and 100 indicating absolute discrimination. Scores in individual dimensions and indicators are also scaled similarly.<sup>14</sup>

The 2023 SIGI report included all AMS except Brunei Darussalam. The global average score was 29.2, whilst ASEAN's average was much higher at 39.1. The best result (closer to the score of 0 – no discrimination) was achieved by Cambodia (21.7), and the worst by Malaysia (61.7). Only Cambodia, Lao PDR, and Viet Nam scored better than the global average and the Asian average (which was 37.2) and were classified as low in the context of overall gender discrimination.

OECD released a separate report for Southeast Asia in March 2024. Whilst these results are still for 2023, they also include an interesting decomposition for each index area and this is shown as the summary results from the report in Table 8.1, including the total scores (also reported in our Figure 8.1 and Table 8.2) and its four dimensions (OECD,2024 and n.d.).

Table 8.1. Social Institutions and Gender Index 2023 Results: Southeast Asia

Geographical area	SIGI score	Classification	SIGI score by dimension			
			Discrimination in the family	Restricted physical integrity	Restricted access to productive and financial resources	Restricted civil liberties
Southeast Asian countries						
Cambodia	22	Low	22	18	29	17
Viet Nam	24	Low	38	38	8	10
Lao PDR	25	Low	25	28	25	23
Thailand	33	Medium	39	20	22	47
Indonesia	45	High	80	32	18	36
Singapore	45	High	39	46	41	53
Myanmar	47	High	63	55	34	33
Philippines	50	High	57	49	50	42
Malaysia	61	Very High	86	47	44	61
Brunei Darussalam	NA	NA	92	NA	NA	NA
Timor-Leste	NA	NA	26	37	20	NA

<sup>14</sup> For a methodological note, see Ferrant, Fuirotand, and Zambrano (2020).



Geographical area	SIGI score	Classification	SIGI score by dimension			
			Discrimination in the family	Restricted physical integrity	Restricted access to productive and financial resources	Restricted civil liberties
Regional aggregates						
Southeast Asia	39	Medium	52	37	29	36
Asia	37	Medium	51	33	31	36
OECD	15	Very Low	14	18	13	15
World	29	Low	38	27	27	26

Lao PDR = the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Myanmar = the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, NA = not applicable, OECD = Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, SIGI = Social Institutions and Gender Index.

Source: OECD (2024 and n.d.).

The World Bank WBL measures legal differences for men and women in individual economies, identifying barriers to women's economic participation across eight, – and since 2024, 10 – dimensions that affect women's economic opportunities.<sup>15</sup> In addition to introducing two new indicators, WBL2 differs from the WBL1 index as it expands the scope of analysis. In both versions, legal indexes analyse domestic laws and regulations that affect women's economic opportunities. Answers to the questions in these indexes are based only on codified law. The WBL2 introduces an additional two layers of analysis: the supportive frameworks index analyses instruments designed to support the implementation of laws (allowing it to identify the distance between legal reforms and the outcomes); and it captures expert opinions on the extent to which these outcomes are being realised in practice in a particular economy. The values of overall indices are from 0 to 100, where 100 means equal legal rights for men and women, thus the higher the score, more legal equality women enjoy. A score of 77% implies that women enjoy just 77% of the legal protection available to men. A review of the implementation of laws and rules, undertaken by the WBL2, shows that the gaps increase significantly for most countries. So, whilst laws on the books imply that women enjoy roughly two-thirds of the rights of men (WBL1), countries have on average, established less than 40% of the systems needed for full implementation (WBL2). For example, 98 economies have enacted legislation mandating equal pay for women for work of equal value. Yet only 35 economies – fewer than one out of every five – have adopted pay-transparency measures or enforcement mechanisms to address the pay gap.

<sup>15</sup> The 2024 WBL Report introduces a new index which is based on 10 individual indicators, adding two new ones that can be critical in opening up or restricting women's options: safety from violence and access to childcare services. See World Bank Group (2024a; 2024b).

The 2024 WBL Report finds that globally, women enjoy just 64% of the legal protections that men do, and that after the implementation gap is considered, that figure drops to 35%. Figure 8.1 and Table 8.2 present results for AMS. When WBL1 is used, the worst score is 53.1% (Brunei Darussalam) and the best is 88.1% (Viet Nam); and the ASEAN average is 73.7% (compared to the global average of 77%). When WBL2 is used, the worst score is 35% (Brunei Darussalam), the best is 85% (Viet Nam); the ASEAN average is 60% (against a global average of 64%). The results are even more worrying when the implementation gap is accounted for, as then the global average of 39% compares to the best score in ASEAN of 62% (Singapore) and the worst of 11.7% (Republic of the Union of Myanmar); the ASEAN average is 34%. (World Bank Group, n.d.)

Finally, the SDG GI<sup>16</sup> covers 56 key indicators across 14 of the 17 SDGs, with each goal represented by between three and five gender-related indicators. Whilst the index follows the structure of the SDGs, it adds a gender lens across each of the goals, including many that lack such a focus in the official framework, or those where no data are reported at present to monitor progress. The index makes it possible, therefore, to track progress across most of the goals (and not just SDG 5) on gender equality. Given the data gaps in official SDG monitoring, the SDG GI draws on available gender-related SDG indicators and complements them with a wider range of data sources to provide a timelier and more comprehensive picture of progress. This includes tracking legal frameworks that address gender equality (e.g. laws related to equality in the workplace, abortion rights, sexual orientation, etc.), global survey data that capture women's views about different aspects of their lives and societies, and other data collections that are conducted by a range of data producers (including the World Bank, civil society organisations, and think tanks) on a global and regular basis. The index tracks progress over time, allowing benchmarking since 2015 and scenario-building to provide insights into how (and whether) gender indicators are progressing towards the attainment of the SDGs by the 2030 deadline. The overall index score and individual goal scores are based on a scale of 0 to 100.<sup>17</sup> A score of 100 reflects the achievement of gender equality in relation to the targets set for each indicator in the index. A score of 50 signifies that a country is about halfway to meeting that goal.

The SDG Gender Index Report 2022 findings for AMS are summarised in Table 8.2 and Figure 8.2 (data for Brunei Darussalam and the Republic of the Union of Myanmar are not available). The global average is 67.8 out of 100. The worst ASEAN performance is 60 (Cambodia) and the best is 83 (Singapore); the ASEAN average is 68.7, just above the global average (Equal Measures 2030, 2022 and n.d.).

In summary, whilst there is no country with a perfect gender equality or women's empowerment score in any of the metrics used, this should not be seen as an excuse for not performing well, especially in those areas that could be improved by deliberate actions. The opportunity costs of inaction is high and equal to an adverse impact on the country's achievements in all key aspects of human development. Furthermore, disparities amongst AMS underscore the need for targeted efforts on the regional level to bridge these gaps across the region.

<sup>16</sup> Composition of the index is available at Equal Measures 2030 (n.d.).

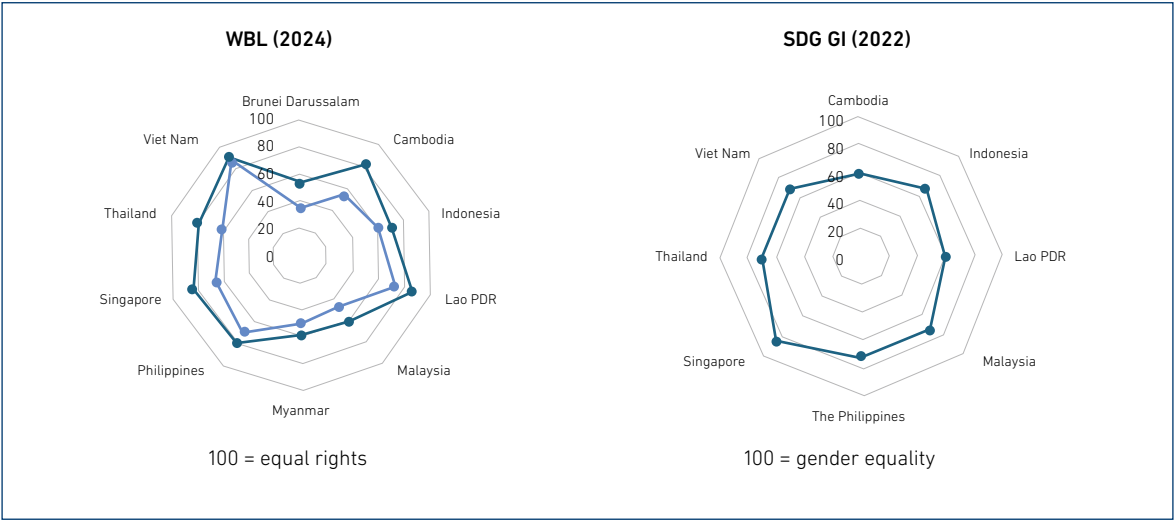
<sup>17</sup> The scoring system (Excellent: 90 and above; Good: 80–89; Fair: 70–79; Poor: 60–69; Very poor: 59 and below) implies that AMS mostly fall in category Poor– see Figure 1 and Table 2.

These six indices further highlight the absence of a dedicated ASEAN entity responsible for gathering and distributing gender-related data and indicators. Whilst ASEANStat tracks progress with SDGs, a few targets used to report on and monitor progress on SDG 5 (gender equality) are largely incomplete regarding AMS coverage and are focused on social aspects and leadership.<sup>18</sup> There are some other statistics in ASEAN Yearbooks related to labour/employment (as well to health and education), however they lack much of the information needed for evidence-based policymaking to promote gender equality. Appendix 2 of this chapter summarises the APEC Women and the Economy Dashboard (APEC, 2023) illustrating an advantage of preparing a dedicated dashboard. Since seven of AMS are also APEC members, building an ASEAN dashboard based on the APEC example could be one option for this.

**Figure 8.1. Integrated ASEAN Economic Community Sustainability Framework Based on Public–Private–People Partnership Model**



<sup>18</sup> Two indicators focus on the proportion of women in the age group 20–24 who were married (in a union) before age of 16/age of 18, and another two indicators focus on the proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments, and the proportion of women in managerial positions.



GDI = gender development index, GGG = global gender gap, GII = gender inequality index, Lao PDR = the Lao People's Democratic Republic, SDG GI = Development Goals Gender Index, SIGI = social institutions and gender, WBL = women, business and law.

Note: For more explanation, see Section 2 of this chapter.

Source: Table 8.2

**Table 8.2. An Illustration of the Status of Gender Equality and Women's Economic Empowerment Based on a Set of Six Composite Indicators (2021–2024)**

	Brunei Darussalam	Cambodia	Indonesia	Lao PDR	Malaysia	Myanmar	Philippines	Singapore	Thailand	Viet Nam	ASEAN Average*
<b>Gender Development Index (2021)<sup>a</sup></b>	98.4	92.6	94.1	94.9	98.2	94.4	99	99.2	101.2	100.2	97.2
<b>Gender Inequality Index (2021)<sup>b</sup></b>	25.9	46.1	44.4	47.8	22.8	49.8	41.9	40	33.3	29.6	34.6
<b>rank</b>	61	116	110	120	57	125	101	7	79	71	na
<b>Global Gender Gap Report (2023)<sup>c</sup></b>	69.3	69.5	69.7	73.3	68.2	65	79.1	73.9	71.1	71.1	71.0*
<b>rank</b>	96	92	87	54	102	123	16	49	74	71.172	na
<b>Social Institutions and Gender Index (2023)</b>	na	21.7	44.6	25.1	61.7	47.0	49.7	45.0	32.6	24.5	30.4*
<b>Women, Business, and Law (2024)-WBL1</b>	53.1	81.3	70.6	85.6	60.6	58.8	78.8	82.5	78.1	88.1	73.7*

	Brunei Darus-salam	Cam-bodia	Indo-nesia	Lao PDR	Malay-sia	Myan-mar	Philip-pines	Singa-pore	Thai-land	Viet Nam	ASEAN Aver-age*
<b>-WBL-2</b>	35	55	60	72.5	47.5	50	70	65	60	85	60*
<b>SDG Gender Index (2022)<sup>d</sup></b>		60	67	61	70		70	83	70	69	68.7*
<b>rank</b>	na	101	76	97	59	na	61	20	60	64	na

ASEAN = Association of Southeast Asian Nations, Lao PDR = the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Myanmar = the Republic of the Union of Myanmar.

Notes: Averages marked \* are simply averages of the AMS scores and calculated for the purpose of this table by the author.

<sup>a</sup> Originally measured by values from 0 to 1 but here normalised to 0 to 100. Value of 100 indicates developmental equality between genders, whilst values further from 100 indicate less equality between gender.

<sup>b</sup> Originally measured by values from 0 to 1. Here normalised to values 0 to 100. Value of 0 indicates that women and men fare equally, and 100

<sup>c</sup> Scores range from 0 to 100 and can be interpreted as the distance covered towards parity (=100). Read as the percentage of the gender gap that has been closed.

<sup>d</sup> The values range from 0 to 100, where 100 indicates meeting the set goals. Scoring is set as Excellent: 90 and above; Good: 80–89; Fair: 70–79; Poor: 60–69; Very poor: 59 and below.

Source: Equal Measures2030 (2022 and n.d.), OECD SIGI (2024 and n.d.), UNDP (n.d.a), UNDP (n.d.b), WEF (2023), World Bank Group (n.d.).

### 3. Gender Mainstreaming and the ASEAN Commitment

The concept of gender mainstreaming was first suggested by the Beijing Platform for Action in 1995 by saying that policy makers should apply a clear gender lens to all policies and programmes to ensure that decisions are gender-informed before they are made. Consequently, at its 1997 substantive session the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) recognised unanimous states' agreements with the Beijing Platform for Action, 'that it was essential to design, implement and monitor, with the full participation of women, effective, efficient and mutually reinforcing gender-sensitive policies and programmes, including development policies and programmes at all levels, to foster the empowerment and advancement of women' (UN, 1995). To promote a coordinated and coherent policy of gender mainstreaming, ECOSOC (1997) clarified the concept of mainstreaming, its central principles and offered specific recommendations to all actors within the United Nations system.

The strategy of mainstreaming is defined in the ECOSOC agreed conclusions, 1997/2, as: *'... the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in all areas and at all levels. It is a strategy for making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally, and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal is to achieve gender equality'* (ECOSOC, 1997:3).

Gender mainstreaming represents an essential strategy within international and regional frameworks for promoting gender equality and empowering all individuals, irrespective of their gender. This approach seeks to integrate gender perspectives and considerations into all stages of policymaking including planning and implementation across various sectors and all levels of policymaking. Gender mainstreaming involves reevaluating, restructuring, and changing institutional processes and policy frameworks to ensure that gender equality considerations are at the centre. This approach goes beyond merely adding gender-related activities or focusing solely on women's issues; it involves integrating gender perspectives into all decision-making processes to address inequalities. Therefore, gender mainstreaming requires policy makers and decision makers to adopt a different perspective, to learn new skills, and to change procedures in existing institutions (Alami, 2018).

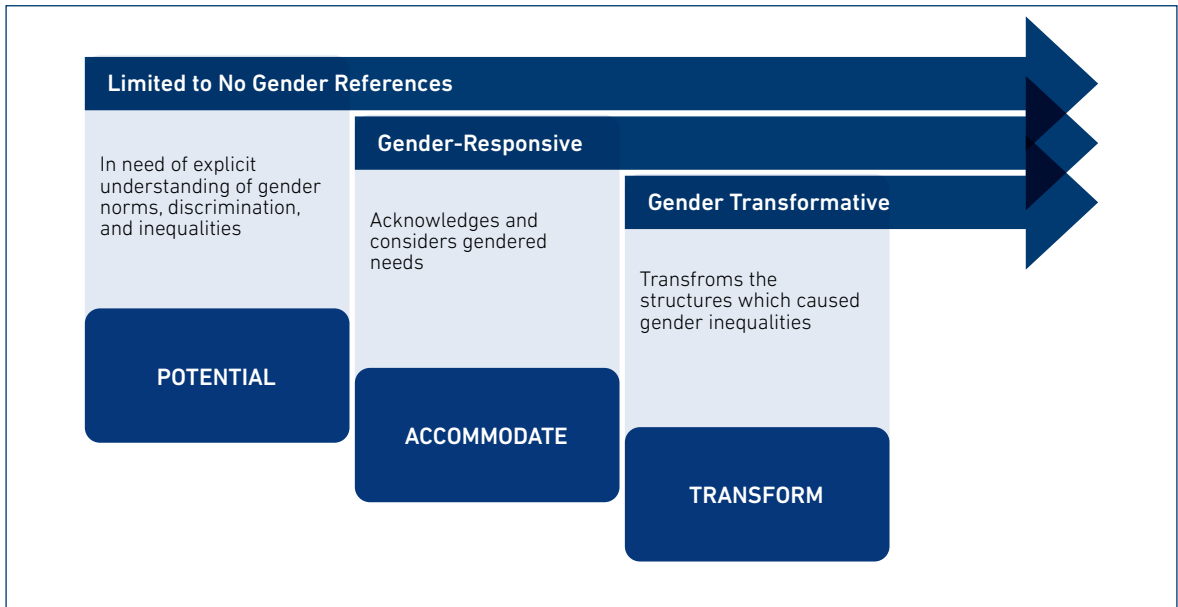
Nevertheless, gender mainstreaming may often adopt targeted and specific interventions to address identified gender disparities. These interventions are particularly data-driven and require sex- (or, preferably, gender-) disaggregated data to identify specific gender disparities.<sup>19</sup>

Based on this understanding of gender mainstreaming, this section examines ASEAN's commitments towards gender mainstreaming by reviewing some of the more recent key policies and documents with a focus on their relevance to ASEAN's vision and economic activities or sustainable development. It is useful to remember that ASEAN uses a whole-of-ASEAN approach to introduce and institutionalise gender perspectives in its work. Such an approach is guided by the principle that addressing fundamental gender gaps is a moral imperative and a sound economic proposition: one that leads to a reduction in poverty and inequality and the promotion of inclusion and resilience in the long run (ASEAN, 2023b).

To assess different policies, it is useful to apply a standard gender equity continuum 'metric' to categorise and assess actions, policies, or initiatives in terms of their awareness of the current gender inequalities (and their causes, such as norms) and their capacity to drive a transformation or elimination of these causes (Figure 8.2 and Appendix 3).

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<sup>19</sup> This is not to say that nontargeted interventions do not require data. Any decision-making should be based on analysis of data. Likewise, data are needed to assess overall progress of gender mainstreaming.

**Figure 8.2. Attributes of Policies that Drive Gender Equality**

Source: Author (based on literature).

As noted, gender mainstreaming is a critical strategy for achieving gender equality and empowering all individuals. Whilst ASEAN has made significant strides in integrating gender perspectives into its policies and frameworks, there remains a need for a more inclusive approach that addresses the full spectrum of gender issues. As observed in Appendix 3, ASEAN's commitment to gender mainstreaming has been inching in the right direction – towards responsive and transformative actions and policies – although progress has been uneven across the areas the three communities are responsible for. Currently, the pivotal instrument driving ASEAN gender mainstreaming is the 2021 AGMSF (ASEAN, 2021).<sup>20</sup> Its four strategic goals (building blocks) are:

- **Goal 1:** ASEAN policies, institutions, and practices better embody its vision for a fairer, more equitable, and inclusive world (@ policy development);
- **Goal 2:** ASEAN builds its knowledge, technical competencies, and capacity on gender and inclusion issues (@ capacity building);
- **Goal 3:** ASEAN policies and action plans better reflect the needs of women and girls in the region, and sectoral bodies across the three communities can progressively undertake more effective initiatives that centre their participation and respond to their needs (@ cooperation & collaboration); and
- **Goal 4:** ASEAN supports intergovernmental processes and Member States' gender mainstreaming and gender-focused initiatives (@ technical assistance, monitoring, and evaluation).

<sup>20</sup> Reminder: The AGMSF outlines ASEAN's commitment and approach to integrating gender perspectives across its Member States' policies and programmes. The framework is designed to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, recognising these as fundamental to achieving sustainable development and socioeconomic progress.

The AGMSF needs its Implementation Plan with specific gender-responsive actions. The framework includes a section on 'Indicative Actions' (Section 8) where there are indications of possible timeframes and approaches to be taken whilst developing the Implementation Plan (emphasising the need for pragmatism and sequencing considering resources and the priorities of the AMS and the dialogue partners). One can argue that AMS and dialogue partners have already confirmed that their priorities are developing and strengthening inclusive, resilient, and sustainable people-centred economies and societies. If so, there is a clear mandate to proceed to build a collective work on gender mainstreaming as an integral and irreplaceable component to achieve sustainable development. Whilst it is reasonable to accept that availability of resources may put the implementation of the framework at risk, it is not acceptable to use the lack of high-level political support as an excuse (given that high-level officials were involved in the adoption of the framework). However, in August 2023, Policy Recommendations to Accelerate AGMSF Implementation (ASSC, 2023) were issued (and they were also endorsed by the ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Women). They include an Annex titled Alignment of the Policy Recommendations with the AGMSF and its Implementation Plan (2021–2025) indicating the existence of such a plan. The Annex even includes two Implementation Plan outcomes for each of the four broad goals of the AGMSF. However, the author was unable to locate a copy of the plan and must assume that the 2023 Policy Recommendations serve as the plan itself.<sup>21</sup>

The AGMSF also proposes a comprehensive institutional framework for implementing gender mainstreaming across ASEAN. This includes the creation of dedicated units within the ASEAN Secretariat. The ASEAN Gender Mainstreaming Steering Committee which, 'aims to promote gender equality and women's empowerment across the ASEAN region by developing strategies and policies that prioritise gender mainstreaming in all areas of governance, economics, and social development' (ASEAN, 2023d) has met twice in 2023 and its third meeting held in Lao PDR in August 2024. There is no information about the proposed establishment of the gender focal points and an ad hoc gender mainstreaming focal team. Overall, not much information is publicly available about the proposed institutional framework for gender mainstreaming and on involving other ASEAN entities (starting with AEC and APSC, which 'pay relatively less attention to these issues' (ASEAN, 2021:Ch. 4: 1). The scarcity of public information regarding the proposed institutional framework for gender mainstreaming, along with the limited engagement of other ASEAN entities – particularly those associated with AEC and APSC – underscores a concerning lack of transparency and stakeholder consultation. Such an approach is not conducive to effectively enhancing work on gender mainstreaming and WEE, as it may hinder collaborative efforts and diminish the potential for inclusive and informed decision-making.

Section 4 looks more closely to how AEC could step-up and contribute more directly towards ASEAN-wide gender mainstreaming and WEE by applying a gender lens to its instruments and actions.

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<sup>21</sup> In the same Section 8, the framework envisages that, 'The Implementation Plan should be reviewed and revised every year as the resources, capacities, and commitments available to the gender mainstreaming agenda and this Strategic Framework evolve, and as ongoing monitoring and the Mid Term Review generate recommendations for improvements.' (p.23).



## 4. Engendering the ASEAN Economic Community

The AEC Blueprint 2025 (ASEAN, 2015) builds upon the achievements of AEC Blueprint 2015 (ASEAN, 2008), increasing the key characteristics of the AEC from four to five:

- i). A highly integrated and cohesive economy: This goes beyond the 2015 goals to reduce trade barriers and enhance the free flow of services, investment, and skilled labour even further.
- ii). A competitive, innovative, and dynamic ASEAN: This focuses on digital innovation, e-commerce, and the digital economy, recognising the importance of technological advancements.
- iii). Enhanced connectivity and sectoral cooperation: This highlights the significance of infrastructure development (both physical and digital), energy security, and food, agriculture, and forestry cooperation.
- iv). A resilient, inclusive, people-oriented, and people-centred ASEAN: This emphasises sustainable development, health, and cultural development, ensuring that economic growth benefits all segments of society.
- v). A global ASEAN: This reinforces ASEAN centrality especially in the context of re-globalisation and emerging regional economic architecture and aims to strengthen ASEAN's role and voice in the global economic forums and in the East Asian region.

Compared to the 2015 Blueprint, the 2025 AEC version

- is broader and more ambitious in scope, aiming not just for economic integration but also for a cohesive, people-centred ASEAN economy that leverages digital technology;
- places a stronger emphasis on digital economy, innovation, and technology as key drivers of economic growth and competitiveness;
- puts a greater emphasis on sustainable development and inclusiveness in the 2025 Blueprint, reflecting a more holistic approach to regional economic integration that seeks to ensure benefits are widely shared; and
- has a clearer focus on enhancing ASEAN's role in the global economy, reflecting a shift towards not just internal integration but also external engagement and influence.

Neither blueprint, however, provides space for explicit (rather than implicit) promotion of gender equality and WEE. As noted earlier, the Consolidated Strategic Action Plan (ASEAN, 2018) (prepared for AEC 2025 implementation) does not do justice to the identified gender disparities across the AMS in areas covered by the AEC. If one would apply a gender-responsiveness metric<sup>22</sup> that is normally used to assess the degree to which a trade agreement addresses gender equality issues, the AEC Blueprints and the associated Strategic Plan would at best score the limited level of responsiveness. Women's

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<sup>22</sup> This metric contains five levels of gender awareness maturity: level 1: Limited (awareness); level 2: Evolving (affirmations); level 3: Acceptable (cooperation and advocacy); level 4: Advanced (institutionalisation) and level 5: Optimal (legally binding obligations and enforcement). This metric was developed by Amrita Bahr. (Bahri, 2019).

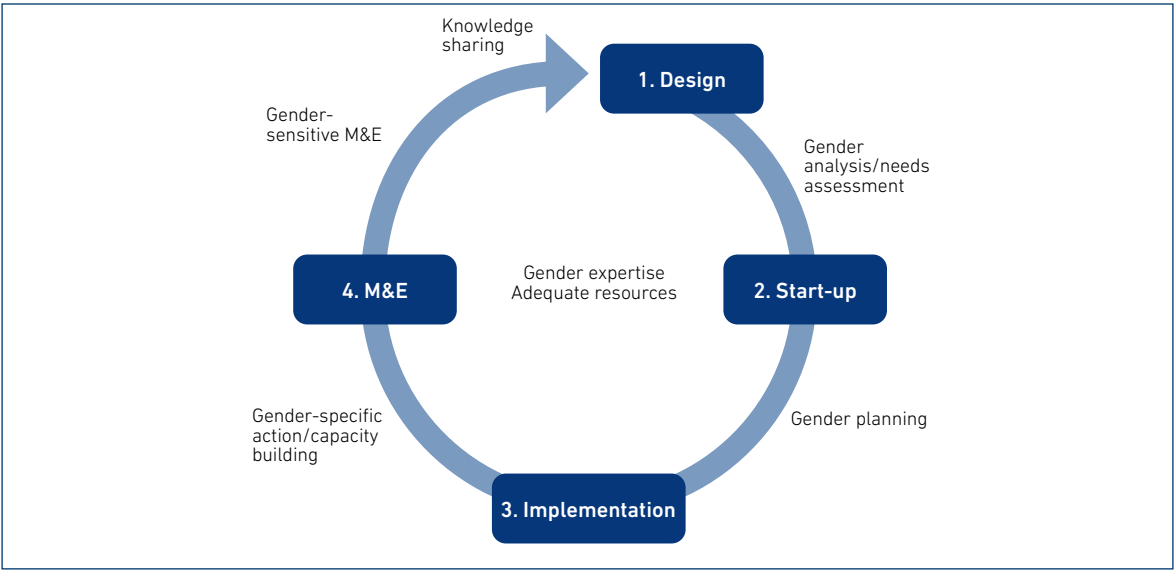
economic rights are not integrated into the AEC. This may be at least partly attributed to the inadequate representation of women in the working committees under the AEC.<sup>23</sup>

The gender mainstreaming of the AEC involves recognising the ways in which women (and, if aspiring to aim for an inclusive AEC, then other marginalised groups too) interact with the economy (often in more than one role at the same time) – as, for example, producers, consumers, entrepreneurs, users of public services, taxpayers, and participants in the global economy.

The strategy of gender mainstreaming (as mentioned in Section 3 of this chapter) is a strategy focused on achieving the goal of gender equality. To be effective it must be relevant for, and should be utilised in, all sectors and policy areas relevant to the AEC (which is the meaning of ‘mainstreaming’). The strategy requires explicit attention to both women and men, and diverse gender identities, ensuring that they can participate in, influence, and benefit from development of policies and practices. Finally, and very importantly, gender mainstreaming typically ‘integrates’ attention to gender equality in routine processes and procedures as well as employing ‘targeted interventions’ to address specific constraints and challenges faced by women or men and girls and boys.

Stages of gender mainstreaming are illustrated in Figure 8.3. We are conscious that the reader might be only interested in the result of applying this process, but in the interest of completeness, we provide this illustration without further explanation. In addition, Box 1 provides details on helpful, publicly available toolkits that can assist in one of more of these stages.

**Figure 8.3. Gender Mainstreaming Cycle**



M&E = monitoring and evaluation.  
Source: Adapted from the National Democratic Institute (2024).

<sup>23</sup> These two documents also do not include any mention of the other two ASEAN communities and the potential value of collaborative actions to meet any of the objectives.

### **Box 1 Selected Gender Mainstreaming Toolkits and Possible Application by the Association of Southeast Asian Nations to Enhance Gender Equality and Women's Economic Empowerment**

#### **1. Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development: Toolkit on Mainstreaming and Implementing Gender Equality 2023**

Application for the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN): This toolkit can assist ASEAN to embed gender equality perspectives across all levels of policy formulation and implementation to achieve more equitable outcomes in its initiatives and boost public confidence in its institutions. This approach aligns well with ASEAN's aspiration to build cohesive and inclusive policymaking that considers the diverse needs and contributions of women in the region.

#### **2. International Monetary Fund (IMF): Strategy Towards Mainstreaming Gender**

Application for ASEAN: Leveraging the IMF's strategy, ASEAN could prioritise the collection of gender-disaggregated data and the development of modelling tools for policy analysis. This data-driven approach can inform ASEAN's policy decisions, ensuring they contribute to reducing gender disparities, which in turn can foster economic growth and stability across the region. Collaboration with external partners could also be enhanced to bring in global best practices and resources.

#### **3. Government of Canada: Gender-Based Analysis Plus**

Application for ASEAN: The Gender-Based Analysis Plus framework can guide ASEAN in evaluating the impacts of its policies and programmes on different segments of the population. By considering a range of intersectional factors, ASEAN can ensure that its initiatives are inclusive and equitable, addressing the needs of the most marginalised and contributing to a more cohesive and resilient society.

#### **4. United Nations Trade and Development: UNCTAD Trade and Gender Toolbox**

Application for ASEAN: This toolbox provides ASEAN with a structured approach to assess the gendered impacts of trade reforms before they are implemented. By applying this framework, ASEAN can identify and mitigate potential adverse effects on women, ensuring that trade policies are both equitable and supportive of gender equality. This can be particularly beneficial in negotiating deep trade agreements and formulating economic policies that consider the unique challenges and opportunities faced by women in the region.

#### **5. United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) Strengthening Women's Entrepreneurship in National Micro, Small and Medium Enterprise Policies and Action Plans : Toolkit for Policymakers**

Application for ASEAN: The toolkit assists policymakers responsible for micro, small, and medium enterprise (MSME) development to assess the development of women's entrepreneurship at the national level. A completion of the self-assessment process provides insight on actions

to be taken to strengthen policy support and develop a positive ecosystem for women's entrepreneurship. It establishes a baseline to monitor longitudinal progress of initiatives targeting the advancement of women-owned-led MSMEs. It should help lead to more gender-responsive development of the MSME sector and a greater contribution of women entrepreneurs and women-owned-led enterprises to the economy.

Consulting and using these and other toolkits would enable ASEAN to take a more holistic and informed approach to gender mainstreaming, ensuring that gender equality and women's economic empowerment are central to its development agenda. The strategic integration of gender considerations can help AMS achieve sustainable development, economic growth, and social justice, aligning with both regional goals and global commitments to gender equality.

Source: Government of Canada (n.d.), IMF (2022), OECD (2018), UNESCAP (2022), UNCTAD (2017). The text has been adopted from the official webpages of the institutions.

#### 4.1. A Pragmatic Plan to Mainstream Gender in the ASEAN Economic Community

The transformation from the current, almost gender-blind AEC to one that is gender-transformative cannot be achieved overnight, and there are certain components of the process of gender mainstreaming that need to be addressed first. These include the following: (The list is nonsequential as some actions need to be undertaken in parallel as they support each other):

- **Institutional arrangements:** AEC must be given more explicit responsibility for gender mainstreaming and WEE. Whilst current entities such as ASEAN Commission on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children and ASEAN Committee on Women shall lead across all three communities, it is necessary that AEC forms its own body (for example, the AEC Gender Advisory Committee). That body will be responsible for ensuring that gender equality is treated as an economic objective, given women's role in the economy. It will also be responsible for coordination with the other entities including the ASEAN Women Entrepreneurs Network and the ASEAN Coordinating Committee on Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises. In fact, the coordination with the latter is crucial given that the focus of WEE in the current AEC is on promoting women as entrepreneurs. The AEC body will also need to build cooperation with the AMS national bodies responsible for WEE and gender equality.

- **Prepare for gender-informed policymaking:** No strategy can be implemented without the availability of relevant gender-related data. Better understanding of how economic activities and policies affect women and men differently (with additional intersectional elements) should translate into a better and more effective policies. Such results should, in turn, provide incentive to improve investment into a better collection of sex- (or gender-) disaggregated data, better assessment, and wider dissemination of results. It is encouraging that there is a drive to collect both qualitative and quantitative data on many aspects of gender equality and WEE. One objective should be to pull these together into one comprehensive source (Appendix 2) to be readily available to consult when designing new measures or negotiating new trade agreements (see also Box 1). Additionally, more reliable data can assist in identifying priorities for both sectoral and subregional targeting of measures, allocation of budgets, as well as gender-responsive monitoring and evaluation.
- **Early harvest:** AEC spans a wide range of economic activities and it would be counterproductive to start introducing gender-accommodating and gender-transformative actions across the current set of 153 strategic measures. Furthermore, it is easier to aim for those areas of the AEC where there are already established experiences and approaches for boosting WEE in some of the ASEAN dialogue partners or even some AMS. These could be grouped into three areas:
  - (i) enhancing market access for women (through, for example, a removal of barriers on trade in goods and services especially relevant for women, including through negotiation of trade agreements; making gender-responsive trade facilitation measures; and promoting WEE in and by small and medium-sized enterprises, etc.) (See Box 2);
  - (ii) enhancing women's capacity to engage in trade and other economic activities (through, for example, improving access to the following areas: instruments of digital trade; digital technology, trade, and other finance; trade-related information; infrastructure; and specialised skills and knowledge); and
  - (iii) reducing risks from participation in economic activities and trade through, for example, designing adjustment programmes that are considerate of women's needs (restricted mobility, multitasking/ being 'time-poor', etc.).
- **Accepting relevant international conventions and joining other international initiatives:** The application of international labour standards in ASEAN remains a work in progress. AMS must commit to quick and complete acceptance of all International Labour Organization Conventions relevant to gender equality and WEE. Most of the AMS have joined more than 125 World Trade Organization (WTO) members in the Trade and Gender Informal Working Group. They also signed the 2017 Buenos Aires Declaration on Trade and Women's Economic Empowerment (WTO, 2017) calling for the WTO to engage on the issues linking trade and gender. Brunei Darussalam, Singapore, and Thailand are not signatories. At the 11th WTO Ministerial Conference in Buenos Aires in 2017, more than 120 member countries, including seven AMS, declared that more must be done to include women in trade. The Buenos Aires Declaration on Trade and Women's Economic Empowerment aims to increase the participation of women in trade and remove barriers faced by women in entering the global marketplace.

- A small group of open and progressive countries, including Argentina, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Mexico, New Zealand, and Peru, are working together under the Global Trade and Gender Arrangement (WTO, 2021).<sup>24</sup> Moreover, there are benefits from strengthening partnerships with regional and international organisations working on gender equality and WEE (e.g. the Asian Development Bank, United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, and UNWomen) to leverage resources and expertise to advance gender equality within the AEC.
- **Advocacy, awareness, and agency:** It is important to foster active engagement and collaboration with diverse stakeholders, including women's organisations, gender experts, and private sector representatives throughout the AEC planning and implementation process. The interaction with AMS should incorporate opportunities for dialogue, knowledge sharing, and joint actions. AEC activities should advocate for WEE as part of human rights and promote intra- and extra-ASEAN cooperation on gender mainstreaming efforts.

By integrating these strategies into the planning and implementation of the future AEC blueprint, ASEAN can create a more gender-inclusive economic community that leverages the full potential of its entire population, contributing to more sustainable and equitable growth across the region.

## Box 2 Enhancing Market Access for Women and Promoting Women's Economic Empowerment (Examples of Interventions and Actions)

### Trade in Goods, Trade in Services and Trade Facilitation

- Reduce the remaining tariff barriers (especially on inputs) that make female-dominated industries less competitive and productive, or make everyday consumer goods less affordable; eliminate gender-related tariff differentials;
- Address the trade distorting effects of non-tariff measures including by simplifying the certification procedures to tackle women-specific obstacles (e.g. operating hours; access to documents) as the compliance costs of non-tariff measures disproportionately affect women producers/traders;
- Strengthen efforts to increase participation of women in standard-setting bodies (towards parity);
- Promote cross-border services trade with potential for women by joining plurilateral initiatives at the WTO; e-commerce has proven to be more women-friendly than traditional export/trade in goods and services;
- Lift restrictions on consuming services abroad as women tend to benefit from access to education, health, financial, and other services;
- Set up a dedicated trade facilitation support for women traders or micro, small, and medium enterprises led or owned by women;

<sup>24</sup> The Global Trade and Gender Arrangement is an innovative non-binding plurilateral trade instrument that is open for other countries to join. It introduces new principles, such as not weakening or reducing protection provided by gender equality laws and regulations to promote trade or investment (WTO, 2021).

- Mandate at least 30% female participation in National Trade Facilitation Committees; promote employment of women customs officers;
- Provide a dedicated ASSIST channel to help with Single Window procedures and use of paperless channels.

### Trade agreements

- Include a binding requirement for non-discriminatory treatment of women (and other marginalised groups) in as many individual chapters as relevant or appropriate in the trade agreement<sup>b</sup> and gradually (over time), consider greater use of specific, binding, and transparent language in relation to gender commitments in trade agreements;
- Use existing stand-alone arrangements with gender and trade provisions, such as the Global Trade and Gender Arrangement or some digital economy agreements as a model to develop further stand-alone agreements on gender and trade with specific provisions that would promote women's economic empowerment through trade;
- Place gender commitments in sections of chapters or add chapters that signal their importance and set the tone for the entire agreement;
- Assess the impact of gender provisions to inform any changes to the rules or strategies to bridge disparities;
- Periodically update trade agreement provisions as circumstances change;
- Integrate capacity strengthening into trade agreement design, implementation, monitoring, evaluation and financing;
- Include provisions requiring consultation with women representatives ( and those of other groups), for carrying out work programmes to implement relevant chapters, especially for the design of any technical assistance and capacity building programmes;
- Setup information portals that support and reinforce the intent and objectives of the provisions in the future agreement for the greater inclusion and benefit of women and marginalised groups;

Notes: Whilst this is mostly written from the perspective of increasing market access for women, it should be stressed that similar treatment ought to be considered for other marginalised groups such as youth, people with disabilities, and Indigenous People.

a. World Bank Group and WTO ( 2020:161).

b. An example of such a provision is the non-discrimination obligation contained in the Joint Initiative on Services Domestic Regulation outcome at the World Trade Organisation, and which will be incorporated by prior agreement into free trade agreements, including the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership and the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership.

Source: Author's research based on general literature on women and trade including World Bank Group and WTO (2020).

## 5. Linkages with the Other Two ASEAN Communities

The other two ASEAN communities (the ASCC and the APSC) also evolved with the deepening of ASEAN integration and now operate under 2025 Blueprints. As has been mentioned in the introduction to this paper, the ASCC carries main responsibility over gender equality and women's empowerment work. It relies on three primary entities: ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Women, ASEAN Committee on Women, and ASEAN Commission on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children. These bodies collectively contribute to the formulation and implementation of ASEAN's gender policies and programmes, demonstrating the community's commitment to promoting gender equality and the well-being of women and children across the region.<sup>25</sup>

The APSC's efforts towards gender mainstreaming and equity are primarily channelled through initiatives such as the ASEAN Regional Plan of Action on Women, Peace, and Security (RPA WPS). The RPA WPS is a comprehensive approach dedicated to integrating the women, peace, and security agenda into the fabric of the ASEAN political and security framework, emphasising sustainable peace and security for all citizens. This plan builds on previous political engagements and declarations within ASEAN, including those aimed at eliminating violence against women and promoting their rights. The APSC work underscores ASEAN's recognition of the importance of gender perspectives in peace and security matters and its commitment to enhancing gender equity through regional action plans and strategic frameworks.

Whilst all three communities share the same basic principles and values related to gender equity and should theoretically use those to weave their agendas and strengthen delivery and impact, at present this integrated work is still in a nascent phase. As already mentioned, one of the key deliverables of the AGMSF was to integrate all three communities and other ASEAN's gender institutions into, 'an effective, authoritative, and sufficiently capacitated system that can undertake a sustained advocacy and influencing effort and drive the implementation of a complex gender mainstreaming agenda over the long-term.' (ASEAN, 2021:7). As further explained, a smooth and strategic coordination of the different institutions (under each of the communities) is essential in this regard. The framework offered a proposal for such a coordinative mechanism to bring communities together (Figure 8.4) but it is not clear which, if any, of these coordinative functions and offices were put in place.

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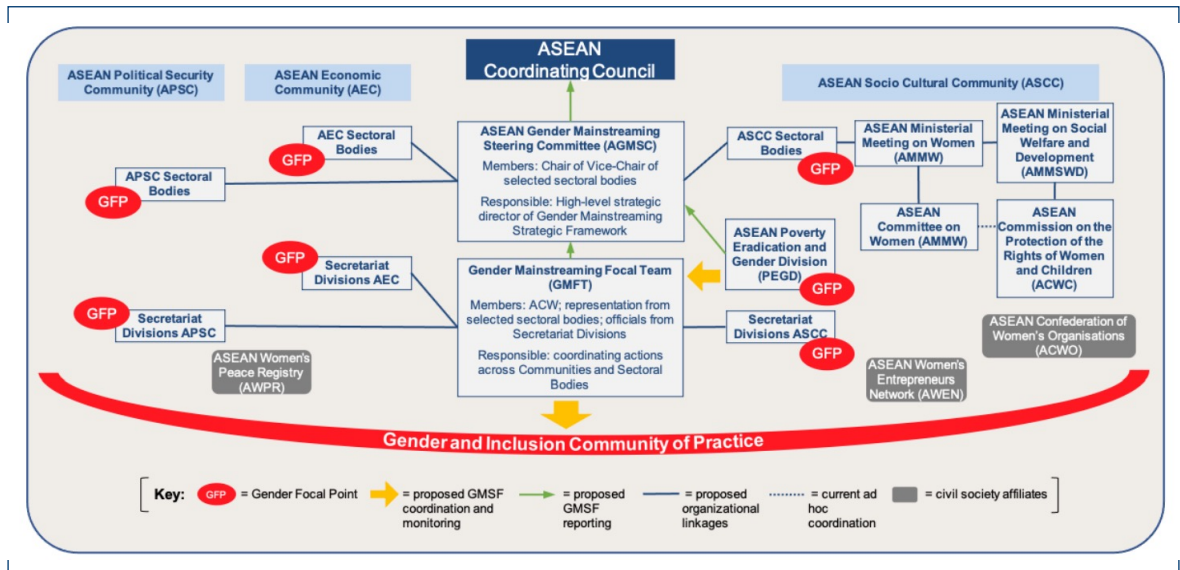
<sup>25</sup> The ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Women consists of ministers responsible for women's and girls' affairs in each ASEAN Member State. Their main role is to provide strategic policy direction for regional cooperation on women's issues within ASEAN.

The ASEAN Committee on Women is tasked with coordinating and monitoring ASEAN's activities relating to women, promoting cooperation, and facilitating the implementation of regional policies and plans. Made up of representatives from AMS women's agencies, the ASEAN Committee on Women develops and implements a five-year regional work plan, manages partnerships, and produces a triennial status report on women's political participation and their inclusion in national plans and programmes.

The ASEAN Commission on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children (ACWC) aims to advocate for and safeguard the human rights and fundamental freedoms of women and children in the ASEAN region. Reporting to the ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Social Welfare and Development, the ACWC collaborates with UN agencies, including UNWomen, to endorse and apply international and regional treaties and other mechanisms for the protection of women and children's rights. Unlike the ACW, which comprises senior government officials, the ACWC includes experts and NGO representatives.



Figure 8.4. Structure of the ASEAN Gender Mainstreaming Institutional Mechanism



Source: ASEAN (2021).

## 6. Short Summary and Takeaways for Policymakers

### 6.1. Summary

Since its inception in 1967, ASEAN has been proactive in promoting gender equality, establishing various policies and mechanisms towards this end. The ASCC plays a pivotal role in this effort, serving as the main entity responsible for developing gender-related policies. From 1988, ASEAN has introduced numerous declarations aimed at bolstering women's rights. Additionally, AMS have shown their commitment to international efforts by becoming signatories to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, adopting the Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action, and supporting the SDGs. This series of strategic initiatives has led to the adoption of the Action Agenda and the ASEAN Declaration on Gender-Responsive Implementation of the ASEAN Community Vision 2025 and Sustainable Development Goals, marking a significant step forward in the region's commitment to gender equality (ASEAN, 2017b).

Furthermore, the AGMSF 2021–2025 (ASEAN, 2021) tabled a clear demand for the whole-of-ASEAN approach in the work on promoting gender equality and WEE. This framework proposed some indicative agendas but was supposed to be complemented by the Implementation Plan which did not materialise. In the absence of that plan – which would have been instrumental in putting in place a new institutional mechanism to drive this coordinated gender mainstreaming across the communities, – the communities have started to contribute independently. For example, the APSC has developed the RPA WPS and some linked activities. The AEC delivered the Declaration on Building a more Sustainable, Inclusive, and Resilient Future: Unlocking Women’s Entrepreneurship in ASEAN (2022), whilst ASCC worked, inter alia, on the Declaration on Gender Equality and Family Development (ASEAN, 2023a). The author could not find any evidence of efforts to make inter-communities linkages in these declarations or related work.

## 6.2. Takeaways

As mentioned earlier, it is not clear if the AGMSF is considered for the discussions on the Post-2025 Vision and future communities Blueprints.

Realistically, that work will require consultations not only within ASEAN and its Member States but also with the wider community in and outside ASEAN. Findings of projects such as this should provide valuable insights into new forward-looking strategies for ASEAN.

It is also the best time to address some of the issues and concerns affecting (or perhaps interfering with) the effective and efficient work on gender mainstreaming. Here are some of the concerns identified in this chapter:

- **Women’s leadership within ASEAN**

Between 1967 when ASEAN was established, and 2024, there have been 15 Secretary-Generals (including the current one), none of whom were women. Only three women have held a Deputy Secretary-General role; one from the Philippines from 2012 to 2015 (responsible for ASSC), one from Cambodia from 2006 to 2009 (responsible for ASCC) and currently one from Malaysia (responsible for APSC). The members of the ASEAN Coordinating Council are all men except for one woman from Indonesia.<sup>26</sup> As was obvious from various measures of gender equality and WEE, ASEAN clearly lags behind in terms of political empowerment of women. Governments should lead by example in this regard and introduce deliberate policies to recruit more women who meet criteria into leadership positions, both in the administrative sector and at the boards of publicly owned companies. Germany could be a good role model to follow.

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<sup>26</sup> Amongst the members there is Aung San Sun Kyi from the Republic of the Union of Myanmar but given that she is in prison her role is only nominal. There is no publicly available information on the members of the AEC, APSC, and ASCC councils, so it is not possible to comment on the sex composition of those bodies.

- **Data and analysis are crucial for gender-informed economic governance**

This chapter makes a strong argument for the need to integrate gender perspectives into the economic governance of the ASEAN region. By developing an ASEAN Gender Equality Dashboard, akin to APEC's model (Appendix 2), ASEAN would better monitor and evaluate its progress towards gender equality and WEE. Additionally, significant investment (financial and human resources) is needed to widen the scope and extent of sex/gender-disaggregated data collection, assessments, and dissemination of reports.

- **Proactive stance in negotiating or upgrading trade agreements with gender and economic inclusion provisions**

Whilst this chapter did not analyse current ASEAN+1<sup>27</sup> and AMS trade agreements for their inclusion of gender-related provisions, other reports show that ASEAN lags behind some other countries (i.e. Canada, Chile, and New Zealand) when it comes to willingness and readiness to negotiate on these issues. Often ASEAN hides behind arguments of diversity and states that not all its AMS are ready to embark on this 'non-economic' and new area for trade agreement negotiations. This is not a beneficial tactic, as ASEAN trading partners will push for such engagement – their governments must respond to the demands of their electorates. Thus, to foster inclusive economic growth based on trade, ASEAN is strongly advised to consider starting negotiation of trade agreements with forward-thinking partners in gender mainstreaming and other aspects of inclusive trade. Business as usual perpetuates gender disparities, hindering sustainable development. Collaborating with progressive partners ensures integration of robust gender provisions in trade agreements, catalysing women's empowerment and bridging socioeconomic gaps. Embracing innovative approaches promotes a more equitable and resilient AEC, aligning with global efforts for gender equality.

- **Inspire change of mindsets by addressing discriminatory gender and social norms**

The only successful long-term strategy is one that addresses discriminatory social norms, laws, and regulations. This includes looking at employers' policies and practices related to women's equal access to, and control over, assets and resources needed to fully participate in the economy. Prevention, mitigation, and reduction of gender-related violence and sexual harassment in both formal and informal workplaces as well as during travel to and from the workplace is indispensable in the search for gender equality.

The 2023 Declaration on Gender Equality and Family Development (ASEAN, 2023a) could have been used to shine a light on existing discrimination, both that which is open and explicit, as well as that which occurs by omission. However, the declaration focuses almost exclusively on women, men, girls, and boys within the context of family, and fails to address the full spectrum of gender issues. This narrow focus undermines the essence of gender mainstreaming, which aims to consider the varied experiences and needs of all individuals, including those of different sexual orientations and gender identities.

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<sup>27</sup> ASEAN + 1 stands for the free trade agreements between ASEAN (as a bloc) and one other trading partner, e.g. China, India, Japan, Republic of Korea, and similar.

The omission points to a broader challenge within ASEAN's gender mainstreaming efforts: the need for a more inclusive and comprehensive approach that transcends traditional gender binaries and family structures. To effectively mainstream gender, ASEAN must expand its framework to address the diverse realities of all individuals, ensuring that policies and programmes are truly inclusive and equitable.

Lastly, leveraging existing tools and best practices from international organisations and other regional bodies can provide valuable insights, frameworks, and confidence to ASEAN policymakers and analysts. Ultimately, the successful engendering of the AEC requires commitment, collaboration, and continuous effort from all AMS and stakeholders.

### 6.3. Final Message

Failure to take swift action on the tasks outlined in the AGMSF and those mentioned above is likely to hinder ASEAN's ability to achieve the vision set out in its 'Beyond 2025' AGMSF framework, which states:

'ASEAN will be an example of change-focused inter-governmental leadership on gender and inclusion issues in the region. With a clearly defined agenda on gender equality that provides strategic, evidence-based support to inter-governmental processes. ASEAN will act as a forum for knowledge, dialogue and ideas; facilitate an effective interface between women's organisations and movements and national governments; deliver gender-transformative programming; act as an authoritative voice championing the issues of the poorest and most vulnerable women and girls in the region; shape donor priorities; and contribute to the international conversation.' (ASEAN, 2021: Section 5. p.3)

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## Appendix 1: 2023 ASEAN Declaration on Gender Equality and Family Development

What follows is a brief analysis of the text of the ASEAN Declaration on Gender Equality and Family Development from a gender diverse perspective, focusing on five operative points (ASEAN, 2023a).<sup>28</sup>

### 1. Strengthening Family Resilience and Well-Being

Traditional definitions of ‘family’ can exclude family units combining gender diverse individuals, which may include chosen families, same-sex partners with or without children, and other nontraditional configurations. Policies must broaden the concept of family to ensure that all types of family units are recognised and supported, facilitating their resilience and well-being. Gender mainstreaming in this context should include sensitivity to the diverse needs and realities of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer, asexual, and more (LGBTIQA+) families, ensuring they too can live independently and harmoniously.

### 2. Economic Empowerment and Education Opportunities for Women and Girls

Whilst promoting economic empowerment and educational opportunities for women and girls is crucial, it is also essential to recognise and address the specific barriers faced by transgender women and nonbinary individuals. These groups often encounter significant discrimination in education and the workplace. Mainstreaming gender into labour and employment policies should include protections against discrimination based on gender identity and expression, as well as programmes specifically designed to support the inclusion of transgender and nonbinary individuals in education and the workforce.

### 3. Strengthening Capacities on Family-Inclusive Approaches

The call for sex-disaggregated data and statistics should be expanded to include data on gender diversity beyond the male/female binary. This data is crucial for understanding the unique challenges faced by LGBTIQA+ families and for developing inclusive policies and programmes. Increasing awareness of family-inclusive approaches should also involve educating stakeholders about the diversity of family structures, including those of the LGBTIQA+ community.

### 4. Investments in Care Systems and Social Services

Building universal, gender-responsive, and sustainable care systems must explicitly consider the needs of LGBTIQA+ individuals, who may face barriers in accessing care due to stigma and discrimination. Policies aimed at reducing the burden of unpaid care work for women and girls should also consider the roles that nonbinary and transgender individuals play in caregiving within families, ensuring that support systems are inclusive and accessible to everyone, regardless of gender identity.

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<sup>28</sup> Appendix 1 recognises and addresses several key areas where existing instruments or frameworks may unintentionally exclude or marginalise nonbinary, transgender, and other LGBTIQA+ individuals and their families.

### **5. Cross-Sectoral and Inter-Pillar Cooperation**

Engaging a broad range of stakeholders in promoting family development, women's empowerment, and gender equality offers an opportunity to include LGBTIQ+ voices and perspectives. This could involve partnering with LGBTIQ+ organisations, including LGBTIQ+ researchers and practitioners in knowledge exchange and research initiatives, and ensuring that efforts to promote inclusive sustainable growth explicitly address the needs and contributions of the LGBTIQ+ community.

A truly inclusive approach to gender equality and family policies within ASEAN and its Member States requires explicit recognition of, and provisions for, the rights, needs, and contributions of LGBTIQ+ individuals and their families. This means going beyond traditional gender binaries and family structures to embrace and support the full spectrum of gender identities and family configurations, ensuring that all individuals can benefit from these initiatives

## Appendix 2: Excerpts from the APEC Women and the Economy Dashboard

The APEC Women and the Economy Dashboard (APEC, 2023) aims to offer an overview of the situation of women within the region by tracking trends over time through various indicators to assess progress, pinpoint areas lacking in data and policy, and to shed light on societal issues affecting women's economic engagement.

These indicators focus on the following areas: i) access to capital and assets; ii) market access; iii) skills, capacity building, and health; iv) leadership, voice, and agency; and v) innovation and technology. The aim is to provide policymakers with reliable and current data that highlight the conditions, opportunities, and challenges faced by women in their participation in economic activities.

The dashboard serves as a tool to facilitate the incorporation of gender perspectives across APEC. It enables technical working groups and subforums within APEC to utilise its comprehensive indicators, which cover a broad spectrum of women's economic participation, to identify and integrate gender considerations into projects and areas within their scope.

Major international organisations such as the International Labour Organisation, the International Telecommunication Union, the Inter-Parliamentary Union, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, the United Nations, the World Bank, the World Economic Forum, and the World Health Organisation contribute data for these indicators.

The 2023 edition of the dashboard includes 90 indicators for the years 2008–2022. Data used for the construction of the dashboard come from all major international organisation. The dashboard is updated biennially to capture the evolving status of women in APEC countries, including adjustments in the indicators to address data availability and the pertinence of specific measures.

Most of the indicators are updated until the period 2020–2022; however, there are still issues with data availability. Of concern are data on female graduates in science, technology, engineering and mathematics programmes; women researchers; and those in the field of research and development; as well as the percentage of firms with female owners and managers. The persistence of data gaps in those areas prevent the depiction of a more accurate picture of women's participation across different areas and their representation in leadership roles in the private sector.

### Table 8A.1. Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Women and the Economy Dashboard 2023

	Indicator	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
1. Access to Capital and Assets																
1.1 Property and Inheritance Rights	1.1.1 Women and men have equal ownership rights to property (Y/N)	Yes = 19/21	Yes = 19/21	Yes = 19/21	Yes = 19/21	Yes = 19/21	Yes = 19/21	Yes = 19/21	Yes = 19/21	Yes = 19/21	Yes = 19/21	Yes = 19/21	Yes = 19/21	Yes = 19/21	Yes = 19/21	Yes = 19/21
	1.1.2 Equality of inheritance rights between sons and daughters (Y/N)	Yes = 18/21	Yes = 18/21	Yes = 18/21	Yes = 18/21	Yes = 18/21	Yes = 18/21	Yes = 18/21	Yes = 18/21	Yes = 18/21	Yes = 18/21	Yes = 18/21	Yes = 18/21	Yes = 18/21	Yes = 18/21	Yes = 18/21
	1.1.3 Equality of inheritance rights between husbands and wives (Y/N)	Yes = 18/21	Yes = 18/21	Yes = 18/21	Yes = 18/21	Yes = 18/21	Yes = 18/21	Yes = 18/21	Yes = 18/21	Yes = 18/21	Yes = 18/21	Yes = 18/21	Yes = 18/21	Yes = 18/21	Yes = 18/21	Yes = 18/21
1.2 Labour Market Participation	1.2.1 Proportion of women population ages 15 and older that is economically active (in %, modelled ILO estimate)	59.8	59.4	59.0	59.0	58.9	58.6	58.5	33.3	29.6	29.6	29.6	29.6	29.6	29.6	34.6
	1.2.2 Ratio of female to male labour force participation (in %, modelled ILO estimate)	78.4	78.4	78.3	78.4	78.5	78.5	78.7	33.3	29.6	29.6	29.6	29.6	29.6	29.6	34.6
	1.2.3 Women and men can retire at the same age with full pension benefits (Y/N)	Yes = 16/21	Yes = 16/21	Yes = 16/21	Yes = 16/21	Yes = 16/21	Yes = 16/21	Yes = 16/21	Yes = 16/21	Yes = 17/21	Yes = 17/21	Yes = 17/21	Yes = 17/21	Yes = 17/21	Yes = 17/21	Yes = 17/21
1.3 Financial Services; Availability, Access, Literacy, Outreach and Learning	1.3.1 Commercial banks (per 100,000 adults)	14.7	14.8	14.8	15.4	15.7	15.6	15.5	15.5	15.3	15.0	14.8	14.6	14.3	14.0	
	1.3.2 SIGI "Access to Credit" measurement of women's right and de facto access to bank loans (Score = 0.5, or 1)							0.12					0.07			0.05
	1.3.3 Existing law against discrimination in access to credit on the basis of sex (Y/N)	Yes = 8/21	Yes = 8/21	Yes = 8/21	Yes = 8/21	Yes = 8/21	Yes = 8/21	Yes = 8/21	Yes = 9/21	Yes = 9/21	Yes = 9/21	Yes = 9/21	Yes = 9/21	Yes = 9/21	Yes = 9/21	Yes = 9/21
	1.3.4 Account at a bank or equivalent, female (% age 15+)				59.0			72.4			73.4				81.2	
	1.3.5 Account at a bank or equivalent, male (% age 15+)				64.0			74.1			77.3				82.8	

	Indicator	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
<b>1.4</b>																
<b>Financial Services: Formal Saving and Borrowing</b>																
1.4.1	Saved at a financial institution, female (% age 15+)				32.1			38.6			34.3				42.2	
1.4.2	Loan from a financial institution, female (% age 15+)				9.9			28.1			29.2				39.1	
<b>1.5</b>																
<b>Building Credit</b>																
1.5.1	Owns a debit or credit card, female (% age 15+)				42.7			53.7			61.7				69.8	
1.5.2	Owns a debit or credit card, male (% age 15+)				47.0			54.9			65.5				71.2	
1.5.3	Made a utility payment, female (% age 15+)							76.5			69.9				63.4	
1.5.4	Made a utility payment, male (% age 15+)							73.4			69.2				64.7	
<b>2. Access to Markets</b>																
<b>2.1</b>																
<b>Infrastructure</b>																
2.1.1	People using safely managed drinking water services (% of population)	80.5	80.5	80.6	80.7	80.8	80.9	81.0	81.0	81.1	81.2	81.3	81.3	81.4		
2.1.2	People using safely managed sanitation services (% of population)	46.0	48.0	50.0	52.1	54.3	56.5	58.7	61.1	63.5	65.9	68.4	70.9	72.1		
2.1.3	Access to electricity (rural %)	94.6	95.3	96.4	96.9	97.1	97.3	97.6	97.5	97.8	98.2	98.3	98.4	98.0	98.7	
2.1.4	Access to electricity (urban %)	99.4	99.6	99.6	99.7	99.7	99.8	99.8	99.5	99.8	99.8	99.9	99.8	99.8	99.9	
2.1.5	Quality of infrastructure (scale of 1-7)	4.6	4.6	4.8	5.0	4.9	4.9	5.0	4.9	4.8	4.8					
<b>2.2</b>																
<b>Competitive Access for Entrepreneurs</b>																
2.2.1	Effectiveness of anti-monopoly policy (scale of 1-7)	4.5	4.5	4.5	4.4	4.5	4.5	4.5	4.5	4.3	4.4					
2.2.2	Extent of market dominance (scale of 1-7)	4.5	4.3	4.2	4.1	4.2	4.2	4.2	4.2	4.1	4.1	4.2	4.2			
2.2.3	Intensity of local competition (scale of 1-7)	5.4	5.3	5.3	5.3	5.3	5.4	5.5	5.5	5.5	5.5					

	Indicator	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
<b>2.3</b>																
<b>Access to International Trade</b>																
2.3.1	Access of domestic companies to international markets (scale of 0-100)	78.1	80.3	81.3	81.1	80.8	81.5	81.8	82.0	82.8	83.7	84.7	84.1	84.3	82.9	80.5
<b>2.4</b>																
<b>Vulnerable Employment</b>																
2.4.1	Proportion of contributing family members (% of total employed)	13.0	12.4	12.0	11.6	11.1	10.6	10.3	9.7	9.2	8.8	8.5	8.2	8.2	8.0	
2.4.2	Female unemployment rate (% of female labour force, modelled ILO estimate)	4.4	4.9	4.7	4.6	4.4	4.2	4.1	4.1	3.9	3.8	3.6	3.6	4.7	3.9	3.7
<b>2.5</b>																
<b>Non-Discrimination in Employment Access, Opportunity, and Conditions</b>																
2.5.1	SGI "Freedom of movement" (Score 0.5, or 1)								81.0	81.1	81.2	81.3	81.3	81.4		
2.5.2	Existing law mandating non-discrimination based on sex in employment (Y/N)	Yes = 17/21	Yes = 17/21	Yes = 17/21	Yes = 17/21	Yes = 17/21	Yes = 18/21	Yes = 18/21	Yes = 18/21	Yes = 18/21	Yes = 18/21	Yes = 18/21	Yes = 18/21	Yes = 18/21	Yes = 18/21	Yes = 18/21
2.5.3	Wage equality between women and men for similar work (score of 0 to 1)	0.67	0.68	0.68	0.67	0.67	0.67	0.67	0.66	0.66	0.67	0.68	0.68	0.69	0.71	0.70
2.5.4	Whether women are able to work in the same industries as men (Y/N)	Yes = 10/21	Yes = 10/21	Yes = 11/21	Yes = 11/21	Yes = 12/21	Yes = 12/21	Yes = 13/21	Yes = 13/21	Yes = 13/21	Yes = 13/21	Yes = 13/21	Yes = 13/21	Yes = 13/21	Yes = 14/21	Yes = 14/21
2.5.5	Whether a woman can work in a job deemed dangerous in the same way as a man (Y/N)	Yes = 14/21	Yes = 14/21	Yes = 14/21	Yes = 14/21	Yes = 14/21	Yes = 14/21	Yes = 15/21	Yes = 15/21	Yes = 15/21	Yes = 15/21	Yes = 15/21	Yes = 15/21	Yes = 16/21	Yes = 16/21	Yes = 16/21
2.5.6	Whether women can work the same night hours as men (Y/N)	Yes = 19/21	Yes = 19/21	Yes = 20/21	Yes = 20/21	Yes = 21/21	Yes = 21/21	Yes = 21/21	Yes = 21/21	Yes = 21/21	Yes = 21/21	Yes = 21/21	Yes = 21/21	Yes = 21/21	Yes = 21/21	Yes = 21/21
<b>3. Skill, Capacity-Building, and Health</b>																
<b>3.1</b>																
<b>Educational Attainment</b>																
3.1.1	How close women are to achieving equality with men in literacy, net enrolment in primary and secondary schools; and gross enrolment in tertiary school (scale of 0-100)	97.7	97.6	98.1	98.1	98.5	98.4	98.5	98.4	98.4	98.3	98.6	98.6	98.6	98.2	98.4



	Indicator	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
3.4.9	Existence of women's legal protection from domestic violence such as rape, assault, and harassment (score of 0.25, .5, .75, or 1)							0.29				0.62				0.43
<b>4. Leadership, Voice and Agency</b>																
<b>4.1</b>	<b>Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (CRVS)</b>															
4.1.1	Whether economies maintain continuous, permanent, compulsory and universal recording of vital events (notably, live births, deaths and causes of death)	Yes = 16	Yes = 16	Yes = 16	Yes = 16	Yes = 16	Yes = 16	Yes = 16	Yes = 16	Yes = 16	Yes = 16	Yes = 16	Yes = 16	Yes = 16	Yes = 16	Yes = 16
<b>4.2</b>	<b>Women's agency</b>															
4.2.1	Can a woman apply for a passport in the same way as a man (Y/N)	Yes = 19/21	Yes = 19/21	Yes = 19/21	Yes = 19/21	Yes = 19/21	Yes = 19/21	Yes = 19/21	Yes = 19/21	Yes = 19/21	Yes = 19/21	Yes = 19/21	Yes = 19/21	Yes = 19/21	Yes = 19/21	Yes = 19/21
4.2.2	Can a woman sign a contract in the same way as a man (Y/N)	Yes = 21/21	Yes = 21/21	Yes = 21/21	Yes = 21/21	Yes = 21/21	Yes = 21/21	Yes = 21/21	Yes = 21/21	Yes = 21/21	Yes = 21/21	Yes = 21/21	Yes = 21/21	Yes = 21/21	Yes = 21/21	Yes = 21/21
4.2.3	Can a woman register a business in the same way as a man (Y/N)	Yes = 21/21	Yes = 21/21	Yes = 21/21	Yes = 21/21	Yes = 21/21	Yes = 21/21	Yes = 21/21	Yes = 21/21	Yes = 21/21	Yes = 21/21	Yes = 21/21	Yes = 21/21	Yes = 21/21	Yes = 21/21	Yes = 21/21
<b>4.3</b>	<b>Women's Participation in Courts</b>															
4.3.1	Does a woman's register a business in the same evidentiary weight as a man's (Y/N)	Yes = 19/19	Yes = 19/19	Yes = 19/19	Yes = 19/19	Yes = 19/19	Yes = 19/19	Yes = 20/20	Yes = 20/21	Yes = 20/21	Yes = 20/21	Yes = 20/21	Yes = 20/21	Yes = 20/21	Yes = 20/21	Yes = 20/21
<b>4.4</b>	<b>Care Economy: Time spent on unpaid work</b>															
4.4.1	Average time spent on unpaid work, female (hours per day)															
<b>4.5</b>	<b>Conditions for Career Advancement</b>															
4.5.1	Whether the law mandates equal remuneration for men and women for work of equal value (Y/N)	Yes = 8/21	Yes = 8/21	Yes = 7/21	Yes = 8/21	Yes = 8/21	Yes = 9/21	Yes = 9/21	Yes = 9/21	Yes = 9/21	Yes = 9/21	Yes = 9/21	Yes = 9/21	Yes = 10/21	Yes = 11/21	Yes = 11/21
4.5.2	Whether there are laws Penalising or preventing the dismissal of pregnant women (Y/N)	Yes = 16/21	Yes = 16/21	Yes = 16/21	Yes = 16/21	Yes = 16/21	Yes = 17/21	Yes = 17/21	Yes = 17/21	Yes = 17/21	Yes = 17/21	Yes = 17/21	Yes = 17/21	Yes = 17/21	Yes = 17/21	Yes = 17/21
4.5.3	Whether the law mandates paid maternity leave of at least 14 weeks (Y/N)	Yes = 8/21	Yes = 10/21	Yes = 10/21	Yes = 11/21	Yes = 11/21	Yes = 11/21	Yes = 11/21	Yes = 11/21	Yes = 12/21	Yes = 12/21	Yes = 12/21	Yes = 13/21	Yes = 13/21	Yes = 14/21	Yes = 14/21



	Indicator	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
	4.5.4 Whether the law mandates paid parental leave (Y/N)	Yes = 3/21	Yes = 4/21	Yes = 5/21	Yes = 6/21	Yes = 7/21	Yes = 7/21	Yes = 8/21	Yes = 8/21	Yes = 9/21	Yes = 9/21	Yes = 10/21	Yes = 10/21	Yes = 10/21	Yes = 10/21	Yes = 11/21
<b>4.6 Private Sector Leadership</b>																
	4.6.1 Percentage of firms that report female participation in ownership (%)															
	4.6.2 Percentage of firms that report female participation in top ownership (%)															
<b>4.7 Political Leadership</b>																
	4.7.1 Proportion of women in ministerial level positions (%)	14.4		16.1	0.0	14.3		16.2	15.5			18.3	19.4	20.1		26.6
	4.7.2 Proportion of seats held by women in parliament (%)	18.4	19.0	18.9	18.8	19.5	20.0	19.5	20.0	20.8	21.4	22.5	23.3	24.4	26.2	26.7
	4.7.3 How close women are to equality with men at the highest levels of political decision-making (scale of 0-100)	14.5	14.8	15.8	15.7	15.0	15.6	17.1	16.9	17.4	19.4	20.4	21.3	23.5	25.6	27.6
<b>4.8 Positions of Influence: Judiciary and Academia</b>																
	4.8.1 Ratio of Male to Female Judges															
	4.8.2 Ratio of Male to Female University Presidents															
<b>5. Innovation and Technology</b>																
<b>5.1 Women's agency</b>																
	5.1.1 Mobile phone subscriptions as percentage of the population, total (%)	67.5	75.6	83.7	90.4	97.2	103.0	106.5	107.1	112.0	117.0	121.0	126.6	124.8	127.2	
	5.1.2 Percentage of total population covered by a mobile network signal (%)	94.6		95.9	98.0	97.9	97.6	97.4	97.1	97.2	98.6	98.9	99.4	99.3	99.3	
<b>5.2 Internet Use</b>																
	5.2.1 Percentage of population who are internet users, (%)	32.6	36.5	40.9	44.0	47.5	49.5	51.6	54.7	58.8	60.5	64.9	69.1	73.4	76.3	
	5.2.2 Female internet users (% of population)										70.6	72.6			75.9	
	5.2.3 Used the internet to buy something online, female (% age 15+)							24.6				40.8			64.3	



	Indicator	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
<b>5.5 "Green" Awareness and Activity</b>	5.5.1 Household air quality (scale of 0-100)	55.0	55.8	56.6	57.3	58.0	58.7	59.2	59.9	60.5	61.1	61.7	62.3	62.3	62.3	62.3
	5.5.2 Exposure to air pollution (scale of 0-100)	45.4	45.8	46.4	46.9	47.3	47.5	47.6	48.1	49.0	49.9	50.0	49.7	49.7	49.7	49.7
	5.5.3 Wastewater treatment (scale of 0-100)															
	5.5.4 Waste management (scale of 0-100)										60.4			60.4		67.9
	5.5.5 Fish stocks (scale of 0-100)	32.9	31.6	31.8	31.3	32.1	31.9	30.0	28.1	27.7	29.0	31.9	31.9	31.9	31.9	31.9

APEC = Asia-Pacific Economic Co-operation, ILO = International Labour Organization, R&D = research and development, SIGI = Social Institutions and Gender Index, STEM = science, technology, engineering and mathematics, Y = yes.

Note:

1. See Technical Notes (pp.111–144) for the description, methodology, and data sources of the dashboard indicators.
2. Blank entries for APEC Dashboard indicators mean that data are not available, or no APEC aggregates were calculated.
3. Blank entries for individual economy dashboards correspond to unavailability of data.

Source: APEC (2023).

## Appendix 3: Gender Review of the ASEAN Vision and Gender-Specific Policies and Declarations

**Table 8A.2. Gender Review of the ASEAN Vision and Gender-Specific Policies and Declarations**

Policy Document	Is Gender Mentioned?	Gender Mainstreaming Commitments
<b>General Vision</b>		
ASEAN Community Vision 2025 (issued 2015)	<b>Limited to no gender references</b> (some mention mostly under the ASCC pillar and inclusion in vulnerable groups)	No specific commitments
ASCC Blueprint 2025 (issued 2015)	<b>There is a gender-transformative potential</b> (rights-based approach has specific references to gender)	YES The second ASCC objective aims to enable 'an inclusive community that promotes high quality of life, equitable access to opportunities for all, and promotes and protects the human rights of women, children, youth, the elderly/older persons, persons with disabilities, migrant workers and vulnerable and marginalised groups' and includes some specific strategic measures for gender mainstreaming
AEC Blueprint 2025 (issued 2015)	<b>Limited to no gender references</b> (There is one in connection to MSMEs, and a mention of women linked to enhanced participation in STI and MSMEs)	NO
AEC 2025 Consolidated Strategic Action Plan (issued in 2017, updated 2018)	<b>Limited to no gender references</b> (mostly focused on women's participation in MSMEs and STI)	NO
Complementarities between the ASEAN Community Vision 2025 and the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: A Framework for Action (issued in 2017)	<b>Gender-responsive</b> (gender integrated into the framework but does not outline a clear approach. Gender equality is framed as an instrument to broader SDGs)	YES The focus on 'leave no one behind' as a common goal between the two agendas. This principle pays special attention to women and vulnerable groups. Furthermore, WEE is seen as essential for broader economic and social change. Includes measures related to improving nutrition for women and vulnerable groups.
Plan of Action to Implement the Joint Declaration on Comprehensive Partnership between ASEAN and the UN (2021–2025) (Issued in 2020)	<b>Gender-responsive</b> (Has potential to be gender transformative. The plan promotes the active participation of women at various levels and advocates for raising awareness on gender equality)	YES Present in the political security cooperation section of the plan. The plan makes references to support women's participation in economic activities in ASEAN and supporting ASEAN in promoting women-led entrepreneurship and financing gender equality. There is a subsection on gender mainstreaming with a commitment to collecting gender data to monitor SDGs implementation, promotion of best practices, capacity building, elimination of violence and discrimination (including vulnerable groups).

Policy Document	Is Gender Mentioned?	Gender Mainstreaming Commitments
<b>Gender-Specific</b>		
Declaration on the Advancement of Women in ASEAN Region, 1988	<b>Gender-responsive:</b> (The declaration does not directly address the root cause of gender inequality, but it encourages gender mainstreaming across ASEAN's work)	YES Commitments to promote and implement women's participation in all fields. Commitments to gender mainstreaming in national plans, encouraging participation of women's organisations in national and regional resilience, and strengthening solidarity between regional and global women's groups
Ha Noi Declaration on the Enhancement of Welfare and development of the ASEAN Women and Children, 2010	<b>Gender-transformative potential.</b> (It covers all the elements of a rights-based approach. Increased access to information and improved governance)	YES Commitment to gender mainstreaming, building capacities of AMS, encouraging regional cooperation to strengthen gender-responsive policymaking. Increased accountability towards international commitments
ASEAN Declaration on Gender-Responsive Implementation of the ASEAN Community Vision 2025 (issued 2017)	<b>Gender-responsive</b> (The declaration includes general commitments to mainstreaming gender considerations in the ASEAN Community Vision)	YES Mindful that sustainable development and gender equality require multisectoral interventions and approaches at different levels. It includes several commitments including via gender-responsive budgeting, targeted interventions and investments for gender equality, promoting equitable participation in decision-making, and mainstreaming gender concerns across sectoral bodies in the three ASEAN pillars.
ASEAN Gender Mainstreaming Strategic Framework (2021-2015) issued in 2021	<b>Gender-transformative.</b> (The framework addresses social norms and daily practices that lead to gender inequality. It seeks to mainstream gender in ASEAN at multiple levels. )	YES Proposes a framework for ASEAN gender mainstreaming with a rights-based approach to integrate gender at all levels of activities, planning, implementation, and monitoring. States the need to include men and boys. It also refers to the need to provide sex-disaggregated data, capacity building for ASEAN staff, and involving CSOs in consultations.
Declaration on Gender Equality and Family Development 2023	<b>Gender-responsive</b> (It does not address the roots causing inequality and discrimination.)	YES but limited. Commitments to gender mainstreaming but heavily skewed towards the traditional family roles. Important commitments to improve universal, gender-responsive, and sustainable care systems, and social services to recognise and reduce the burden of unpaid care work. Also to strengthen cross-sectoral and inter-pillar cooperation across the ASEAN Community, such as through knowledge exchange and research, and via stakeholders.

Policy Document	Is Gender Mentioned?	Gender Mainstreaming Commitments
ASEAN Guidelines on Gender Mainstreaming into Labour and Employment Policies Towards Decent Work for All (issued in 2021)	<b>Gender-transformative</b> (Targets four specific areas i.) employment promotion; ii.) decent working conditions; iii.) social and maternity protection; and iv) international labour migration.	YES It aims to mainstream gender equality into labour and employment policies and practices in line with international standards in AMS. It addresses the discrimination and their causes.
Declaration on Building a more Sustainable, Inclusive and Resilient Future: Unlocking Women's Entrepreneurship in ASEAN		

AMS = ASEAN Member State, ASEAN = Association for Southeast Asian Nations, AEC = ASEAN Economic Community., ASCC = ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community, CSO = civil society organisation, MSME = micro, small, and medium enterprise, SDG = Sustainable Development Goals, STI = Science, Technology and Innovation, WEE = women's economic empowerment.

Source: Adapted and expanded by author from the Han, et al., (2022: Annex 1).

## Appendix 4: The List of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations Commitments on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment<sup>29</sup>

1975	Convening of the ASEAN Women Leaders Conference
1976	Establishment of ASEAN Sub-Committee on Women
1981	ASW Renamed ASEAN Women's Programme
1988	Declaration on the Advancement of Women in the ASEAN Region
2004	Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women in the ASEAN Region
2010	Ha Noi Declaration on the Enhancement of the Welfare and Development of ASEAN Women and Children
2012	Human Rights Declaration
2013	Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women and Children
2013	ASEAN Declaration on Strengthening Social Protection
2015	ASEAN Declaration and Convention Against Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children
2017	Manila Declaration to Counter the Rise of Radicalisation and Violent Extremism
2017	ASEAN Declaration on Culture of Prevention for a Peaceful, Inclusive, Resilient, Healthy and Harmonious Society
2017	Manila Statement on Mainstreaming Women's Economic Empowerment (WEE) in ASEAN
2017	Action Agenda on Mainstreaming Women's Economic Empowerment (WEE) in ASEAN
2017	Joint Statement on Women, Peace and Security
2017	ASEAN Declaration on the Role of the Civil Service as a Catalyst for Achieving the ASEAN Community Vision 2025
2017	ASEAN Declaration on Gender-Responsive Implementation of the ASEAN Community Vision 2025
2018	ASEAN Enabling Masterplan 2025: Mainstreaming the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
2019	ASEAN Consensus on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Migrant Workers
2020	ASEAN Guidelines on Gender Mainstreaming into labour and Employment Policies Towards Decent Works For All
2021	ASEAN Gender Mainstreaming Strategic Framework (2021–2025)
2021	ASEAN Guidelines on Gender Mainstreaming into Labour and Employment Policies Towards Decent Work for All

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<sup>29</sup> Excluding ASEAN Charter, Visions and national commitments to Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women and SDGs.

2022	Guidelines for Operationalising the ASEAN Regional Framework on Protection, Gender, and Inclusion in Disaster Management
2022	ASEAN Regional Plan of Action on Women, Peace and Security
2022	Declaration on Building a more Sustainable, Inclusive and Resilient Future: Unlocking Women's Entrepreneurship in ASEAN
2023	Declaration on Gender Equality and Family Development
2023	ASEAN Regional Guidance on Empowering Women and Children: Delivering Quality Social Work Services for Those at Risk of or Affected by Violence
2023	Gender Mainstreaming in the Science, Technology and Innovation: Sensitisation and Socialisation of Gender Equality and Women Empowerment
2023	Policy Recommendations To Accelerate AGMSF Implementation, endorsed by AMMW
n.d.	AMAF's Approach to Gender Mainstreaming in the Food, Agriculture, and Forestry Sectors
n.d.	Roadmap on Accelerating ASEAN Renewable Energy Deployment through Gender-Responsive Energy Policy