

## **Women Economic Forum: High-Level Policy Dialogue on Women and the Economy Statement of the Chair**

1. The APEC Ministers and Heads of Delegations, met in Bangkok, Thailand on 7 September 2022 for the APEC Women and Economy Forum (WEF). We also welcomed the attendance of the APEC Business Advisory Council (ABAC). We were able to convene a hybrid meeting after having been connected through only virtual meetings in the past two years due to the COVID-19 pandemic. We are encouraged by the prospects for recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic through accelerating equitable access to safe, effective, quality-assured and affordable vaccines for all, as well as the implementation of other public health strategies and measures at all levels. We call on all APEC members to continue to work towards inclusive, equitable and sustainable economic recovery in the region.
2. Varying views were expressed on the prevailing situation. The meeting expressed its concern over the widening gap and rising inequality for women and underlined the urgent need to step up efforts to empower them, promote their meaningful participation in the economy, and improve their livelihoods. In this regard, views were expressed that an environment that is enabling and conducive for women to thrive is essential to advancing inclusive and sustainable economic growth in the region. In addition, the meeting also emphasized the need to prevent and eliminate all forms of gender-based violence and discrimination against women and girls of diverse backgrounds, particularly those in vulnerable situations, as well as to promote healthy relationships and address the underlying risk factors of gender-based violence.
3. Reiterating our commitments to advance gender equality, women's empowerment, and a sustainable and inclusive economy, in alignment with the APEC Putrajaya Vision 2040 and the Aotearoa Plan of Action towards an open, dynamic, resilient and peaceful Asia-Pacific community by 2040 for the prosperity of all our people and future generations, and to rebuild from the adverse and long-term impacts of COVID-19, the meeting strongly supported the need for meaningful actions and achieved consensus on the following:
4. We reaffirm our commitment to accelerate the implementation of the La Serena Roadmap for Women and Inclusive Growth (2019-2030) (the Roadmap). The Roadmap will continue to guide our efforts and catalyse policy actions across APEC to promote the empowerment and advancement of women and gender equality in the Asia Pacific region, including those women with untapped economic potential, such as Indigenous women, as appropriate, women with disabilities, and those living in remote and rural areas. We are committed to strengthening and anchoring the progress in all the Roadmap's Key Action Areas. In this vein, we plan to increase efforts to empower women through access to capital and markets; strengthen women's labour force participation; improve women's access to leadership positions in all levels of decision making; support the prioritization of and access to inclusive and quality education, training and skills development for girls and women; and advance women's economic empowerment through collection and analysis of high-quality, timely and reliable sex-disaggregated data.
5. We welcome the sustainable and resilient economy and society envisioned through the WEF 2022 theme "Women's Empowerment through the Bio-Circular-Green (BCG) Economy". The BCG Economy model integrates and synergizes three economic approaches, where technology and innovation are used to create value, reduce waste, and promote a sustainable business model. We recognize that the most vulnerable populations, such as Indigenous women, as appropriate, women with disabilities, and those living in remote or rural areas often bear a disproportionate burden of the impacts of climate change, marine debris, unrecycled waste and unequal impacts

of energy access. However, women and girls can develop meaningful, effective, and relevant solutions to advance the BCG economy model, and the full, equal, and meaningful participation and leadership of women at all levels of decision-making, as well as that of girls, as appropriate, are critical for making the development of environmental sustainability and the recovery efforts more effective.

6. We express concern that the COVID-19 pandemic continues to have a disproportionate impact on women and girls of diverse backgrounds, exacerbating existing gender inequality in several domains. The pandemic significantly impacted sectors held predominantly by women such as hospitality and food services, wholesale and retail sectors, paid domestic work, care sector, and some labor-intensive segments of manufacturing. Within the hardest-hit sectors, women engaged in low-wage and informal employment have been among the most severely impacted by the pandemic. Employment recovery has also been particularly frail among women, with women being slower to return to pre-pandemic employment levels than men. Women, especially those who bear the brunt of unpaid care and domestic responsibilities carry a much heavier household workload particularly during lockdown and stay-at-home orders. Gender-based violence, which remains a pervasive challenge, has been exacerbated during the pandemic and undermines women and girls' participation in education and the economy. Factors like increased exposure to abusers through isolation, difficulty accessing support, increased stress, and economic tensions have increased the rates of violence for women and girls.
7. While the COVID-19 pandemic has presented enormous challenges for many people, it has also transformed the way in which people work and do business, unlocking new prospects for some women. With the rise of the BCG economy, women may have additional employment pathways during the pandemic recovery including emerging business prospects, utilizing online platforms, or entering the green economy. We underscore the importance of bridging the gender digital divide by ensuring equitable access to the internet and in digital skills training to equip women and girls of diverse backgrounds with the tools to take advantage of these new opportunities and promote equal opportunities in the design and implementation of information and communications technology and in mainstreaming a gender perspective in policy decisions and the frameworks that guide them. We also underscore the need to provide institutional support to enable this change, in terms of addressing inequities in unpaid care and domestic work, transitioning from the informal to formal economy, and accessing financing and markets.
8. We emphasize the importance of pushing towards an inclusive, equitable, and sustainable recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic that contribute decisively to the advancement of gender equality and women's empowerment. Empowering women and girls is an important element of a sustainable recovery. Recovery policies and programs should include a focus on the areas where COVID-19 regressed progress on women's economic empowerment. To achieve this, we stress the importance of gender mainstreaming through women's full, equal and meaningful representation in leadership at all levels and decision-making in the recovery process as well as removing barriers which continue to prevent women and girls of diverse backgrounds from being fully empowered to participate in, and benefit from recovery opportunities and prospects.
9. We emphasize our shared commitment to addressing all barriers to women's full and equal participation in all economic activities, including: gender-based discrimination faced by women that hampers their access to financing and credits; denial of women's land tenure and property rights, including ownership; overrepresentation of women in low-paid, less secure informal jobs; discrimination, gender-based violence, and harassment in the world of work, and especially towards individuals working in both the formal and informal sector and in supply

chains; unpaid wages; unequal pay for equal work or work of equal value; unequal responsibility for unpaid care and domestic work; lack of access to affordable and quality care services; occupational segregation that results in unequal opportunities for women to participate in certain male-dominated, high-paying industries; continued underrepresentation of women in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) fields and careers; and barriers to women's leadership and full, equal and meaningful participation in all levels.

10. We acknowledge the need to adopt policies to recognize, reduce and equitably redistribute the unpaid care and domestic work carried out by women and girls, especially those women with young children, and ill, disabled, and elderly family members under their care, as women and girls spend disproportionately more time on unpaid care work than men and boys. We emphasize the need to raise awareness of and tackle harmful norms and gender stereotypes and to engage men and boys as agents and beneficiaries of gender equality to promote co-responsibility of unpaid care and domestic work between women and men. We also emphasize the importance of developing care solutions and work flexibility measures, such as access to affordable and quality care services, provision of social protection for paid caregivers, access to flexible family/care leaves for both female and male workers, and access to family/child allowances, that contribute to the co-responsibility of care and the reconciliation of personal, family and work life, and innovative solutions to lessen the burden of women and girls for managing household responsibilities.
11. As APEC economies recover from the impact of COVID-19, we are committed to advancing gender equality in our economies. Strategies, policies and programs across sectors should integrate a gender mainstreaming approach and promote gender equality in all its stages. We reaffirm our commitment to the collection, analysis, and dissemination of sex-disaggregated data in all relevant fora and sub-fora, including STEM trainings and careers data, to inform decisions, investments, and actions, where appropriate. This disaggregated data should also analyze how women and girls of diverse backgrounds may face disproportionate impacts as a result of intersectional discrimination that necessitates equitable policy approaches. Access to high-quality, timely and reliable data disaggregated by sex, including through the APEC Women and the Economy Dashboard, should be used as a key tracker of genuine economic recovery progress.
12. We recognize that the realization of gender equality and women's empowerment in all its forms requires a holistic and multi-faceted approach to tackle systemic and structural barriers, multiple forms of discrimination, and all biases against women, such as women of diverse backgrounds continue to face multiple disproportionate barriers to economic empowerment compared to men when accessing credit and capital, participating in formal labour markets, and in entry, retention and advancement in the workforce. Hence, long-term and collective effort from the government and private sector needs to be invested in parallel with immediate and shorter-term measures to improve women's economic empowerment and work toward gender equality.
13. We reiterate that as we work to transform our economies to improve overall well-being while balancing economic, social, and environmental dimensions of sustainability, such as in the BCG economic model, women and girls are a crucial component of this inclusive transformation. Opportunities and barriers to empower women and girls of diverse backgrounds to participate fully in the transformation should be identified and integrated into the strategic planning of all focal sectors. We encourage economies to adopt gender-responsive approaches and mainstream gender equality in their BCG policies.

14. We are committed to strengthening collaboration with partners and stakeholders across regions, sectors, and APEC fora to advance the economic empowerment of women and girls of diverse backgrounds. We will continue to monitor and report on progress, gaps, and challenges, share knowledge, and advocate for shared agendas that advance gender equality, women economic empowerment, and inclusive growth. We encourage recognition and celebration of successes, big and small, as they inspire and anchor a sustainable mindset for the imperative of cross-sectoral and cross-economy collaboration in support of gender equality and women economic empowerment, thereby ensuring the continuity and sustainability of such efforts.
15. We commend successful APEC projects aimed at women empowerment and urge member economies to continue their support for and participation in these projects.
16. We look forward to the next APEC Women and the Economy Forum and related activities in the APEC forum of 2023.

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