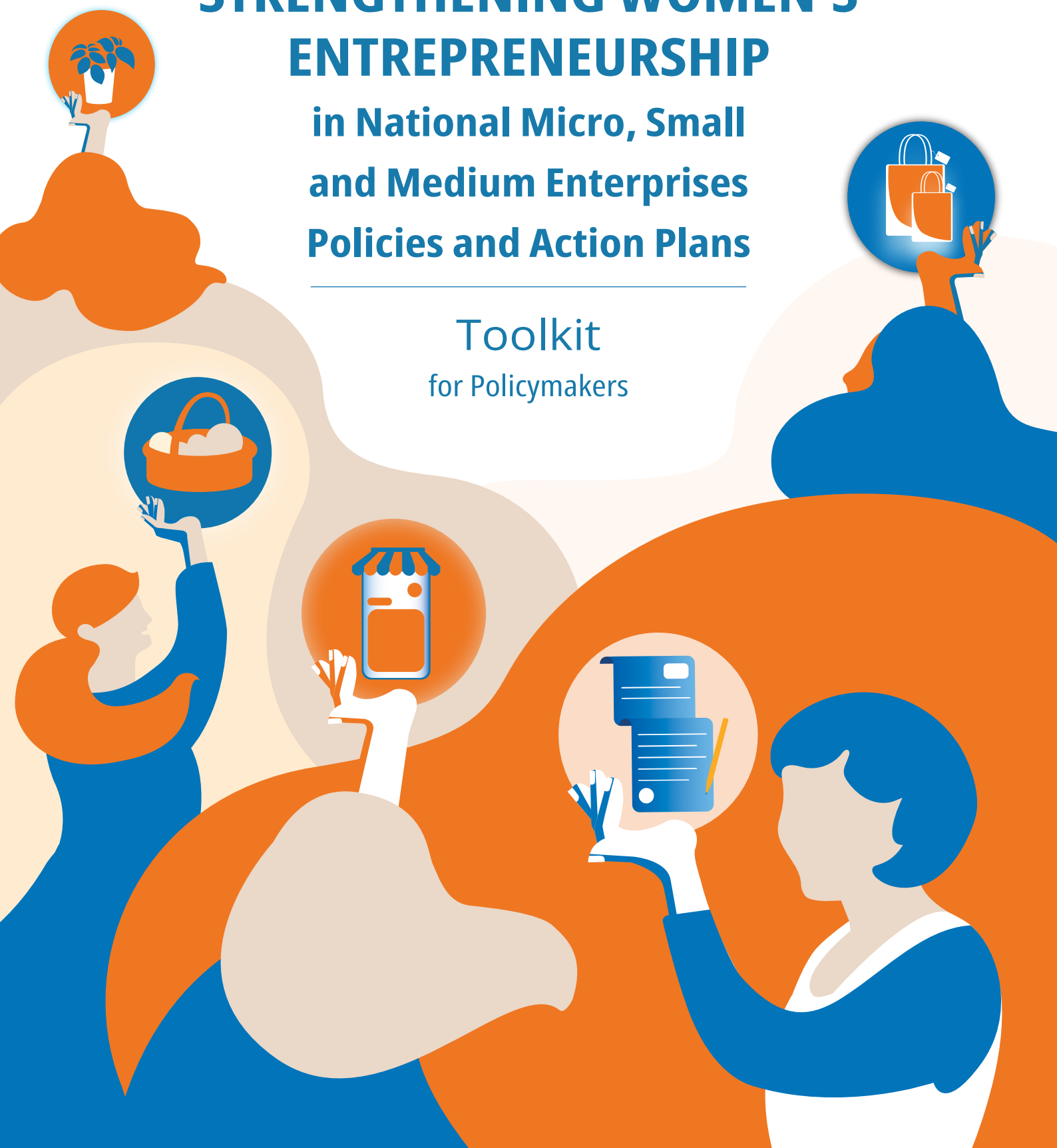


STRENGTHENING WOMEN'S ENTREPRENEURSHIP

in National Micro, Small
and Medium Enterprises
Policies and Action Plans

Toolkit
for Policymakers





The shaded areas of the map indicate ESCAP members and associate members.*

The Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) serves as the United Nations' regional hub promoting cooperation among countries to achieve inclusive and sustainable development. The largest regional intergovernmental platform with 53 Member States and 9 Associate Members, ESCAP has emerged as a strong regional think-tank offering countries sound analytical products that shed insight into the evolving economic, social and environmental dynamics of the region. The Commission's strategic focus is to deliver on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which it does by reinforcing and deepening regional cooperation and integration to advance connectivity, financial cooperation and market integration. ESCAP's research and analysis coupled with its policy advisory services, capacity building and technical assistance to governments aims to support countries' sustainable and inclusive development ambitions.

* The designations employed and the presentation of material on this map do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the Secretariat of the United Nations concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area or of its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries.



FOREWORD

Evidence shows that women's economic empowerment is associated with positive macroeconomic outcomes, including higher economic growth, lower inequality, increased productivity, and greater financial stability. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has set us back, reversing certain progress achieved in this area. Moreover, rising inflation and supply chain disruptions exacerbate the situation, with women and vulnerable groups facing the brunt of the crises.

Despite this outlook, we are living in an age where technological advancements and social innovations have opened up new doors of opportunities for women to effectively participate and increase their contribution to the economy, one of which is through entrepreneurship.

The Policy Toolkit, spearheaded by the ASEAN Coordinating Committee on Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (with technical support from the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, presents a self-assessment toolkit for ministries responsible for MSMEs and women-owned MSMEs development to assess SME policies and support programmes through a gender-focused lens. It provides a structured methodology for the ASEAN Governments to conduct gap analysis, designing interventions, and track progress, with a view to promoting enabling environments for women's enterprises to prosper.

Feedback was sought from the public and private sectors to ensure the Policy Toolkit encompasses the critical elements in women's entrepreneurship and that the self-assessment methodology is practical and feasible. On this note, on behalf of the ASEAN secretariat, I express my appreciation to the ASEAN Committee on Women, ASEAN Commission on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children, Senior Labour Officials Meeting Senior Official Meeting on Rural Development and Poverty Education (SOMRDPE), ASEAN Business Advisory Council, ASEAN

Confederation of Women's Organizations), and ASEAN Women Entrepreneurs Network (AWEN), for their valuable contribution to the Policy Toolkit.

Moving forward, ASEAN, led by ACCMSME, will continue engaging national and regional stakeholders to roll out the Policy Toolkit and bolster our efforts to create, nurture and empower women entrepreneurs in ASEAN, towards a greater inclusive socio-economic development as we strive to build back stronger and better from the pandemic.



H.E. Satvinder Singh

Deputy Secretary-General of ASEAN for the ASEAN Economic Community



FOREWORD

Empowering women – especially women entrepreneurs running micro, small and medium enterprises – is a prerequisite for Asia-Pacific countries to succeed in achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its promise of “leaving no one behind”. But women’s economic empowerment is not just about delivering on global goals. It is a crucial means for lifting women and their families, reducing poverty and boosting the economy. In the Asia-Pacific region alone, closing the gender gap in employment could add as much as \$4.5 trillion – a 12 per cent increase – to the region’s collective GDP by 2025 over the business-as-usual GDP trajectory.

But the countries of the ASEAN region are still far from creating an environment where women entrepreneurs can flourish every day. The sixty million women-owned and -operated businesses in the region face complex barriers, including, among them, lack of access to finance and technology, low levels of financial and digital literacy, discriminatory laws and gender stereotypes. Women own a little more than 10 per cent of the agricultural land in South-East Asian countries while the financing gap for women entrepreneurs is as high as \$6 billion in certain countries in the region. The Covid-19 pandemic has further exposed these underlying liabilities that continue to impact women’s entrepreneurship in the region. Overcoming the barriers faced by women entrepreneurs requires targeted engagement and policies from national and regional authorities.

With the above in mind, the Policy Toolkit is designed to be a practical tool, which provides a framework and methodology for integrating women entrepreneur-centric policies and provisions into national MSME policies and action plans. The Toolkit offers a detailed blueprint, which allows policymakers to use a thorough diagnostic process to examine gender gaps in entrepreneurial and MSME policies and initiatives. It also presents a

scorecard to enable monitoring and evaluation of progress by the countries over time.

This Toolkit is a joint initiative of the ASEAN Coordinating Committee on MSMEs (ACCMSME) and the Catalyzing Women’s Entrepreneurship Programme of ESCAP. The programme, supported by the Government of Canada, has been a central mechanism of support in enabling ESCAP to foster women’s economic empowerment and efforts to reduce poverty and increase gender equality by supporting women’s entrepreneurship in the Asia-Pacific region. This Policy Toolkit will enable the scaling up of the successful reforms already seen in selected countries to the broader ASEAN region. ESCAP is thankful for the commitment and leadership of ACCMSME in the development of this Toolkit and we look forward to continued collaboration in its implementation.



Kaveh Zahedi

Deputy Executive Secretary
Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific



FOREWORD

Addressing gender-based imbalances in the economy improves countries' ability to achieve broad-based economic growth that reduces poverty and contributes to the achievement of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Evidence-based national policymaking is instrumental in developing effective action plans that promote women's economic security, and creating structures that enable women to defend their economic rights. Against this background, Canada endorses the Strengthening Women's Entrepreneurship in National MSME Policies and Action Plans Toolkit for Policymakers, as it provides a framework for the design of effective public policies that support the growth and expansion of women-led enterprises.

We are pleased to have contributed to the production of this Toolkit through the Catalyzing Women's Entrepreneurship (CWE) project, implemented in the Asia-Pacific region in partnership with United Nations Social and Economic Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP). Currently in its fifth year, the project is designed to deliver support for a variety of initiatives that enhance the productive capacity of women-led enterprises, including policy development and advocacy, innovative financing and ICT, and business skills training. The project also demonstrates Canada's commitment under the Feminist International Assistance Policy to placing women's economic empowerment at the centre of partnership initiatives supported under Canadian international development assistance.

Canada values the partnership with ESCAP in the CWE project to support the production of this Toolkit in collaboration with the ASEAN Coordinating Committee on MSMEs as one of Cambodia's Priority Economic Deliverables as ASEAN Chair in 2022. Well-informed and gender-responsive national policymaking means better design of policies and initiatives that provide targeted support for MSMEs to stimulate large scale economic productivity

that creates jobs, improves household income and contributes to rapid macroeconomic growth. The Toolkit can also be used to establish frameworks for advancing the inclusion of gender provisions in Free Trade Agreements in the Asia-Pacific region.

This year marks the forty-fifth anniversary of ASEAN-Canada Dialogue Partner relations. The partnership in the production of this Toolkit is an opportunity to elevate our relationship in the context of the shared priority of promoting inclusive and equitable economic growth, including support for the economic cooperation pillar of the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific. Canada will continue to collaborate with ESCAP, ASEAN and other regional organizations to promote shared goals of achieving peace, stability and prosperity for all.



Vicky Singmin

Chargé d'affaires, Mission of Canada to ASEAN

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