

2020 JOINT STATEMENT OF THE ASEAN MINISTERIAL MEETING ON SOCIAL WELFARE AND DEVELOPMENT: MITIGATING IMPACTS OF COVID-19 ON VULNERABLE GROUPS IN ASEAN

Adopted on 10 June 2020

WE, the ASEAN Ministers responsible for social welfare and development have convened the Special Meeting on Mitigating Impacts of Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) on Vulnerable Groups in ASEAN on 10 June 2020.

EXPRESS our deepest concern over the pandemic caused by COVID-19 and its adverse impacts on the poor and vulnerable groups in ASEAN;

SUPPORT ongoing and accelerated efforts to ensure a social safety net and implement risk-informed, evidence-based and shock-responsive social protection systems to reduce the vulnerabilities of at-risk populations and improve their overall resilience, as guided by the Chairman's Statement on ASEAN Collective Response to the Outbreak of Coronavirus Disease 2019, and the Declaration of the Special ASEAN Summit on Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19);

RECALL the Joint Statement of the Special ASEAN Plus Three Summit on Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19), issued on 14 April 2020 which acknowledged the importance of people's participation in preventing and controlling COVID-19;

RECOGNISE the differentiated and disproportionate impacts of the spread of the virus on the poor children, older persons, women and girls, persons with disabilities, and other vulnerable groups, and the pressing need to guarantee their protection and to promote their welfare while safeguarding their rights and dignity;

COGNISANT of the profound effects of the pandemic and containment measures on children which include susceptibility to domestic, online and other forms of violence and abuse, disruption to their learning and development of human capital and heightened risks to their health and well-being;

DEEPLY CONCERNED over particular risks faced by vulnerable children such as children with disabilities, children affected by migration and trafficking, children in deprived of liberty, children in conflict situations, children in conflict with the law, children living and working on the street in urban, rural and remote areas as well as children in institutional care;

ACKNOWLEDGE the diverse needs of persons with disabilities for both pandemic response and recovery, including assistive care, greater accessibility to basic facilities and information, safety measures and secured livelihoods especially during containment;

ENCOURAGE mainstreaming disability in all measures related to COVID-19 response and recovery in order to ensure disability inclusion, eliminate barriers and discrimination and foster consultation and participation with persons living with various types of disabilities and impairments;

EMPHASIZE the detrimental effects of the pandemic on older persons namely high fatality rate, exacerbated poverty, intersecting discrimination particularly for older women, neglect and abuse in institution and care facilities and limited pension coverage;

URGE all stakeholders to integrate the focus on older persons in COVID-19 response, not only as recipients of care and support but to also recognize them as providers of care and community services. As such, they shall be treated with respect and provided with essential services, and protected from maltreatment propelled by ageism;

NOTE that women form a majority of frontline health and social sector workforce and that their work environment, safety and psychosocial needs are pivotal. Marked increase in intimate partner violence during lock-down period shall be tackled, along with the provision of sexual and reproductive health services for all women and girls;

COMMEND the dedication of social workers and volunteers for their life-saving role in responding to COVID-19 and its recovery and rehabilitation process and reiterate that their health and safety shall be upheld at all times;

To mitigate the impacts of COVID-19, facilitate speedy recovery, and strengthen the resilience of the poor and vulnerable groups in ASEAN, in accordance to the prevailing national laws, policies and regulations of ASEAN Member States we resolve to:

- a. Facilitate the access to social protection with appropriate allocation of public funds for social spending. Provide access to all essential goods and services to safeguard the well-being and livelihoods of the poor children, older persons, persons with disabilities, women and girls, migrant workers, and other vulnerable groups in time of crisis.
- b. Protect the rights, safety and dignity. Promote protection of the rights of the general public against all forms of discrimination, violence, neglected and exploitation, and to be included in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Identify and respond to child protection and gender-based violence risks, multiple vulnerabilities experienced by persons with disabilities and older persons at home and care facilities, migrant workers, and to prevent family separation and institutionalisation.
- c. Secure the health and safety of social workers at the forefront of pandemic response at all level. Allot sufficient public expenditure that would warrant the continuity of social welfare, social safety net and social protection delivery.
- d. Strengthen inter-agency cooperation at the national level, and inter-sectoral cooperation at the ASEAN level. Strengthening multi sectoral collaboration, especially between social welfare, health, education, justice and finance sectors as well as synergy between Governments, development partners, private sector and civil society organisations and volunteers. Enhance effective and transparent public information and communication through official form of media for timely update of government social and development policy and measures in response to the pandemic and counter misinformation.
- e. Endeavor to develop comprehensive and integrated post-pandemic recovery programmes through stock-taking and sharing of good practices, development of guidelines and evidence-based data and knowledge building among others that recognise the specific vulnerabilities of the poor, children, older persons, persons with disabilities, and women and girls, migrant workers as well as other vulnerable groups.
- f. Commit to develop continuity plans and measures that are disability inclusive, gender-responsive, age-sensitive and promotes social solidarity, children's participation in close consultation with and meaningful participation of vulnerable groups and all stakeholders. It is imperative for the poor and vulnerable groups to have improved capacities and resilience to withstand, absorb and respond to the impacts of risks and shocks in the future.
- g. Strive to leverage on technology and recognise the need to address the digital divide across and within ASEAN Member States, so as to assist in the development and implementation of the policies covering the vulnerable groups as well as minimise the negative impacts of the pandemic on them, particularly the older persons, women and children.

WE stay united and work together to intensify regional cooperation at the ASEAN level to support actions at all level that place the poor and vulnerable groups at the centre of all COVID-19 response and recovery measures.

WE look forward to working closely with other ASEAN Ministerial bodies in the full implementation of the Regional Framework and Action Plan on Implementing the ASEAN Declaration on Strengthening Social Protection and the ASEAN Enabling Masterplan 2025: Mainstreaming the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, ASEAN Regional Plan of Action on the Elimination of Violence Against Children (ASEAN RPA ON EVAC) towards ensuring protection, inclusion and resilience of the poor, vulnerable groups in ASEAN.
