

Asian Parliamentary Assembly (APA)

Concept paper on the Commission on Women

The Asian region is one of the most important regions of the world due to its territory, rich natural, human and financial resources, geopolitical, geo-economic and military-strategic importance. Currently, more than half of the world population lives in the Asian region, and most of the countries located here demonstrate stable economic growth, making this region the centre of attraction of the world. Against the background of these factors, along with development and achievements in various fields, there are also serious problems in the region, and in this context, violation of women's rights and gender equality are among the important issues.

Despite the implementation of certain measures and big efforts towards the protection of women's rights and the elimination of gender discrimination in the Asian region, serious problems still exist in this area.

Unfortunately, the Asian region has now become one of the most unstable regions in the world, with regional conflicts and armed clashes often inflicting violence on civilians. During armed conflicts, women and children become the most vulnerable social group. They experience the consequences of violence and rights infringement; they suffer from displacement, loss of homes, loss of close relatives, poverty, and disintegration of families. The conflicts aggravate already existing forms of discrimination against women and girls and increase their vulnerability.

Women trafficking, violence against women, domestic violence, increase in the number of out-of-school girls, existence of early marriages, sex-selective abortions are also widespread in the Asian region.

Despite the overall decrease in the number of victims of women trafficking in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, Asian (both South and East Asia) trafficking outflows remains of a global dimension as most regions detect victims from this part of the world¹.

With an estimated 17,800 victims, Asia recorded the largest number of female intimate partner/family-related killings in 2021.²

Such cases were also widespread in previous years. 20,000 women were killed by family members in Asia in 2017, alone³.

In countries across Asia and the Pacific, surveys indicate that between 15 and 68 per cent of women have experienced physical and/or sexual violence at the hands of an intimate partner⁴.

¹ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). Global Report on Trafficking in Persons 2022, p.26.

² United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). Gender-related killings of women and girls. (femicide/feminicide). Global estimates of gender-related killings of women and girls in the private sphere in 2021. https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/briefs/Femicide_brief_Nov2022.pdf

³ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) 2018, Global Study on Homicide Gender Related Killing of Women and Girls. <https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/focus-areas/end-violence-against-women/evaw-facts-and-figures>.

⁴ United Nations sexual and reproductive health agency (UNFPA). Measuring prevalence of violence against women in Asia-Pacific. <https://asiapacific.unfpa.org/en/nowvawdata>.

In Southeast Asia 33 per cent of partnered women aged 15-49 will experience physical and/or sexual violence from a current or former husband or male partner at least once in their lifetime⁵.

Another social problem specific to the Asian region and causing concern is an early marriage. 45 per cent of all child brides are from South Asia⁶.

Three in four child brides in the region give birth while they are still adolescents; over a third give birth before they turn 18⁷. South and Central Asia also lead in the number of out-of-school girls.

Nowadays, the presence of such cases, the violation of women's rights and the existence of gender discrimination are among the biggest problems in the field of human rights. If urgent measures are not taken by states and international organizations to solve the mentioned problems, the risk of aggravation of the current situation will increase.

Considering that the violation of women's rights and gender inequality is a really serious problem in Asian countries, the establishment of a Commission on Women within the framework of the Asian Parliamentary Assembly may be considered expedient. The new institution to be created can act as an effective mechanism for systematically keeping issues related to women's rights and gender equality on the agenda.

The reasons why the establishment of the Commission on Women has become a necessity:

The existence of the following problems related to women's rights and gender equality in the Asian region are a serious reason for the establishment of the Commission:

- the serious drop in the number of female babies born as a result of sex-selective abortions and the enormous challenge it poses for the future;
- existence of serious problems related to the increase in the number of out-of-school girls and its negative consequences;
- the existence of serious obstacles preventing girls from obtaining higher education;
- widespread early marriages limit the life prospects of young girls, affect their opportunities to study and work, increase pregnancy-related health risks and lead to maternal mortality;
- the existence and increase of cases of domestic violence against women, both physical and moral violence;
- sexual exploitation of women and girls;
- women trafficking as a serious global problem;
- deplorable situation of women in existing conflict zones;
- the plight of refugee and internally displaced women;
- the need to take effective measures to protect refugee and internally displaced women from violence;
- the vulnerability of migrant women and the need to ensure their social and economic rights;

⁵ WHO (2021), Violence Against Women Prevalence Estimates. <https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/focus-areas/end-violence-against-women/evaw-facts-and-figures>

⁶ UNICEF for every child. Is an end to child marriage within reach? Latest trends and future prospects. 2023 update.

⁷ UNICEF for every child. A Profile of Child Marriage in South Asia. 2023.

- low level of participation of women in political life;
- low level of representation of women in parliaments and governments;
- the importance of recognizing women's participation in decision-making as a requirement for justice and democracy, as well as a necessary condition for taking into account their interests;
- underrepresentation of women in the field of science;
- underrepresentation of women in the field of economy and business;
- non-participation or weak representation of women in economic decision-making
- a large number of women among unemployed persons;
- the importance of establishing the same working conditions for employees performing the same work regardless of gender;
- the existence of the gender pay gap
- representation of men in managerial positions in areas where traditionally more women work;
- sexual harassment of women at workplaces;
- the importance of increasing the role of women in civil society institutions;
- the existence of gaps in the legislation of states regarding women's rights;
- in certain countries, women's support programs and strategies are not accepted or the implementation of the mentioned documents is delayed;
- insufficient attention in the media to the problems related to women's rights;
- insufficient education in the field of women's rights and gender equality in society

Objectives of the Commission:

- to mobilize the efforts and resources of the members of the Asian Parliamentary Assembly to draw attention to women's rights and gender equality problems and increasing awareness on this issue on a systematic basis;
- to support establishing the conditions necessary for women to fully exercise their political, economic, social, cultural and civil rights;
- to raise awareness about the situation of women in the member states;
- to strengthen the legal framework for the protection of women and girls in order to end violence and inequality;
- to implement the projects and measures aimed at improving the situation of women and girls in Asian countries;
- to strengthen the national institutions for improvement of the situation of women;
- to ensure the consideration of gender equality issues within the framework of APA's activities

Functions of the Commission:

- to play the role of a data collection mechanism on the situation with women's rights and gender equality in member states;
- to discuss the problems related to women's rights and gender equality within the framework of APA, prepare the reports, accept the draft resolutions, recommendations, contributing to the process of solving existing problems;
- to encourage the preparation of annual reports on the situation with women in member states;

- to present the report on women's rights and gender equality in member states at APA plenary sessions;
- to implement the systematic cooperation between the Commission and other bodies of APA in order to more effectively promote the protection of women's rights;
- to ensure the consideration of gender equality issues in APA activities;
- to support the implementation of gender quotas regarding the composition of delegations in APA;
- to act as a mechanism for supporting women MP;
- to establish the relations between APA and committees on women's rights issues existing in national parliaments;
- to organize the relevant seminars and consultations by the Commission

Outcomes of the establishment of the Commission

The establishment of the Commission on Women will provide the keeping the issue of protection of women's rights and elimination of gender inequality at the forefront of the APA activities and significantly advance the goal of ending discrimination against women in Asian countries.