

# CSW63

Commission on  
the Status of Women

Social Protection • Public Services • Infrastructure



11-22  
March  
2019



**MULTI-STAKEHOLDER FORUM**

**1 February 2019**

**10 am–1 pm and 3-6 pm**

**United Nations Headquarters**

**Conference Building**

**Conference Room 1**

***Social protection systems, access to public services and sustainable infrastructure for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls***

**CONCEPT NOTE & DISCUSSION GUIDE**

## **INTRODUCTION, OBJECTIVES & FORMAT**

During the sixty-third session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW63), from 11 to 22 March 2019, the Commission will address as its priority theme ‘Social protection systems, access to public services and sustainable infrastructure for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls’.

Social protection systems, public services and sustainable infrastructure are integral to achieving the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda on Financing for Development and the Paris Agreement. Heeding the spirit of the 2030 Agenda’s cross-cutting commitment to gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls, their provision must also be geared towards transforming unequal power relations between women and men. The commitment to leaving no one behind, in turn, requires that the needs and rights of women and girls facing multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination are addressed as a matter of priority.

In line with existing international commitments, policies must safeguard women’s and girls’ access to social protection, public services and sustainable infrastructure while ensuring that their design and delivery is transformed to prevent discrimination and to support the empowerment of women and girls. Close attention must be paid to the gender-differentiated risks that women and girls are exposed to over their life course. Greater policy coherence across the three areas can produce powerful synergies, making individual policies work better and addressing the rights and needs of women and girls in a holistic way. Investments across the three

areas must be made with a view to promoting equal access to decent work for women. Public services and sustainable infrastructure provide important opportunities not only for job creation, but also for tackling occupational segregation and gender pay gaps.

The Commission on the Status of Women is expected to adopt agreed conclusions on the priority theme, with action-oriented recommendations for steps and measures to close remaining gaps and challenges. They should be addressed to Governments and other stakeholders. The Commission’s work strengthens political commitment and galvanizes the accelerated implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and the gender-responsive implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The priority theme at CSW63 thus enables the Commission to make a decisive contribution towards ensuring that no one is left behind and that those furthest behind are reached first.

Stakeholders are mobilizing at all levels in preparation for CSW63, and momentum is building towards an interactive and results-oriented session in March. At the global level, efforts are under way to build alliances, strengthen networks and expand multi-stakeholder approaches for greater effectiveness and impact.

## OBJECTIVES

The Multi-Stakeholder Forum will serve to engage a range of stakeholders in the preparations for the sixty-third session of the Commission. More specifically, the Forum will:

- Raise awareness of existing commitments, and identify key areas and issues that should be considered by CSW63 in the context of its priority theme, as well as the ways and means to address them;
- Create a platform for sharing approaches and strategies that bring results and highlighting areas that require enhanced commitments;
- Foster dialogue, build alliances and galvanize partnerships for action in support of social protection systems, access to public services and sustainable infrastructure for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls and subsequently for accelerating implementation of the expected outcomes of CSW63.

## PARTICIPANTS

Participation from different stakeholders, in particular Permanent Representatives and Deputy Permanent Representatives and experts from Permanent Missions to the United Nations, as well as representatives from civil society and women's organizations, and the United Nations system will facilitate the sharing of a range of perspectives.

## OUTCOME

A report on the Multi-Stakeholder Forum, summarizing the key elements from the discussions and outcome expectations, will be prepared and published on the web, and contribute to the preparations for CSW63.

## FORMAT

The Multi-Stakeholder Forum will consist of an opening session; four interactive panel discussions where participants will engage in dialogue, highlight key areas for implementation and commit to further action; and a closing session. The topics of the panel discussions address some of the areas and issues raised in the report of the Secretary-General on the priority theme (E/CN.6/2019/3, forthcoming):

- Social protection systems for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls
- Public services for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls
- Sustainable infrastructure for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls

- Ensuring synergies and addressing intersecting inequalities for enhanced results

The discussions will take place in an interactive format guided by moderators. Four to five participants per panel will be invited to address key questions outlined below. Their interventions will be limited to five minutes each, followed by comments from discussants and participants. Each panelist will also be encouraged to present one concrete result/outcome for CSW63 and her/his contribution and/or commitment towards achieving that outcome.

### DISCUSSION NOTE FOR PANEL 1

#### *Social protection systems for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls*

Social protection refers to policies and programmes designed to reduce and prevent poverty, vulnerability and social exclusion. Social protection systems usually comprise a number of schemes that provide comprehensive protection across the life course, including child and family benefits, maternity protection, unemployment support, employment injury benefits, sickness benefits, old-age benefits, disability benefits, and survivors' benefits as well as access to affordable medical care.

Across the globe, unpaid care and domestic work is disproportionately carried out by women and girls. Social protection systems have slowly started to take unpaid care and domestic work into account. A growing number of contributory pension schemes provide care credits that can help narrow gender pension gaps by compensating for periods taken out of employment to care for children or other dependents. Several public works programmes have incorporated the provision of on-site creches and reduced working hours to enable the participation of workers with care responsibilities. However, more systematic efforts are needed to recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work in and through social protection systems. Strengthening the linkages between social protection systems, public services and sustainable infrastructure is critical to ensure that the recognition of unpaid care and domestic work sustains the empowerment for women and girls in the long-term.

Despite significant progress over the past two decades, gender gaps and biases in social protection systems remain widespread. Where sex-disaggregated data is available, it shows women to be overrepresented among those who

remain excluded. Even where women are relatively well covered, their benefit levels tend to be lower than men's. Gender-specific risks often exacerbate economic insecurity among women and girls over the life course. Universal social protection geared towards ensuring an adequate standard of living for all can only be achieved if gender- and age-specific risks and vulnerabilities are taken into account.

Social protection systems have been redesigned to reduce gender bias, for example, through equalized women's and men's retirement age and revised eligibility rules for minimum pensions to make it easier for women to access them by reducing long vesting periods. Parental leave provisions have been reformed to incentivize men to take on more child care. In most developing countries, however, even maternity leave remains unavailable except for a small group of formal sector employees.

Despite increases in women's labour force participation, women continue to participate less in the labour market than men, earn lower wages, and interrupt their participation more often to care for dependents. They are also overrepresented among informal and non-standard workers in most countries. These factors hamper women's right to social security in systems where entitlements are closely tied to formal employment. Efforts to extend coverage to informal workers have increased and are essential for supporting transitions to formality.

#### PROPOSED QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

- What are examples of national social protection systems that recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work?
- How are gender- and age-specific risks and vulnerabilities being taken into account in the design and implementation of social protection systems, including pension systems?
- What efforts have been made to extend social protection coverage to workers in the informal sector, and how are women benefitting from this?
- What actions are Governments taking to expand parental leave provisions and incentivize men to take on more child care?

#### Public services for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls

Public services enable the realization of a vital public interest, such as health, education, public safety, justice or an adequate standard of living for all. Public services play a central role in reducing poverty and inequality and in advancing the rights of women and girls. Access to quality education, for example, is associated with a range of positive outcomes for girls, including lower rates of early marriage and adolescent pregnancy.

Progress has been made in women's and girls' access to public services, particularly health and education. Yet, significant gaps and inequalities remain. Affordability of services remains a key challenge, particularly where services rely on user fees and co-payments. The detrimental effects of privatization of services and application of user fees on public services are well documented for the health sector where out-of-pocket payments have been found to have a disproportionately negative impact on the poor. They have also been found to be systematically more adverse for women compared to men in several countries. To ensure that access to care is not constrained by the ability to pay, many countries are rolling out universal health coverage (UHC) reforms. To fully live up to their aspiration of universality and equity, these reforms need to be coherent and coordinated across sectors and address multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination.

The quality of public services also matters for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. Gender stereotypes remain ingrained in educational curricula and practices, shaping career choices and employment outcomes. While women have made important inroads into science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) degree programmes, they continue to be a minority among graduates and continue to face social and institutional barriers to employment in 'non-traditional sectors'. In the health sector, the quality of maternity care has come under increasing scrutiny. Removing discrimination in health-care settings and ensuring women and adolescent girls are aware of their rights and can demand gender-responsive and stigma-free services, is fundamental.

Beyond education and health care, there are other types of services that are essential for the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of women, but remain insufficiently available and underfunded. This includes

coordinated, available and accessible quality multisectoral services for women and girls survivors of violence as well as public care services, including childcare and long term care for older persons and/or the chronically ill. When public services are delivered through private providers, it remains the duty of the state to ensure their availability, accessibility, acceptability, and adequate quality. Across sectors, addressing staff shortages and providing workers with decent working conditions is critical for the delivery of gender-responsive quality public services.

#### **PROPOSED QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION :**

- What actions and investments have Governments taken to provide universal health coverage?
- What are good practices for the provision of public care services, including childcare and long term care?
- What policy reforms and other actions have Governments taken to expand access to quality public services for all women and girls throughout their life course?
- How are Governments ensuring, including through monitoring and evaluation, the quality of public services and gender-responsive planning and implementation?

#### **DISCUSSION NOTE FOR PANEL 3**

##### *Sustainable infrastructure for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls*

Sustainable infrastructure is a broad category of goods and services that promotes sustainable development in economic, social and environmental terms. Great potential exists to transform the energy, transport, water, sanitation and waste management sectors to reduce emissions, enable cleaner production and consumption processes, and preserve scarce natural resources while also promoting gender equality.

The 2030 Agenda provides a unique opportunity to systematically address the environmental, economic and social dimensions of development through investments in sustainable infrastructure. Such investments can contribute to labour productivity and social inclusion by making water and sanitation accessible, extending sustainable energy to remote rural areas or providing better housing to marginalized city dwellers. They also create an enabling environment for caregiving, at home and in institutional settings, such as

schools and health centers. Better infrastructure is also critical for raising the productivity of women farmers which in turn contributes to enhancing income and food security.

For these benefits to materialize, infrastructure investments need to integrate gender equality considerations from the outset and be part of long-term development strategies that are matched with sufficient funding. Gaps in the provision of water and sanitation disproportionately affect women and girls. However, while water and sanitation are among the most transformative investments for women and girls, they are much less likely to be financed through private finance or public-private partnerships than other infrastructure investments, such as telecoms, energy or transport. Closing these gaps will require a significant boost in and better allocation of resources.

Gender-responsive investments in urban infrastructure are critical to make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe and sustainable. Yet, urban spaces and transport systems are rarely planned with women's mobility in mind. Studies show that women rely disproportionately on walking and public transport. However, investments in transport infrastructure are biased towards roads, highways and bridges that support private motorized forms of transport.

The energy sector is experiencing rapid transformations as climate change is pushing countries to reduce emissions, adopt climate smart technologies and leap-frog towards renewable energy. Several studies have found that women's participation in governance and technical committees from the design stage is crucial for the success of distributed systems, such as mini grids. However, energy planning instruments remain largely gender-blind.

#### **PROPOSED QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION :**

- What measures are Governments taking to mainstream gender perspectives in the design and implementation of essential infrastructure, such as clean energy and safe water and sanitation?
- What measures are Governments taking to ensure that infrastructure investments in transport systems are gender-responsive, safe and sustainable?
- What are good practices in ensuring women's full and equal participation in the planning, design and implementation of sustainable infrastructure development?

## DISCUSSION NOTE FOR PANEL 4

### Ensuring synergies and addressing intersecting inequalities for enhanced results

Social protection, public services and sustainable infrastructure are closely interlinked. Institutionalized coordination across sectors and levels of government, as well as with private for-profit and not-for-profit providers, is therefore crucial to ensure that social protection, public services and infrastructure policies complement each other in their objectives, functions and financing.

An integrated and systemic approach is particularly important from a gender perspective. Without affordable childcare services, for example, women often struggle to remain in the labour market and secure social protection entitlements through employment. Education is widely considered a public service, but it cannot function without adequate physical infrastructure, including school buildings with safe sanitation facilities for girls. Electricity, water and sanitation systems are infrastructure-heavy sectors; but they also operate as public services and often require social protection measures, such as connection fee waivers or subsidies, to be affordable for all.

There has been significant progress in terms of women's and girls' access to social protection, public services and sustainable infrastructure. However, gender gaps remain, and, in many contexts, progress has been uneven. Women and girls who face multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination are particularly affected by exclusion and marginalization. Across countries, those from poor households, rural areas and specific ethnic groups experience clustered deprivations, from lower access to education, healthcare and decent housing, to clean energy, water and sanitation. Removing discrimination in health-care settings and ensuring women and adolescent girls are aware of their rights and can demand gender-responsive and stigma-free services, is fundamental.

Closing these gaps and ensuring that no one is left behind will require a significant injection of resources alongside targeted measures to expand access, improve quality and strengthen policy coherence between the three areas, including through greater coordination across sectors, levels of government and with for-profit and not-for-profit providers.

Ensuring the meaningful participation of women and girls in the development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies is equally indispensable for furthering progress and sustaining it over time. Social accountability mechanisms, such as gender audits, can be used to gather the experiences and

grievances of women beneficiaries and users and improve the gender-responsive implementation of social protection, public services and sustainable infrastructure projects.

Means-tested social protection interventions can contribute to stigmatization by singling out specific disadvantaged social groups. Fear of facing discriminatory attitudes may discourage women from accessing transfers even when they are entitled to them. The risk of stigmatization is greatest where gender-based discrimination is compounded by inequalities based on age, income, geographical location, race, ethnicity, health or migration status, disability, sexual orientation and gender identity, among others. Universal schemes are least prone to exclusion errors and stigmatization. Targeting approaches that cover an entire area (geographical targeting), or an entire age cohort (categorical targeting), such as children or older persons, can help reduce stigmatization and exclusion and are less complex to administer than means-tested programmes.

### PROPOSED QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION :

- What are good practice in the coordinated and integrated provision of social protection, access to public services and sustainable infrastructure for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls?
- What legislative and policy actions are necessary and effective to ensure that social protection systems, sustainable infrastructure and public services address the needs and rights of women and girls facing multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination and that no one is left behind?
- What are good practices and lessons learned in preventing cutbacks in social protection systems, sustainable infrastructure and public services that benefit women and girls, and strengthen human development, social cohesion and resilience to shocks?

