



# Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General  
18 March 2019

Original: English

---

## Commission on the Status of Women

### Sixty-third session

11–22 March 2019

Agenda item 3 (a) (i)

**Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, entitled “Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century”: social protection systems, access to public services and sustainable infrastructure for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls**

### **Interactive expert panel on harnessing synergies and securing financing**

#### **Chair’s summary**

1. On 15 March 2019, the Commission on the Status of Women held an interactive expert panel discussion on “Harnessing synergies and securing financing”. Participants exchanged views, experiences and insights on the topic, with an emphasis on presenting strategies and results, strengthening dialogue and commitments for further action. The Vice-Chair of the Commission, Rena Tasuja (Estonia), chaired the discussion.

2. The members of the expert panel were: Minister of Education, Family and Social Inclusion of Cabo Verde, Maritza Rosabal; Director of the Ramalingaswami Centre on Equity and Social Determinants of Health of the Public Health Foundation of India, Gita Sen; Co-Founder and Director of Ladysmith, Tara Cookson; a gender specialist with the Transport and Information and Communications Technology Global Practice of the World Bank, Nato Kurshitashvili; and a senior researcher at the Information and Research Centre of Uruguay, Fernando Filgueira. The Head of the Social Policy Unit in the Social Protection Department of the International Labour Organization, Christina Behrendt, served as discussant. Representatives of four Member States and eight civil society organizations engaged in the discussion with the panel members.

#### **Context**

3. Recognizing the ways in which social protection, public services and sustainable infrastructure are linked is imperative in working towards the empowerment of women and girls, in particular for supporting women and girls who face multiple and intersecting inequalities. Policies in those areas must be well designed and integrated



and supported by macroeconomic policies that enhance job creation and sustainable livelihoods. Women are more often excluded from such protections and services, as evidenced by the 10.6 per cent global gender gap in old-age pensions and the higher rates of women in informal and insecure employment.

4. Global normative frameworks, such as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, are critical to harnessing synergies and securing financing for social protection, public services and sustainable infrastructure in support of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls. Sustainable Development Goals 1, 5 and 10, including targets 1.3 and 5.4, specifically recognize the importance of strong gender-responsive social protection systems, public services and sustainable infrastructure.

5. Closing gender gaps in all three areas requires addressing the fallacy that there is limited fiscal space to make the required investments for gender equality and the empowerment of women. In many countries, there is potential to expand the fiscal space and improve the progressivity of tax structures. Such actions require political will but can significantly increase the available resource envelope to invest in gender-responsive policies and services. Government action needs to be supported by an enabling global environment, including through international tax cooperation to combat illicit financial flows and tax evasion.

#### **Harnessing synergies and securing financing for gender-responsive social protection, public services and sustainable infrastructure**

6. Globally, unpaid care and domestic work are disproportionately performed by women and girls. Despite its importance to economic and social well-being, such work is often unrecognized and undervalued. The design and implementation of gender-responsive economic and social policies can contribute to a more equal sharing of care responsibilities. Investing in comprehensive childcare systems can have positive multiplier effects on families, including by opening avenues for parents to seek employment and creating a great number of jobs.

7. Gender inequalities in the world of work are inextricably linked to gender disparities in unpaid care responsibilities that limit women's time and their opportunities for education and participation in the labour force. While regional variations exist, women's rates of participation in the labour force have stagnated globally at rates lower than men overall. The availability of high-quality, subsidized childcare and policies regarding maternity and paternity leave are important factors in women's ability to enter and remain in the workforce.

8. Cash transfers provide essential income to individuals and families. Conditions placed on those transfers can generate demand for services such as education and health. However, with the rigidity of certain conditions and the lack of sufficient investment in public services, the generation of demand is not matched with available and high-quality service delivery. Social protection systems need to be designed on the basis of women's and girls' realities and a thorough assessment must be conducted regarding the impact on women's lives of associating such conditions to cash transfers.

9. The human rights of women and girls must be considered when investing in public services, such as universal health coverage, including by addressing barriers regarding supply and demand that limit access to services. It is essential to recognize and respond to the synergies among financing, the provision of health services and infrastructure in efforts towards achieving strengthened health systems and universal health coverage.

10. The lack of gender-responsive transport infrastructure and services has an impact on the mobility of women and girls. Barriers to accessible, affordable transportation disproportionately affect women and add to their time burdens. Women and girls also face unique safety and personal security risks in transportation, which can result in girls missing school and in women not pursuing jobs that are far from home or being unable to gain access to services. Investing in transport is not an end in itself but a means to provide access to public services and to generate income in a more general sense.

11. Applying an intersectional analysis to social protection systems, public services and sustainable infrastructure will ensure that policy design reflects the needs of women and girls, who are marginalized on grounds of poverty, ethnicity, race, caste, age, sexual orientation and gender identity, disability, indigeneity, migrant and refugee status and location.

### **The way forward**

12. In the 2030 Agenda, Member States committed to achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls and leaving no one behind. Efforts to meet the Sustainable Development Goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda should demonstrate how women's and girls' rights and needs are prioritized within social protection systems, public services and sustainable infrastructure.

13. The collection of data on social protection, public services and infrastructure should capture information on women's and girls' lived experiences. Time-use surveys can improve the understanding of women's unpaid work and increase the visibility of such work as a way to inform policy decisions. Mobility surveys must include issues of affordability, accessibility and safety and must be complemented by qualitative research to ensure that transportation systems improve women's and girls' access to public services and enable them to benefit from social protection systems.

14. Governments can, through deliberate choices, direct investment towards public policies that support gender equality, increase women's participation in the labour force and reduce unpaid care responsibilities. Such a transformation requires political will to increase the progressivity of tax systems, reduce expenditures that have no effects on efficiency or quality and increase investments in social protection, public services and sustainable infrastructure.

15. Directing resources towards gender-responsive social protection, public services and sustainable infrastructure is a long-term investment in human and social capital, which ultimately contributes to inclusive economic growth. Governments should implement gender-responsive planning and budgeting to move towards a more participatory, transparent budget process that raises revenue from all available sources and reprioritizes public expenditure for gender equality and women's empowerment.