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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”: implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives: review theme: women’s empowerment and the link to sustainable development

Review of the implementation of the agreed conclusions of the sixtieth session of the Commission on the Status of Women

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report provides a review of the implementation by Member States of the agreed conclusions of the sixtieth session of the Commission on the Status of Women on women’s empowerment and the link to sustainable development, five years after the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The review was conducted in highly volatile and uncertain global and national contexts, as the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic deepens inequalities, pushes health and care systems to the brink, exacerbates violence against women and girls and changes the strategic priorities of Governments and the international community, posing huge challenges for the achievement of gender equality and women’s empowerment in the context of sustainable development.

* E/CN.6/2021/1.



I. Introduction

1. At the fifty-ninth session of the Commission on the Status of Women, Member States agreed on new working methods for the Commission (see Economic and Social Council resolution 2015/6), which included a more rigorous review of the agreed conclusions relating to a priority theme from a previous session in order to encourage the implementation of its outcomes. As part of the review process, the Commission considers a report on progress made on the theme at the national level.

2. The review theme of the Commission at its sixty-fifth session is “Women’s empowerment and the link to sustainable development”, in accordance with its multi-year programme of work for 2021–2024 (see Economic and Social Council resolution 2020/15). The Commission had adopted agreed conclusions on that theme at its sixtieth session, in 2016 (see E/2016/27-E/CN.6/2016/22, chap. I, sect. A). The Commission previously reviewed the implementation of the agreed conclusions at its sixty-third session, in March 2019 (see E/CN.6/2019/4).

3. This report provides a review of the implementation by Member States of the agreed conclusions on “Women’s empowerment and the link to sustainable development”, covering the two years’ period since the previous review. It considers the impacts of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic on women’s empowerment and sustainable development and actions by Member States in the following areas: strengthening normative, legal and policy frameworks; enhancing national institutional arrangements; financing gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls; strengthening women’s leadership and their full and equal participation in decision-making; and improving gender-responsive data collection in the context of follow-up to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and to track and monitor the gender-specific impacts of and responses to the pandemic.

4. The report is informed by the review and appraisal of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action on the twenty-fifth anniversary of its adoption (see E/CN.6/2020/3). It also draws on information received from Member States¹ and other sources, including the reports of the Secretary-General on progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (see E/2019/68 and E/2020/57) and the voluntary national reviews of the high-level political forum on sustainable development in 2019 and 2020.

5. The present report will be accompanied by presentations by Member States, on a voluntary basis, of lessons learned, challenges and best practices, at the sixty-fifth session of the Commission.

II. Importance of the agreed conclusions

6. The agreed conclusions of the sixtieth session of the Commission highlight the alignment between the 2030 Agenda and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and serve as a road map for the gender-responsive implementation and monitoring of progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals, while leaving no

¹ Afghanistan, Andorra, Argentina, Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Bosnia and Herzegovina, Botswana, Burundi, China, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Cyprus, Czechia, Ecuador, El Salvador, Ethiopia, France, Ghana, Greece, Guyana, Hungary, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Ireland, Japan, Kyrgyzstan, Lebanon, Malawi, Malaysia, Mauritius, Mexico, Mongolia, Montenegro, Morocco, Mozambique, Myanmar, Netherlands, Nicaragua, Norway, Peru, Portugal, Republic of Korea, Romania, South Africa, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Sudan, Sweden, Switzerland and Turkmenistan.

women and girls behind.² The agreed conclusions emphasize that the gender-responsive implementation of the 2030 Agenda requires accelerated action on previous commitments, including the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, to realize gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls and the equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms. The gender-responsive implementation of the 2030 Agenda is universal, integrated and indivisible, applying to developing and developed countries alike.

7. The agreed conclusions reaffirm that realizing gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls is a precondition for sustainable development and crucial to making progress towards all the Sustainable Development Goals and targets, and thereby call for actions reflecting the mutually reinforcing links between the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls (Goal 5) and each of the other Goals.

8. The agreed conclusions recognize the major contributions made by civil society, including women's and community-based organizations, feminist groups and women human rights defenders in placing the interests, priorities and aspirations of women and girls at the forefront of the gender-responsive implementation of the 2030 Agenda, and call for participatory and inclusive engagement, increased resources and support and safe and enabling environments so that women's and civil society organizations can fully contribute to the gender-responsive implementation, follow-up and review of the Sustainable Development Goals.

9. The agreed conclusions give prominence to the gender-responsive follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda, for which improved international and national standards and methodologies and national statistical capacities are needed to produce and disseminate high-quality, reliable and timely data disaggregated by sex, age, income and other characteristics and gender statistics in key areas for measuring progress on the Sustainable Development Goals for women and girls. These areas are reflected in the global indicator framework adopted by the General Assembly in its resolution 71/313. Of the 231 unique indicators in the framework, 51 are gender-specific.³

III. Context for the implementation of the agreed conclusions

10. The implementation of the agreed conclusions took place in increasingly complex and volatile economic, political and environmental conditions. The global economy, after more than a decade of crisis, recession, fiscal austerity and deepening inequality, has faced unprecedented challenges and uncertainties with the economic, social and health repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has compounded the ongoing impacts of the climate and environmental crises, pushing people further behind. Governments have taken wide-ranging measures to contain the transmission of the virus and its economic and social fallout. However, these interventions have left developing countries facing the imminent scenario of crippling debt crises and debilitating fiscal consolidation that would cut public investment and spending on health, education and social protection, jeopardizing the likelihood of attaining the

² United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), "Driving the gender-responsive implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development", August 2016.

³ UN-Women and United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, "Progress on the Sustainable Development Goals: the gender snapshot 2020", 2020.

Sustainable Development Goals by 2030 and adding further urgency to the decade of action for the Goals.⁴

11. The 25-year review and appraisal of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action revealed that, despite important steps to reduce gender gaps and inequalities, progress has not matched the commitments that Member States made in 1995 and that, in some areas, the situation is worse now than before. Income and wealth inequalities have increased in developed and developing countries to levels higher than 25 years ago, disproportionately affecting women and girls (see [E/CN.6/2020/3](#)). In particular, women between 25 and 34 years of age are 25 per cent more likely than men to live in extreme poverty, an age span that coincides with childbearing and child-rearing when families face increased expenses, and women's childcare responsibilities constrain involvement in paid work (see [A/74/111](#)). The gender gap in accessing sufficient food increased from 2018 to 2019, and the likelihood of severe food insecurity is about 27 per cent higher for women than men.⁵ Global poverty was expected to increase in 2020 for the first time since 1998, with 71 million people falling into extreme poverty in the wake of the pandemic.⁶ The ratio of 118 poor women for every 100 poor men estimated for 2021 could increase to 121 poor women for every 100 poor men by 2030.⁷

12. At the global level, the gender gap in labour force participation stagnated at 31 per cent between 1998 and 2018, and the gender pay gap remains on average at 20 per cent. Women do on average three times more unpaid care and domestic work than men and continue to be concentrated in vulnerable employment in the informal economy with little or no labour and social protections (see [E/CN.6/2020/3](#)). Violence against women and girls remains pervasive, with lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex women around the world at heightened risk of violence and harassment (*ibid.*). Women and girls who face multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, based on age, class, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation and gender identity, disability or migration status, among other factors, have made the least progress (*ibid.*), and this constellation of factors would make them disproportionately affected by the pandemic (see [E/2020/57](#)).

13. The COVID-19 crisis has deepened gender inequalities, afflicted economic sectors that have an overrepresentation of women workers, dramatically increased the care burdens of women and girls and caused a shadow pandemic of violence against them.⁸ At the global level, 40 per cent of all employed women work in hard-hit sectors, including accommodation and food services; wholesale and retail trade; real estate, business and administrative activities; and manufacturing.⁹ More women than men have lost their sources of livelihood as a result of COVID-19.¹⁰ Women in the

⁴ United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, "Public finances after COVID-19: is a high-debt, low-growth trap looming for developing countries?", World Economic Situation and Prospects Monthly Briefing, No. 142 (October 2020).

⁵ *The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2020* (United Nations publications, Sales No. E.20.1.7).

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Ginette Azcona and others, *From Insights to Action: Gender Equality in the Wake of COVID-19* (New York, UN-Women, 2020).

⁸ Jade Cochran and others, "Addressing the economic fallout of COVID-19: pathways and policy options for a gender-responsive recovery", Policy Brief, No. 15 (New York, UN-Women, 2020); Bobo Diallo, Seemin Qayum and Silke Staab, "COVID-19 and the care economy: immediate action and structural transformation for a gender-responsive recovery", Policy Brief, No. 16 (New York, UN-Women, 2020); and UN-Women, "COVID-19 and violence against women and girls: addressing the shadow pandemic", Policy Brief, No. 17 (New York, UN-Women, 2020).

⁹ International Labour Organization (ILO), "ILO monitor: COVID-19 and the world of work", 2nd ed., 7 April 2020.

¹⁰ Azcona and others, *From Insights to Action*.

informal economy, including essential workers and domestic workers, with limited or no access to social security and paid sick leave and few protections against dismissal, have been particularly affected.¹¹ It is estimated that, at the global level, informal workers lost on average 60 per cent of their income in the first month of the pandemic.¹² Women represent 70 per cent of the world's health workforce and are at increased risk of exposure to the virus (available data indicate that 72 per cent of infected health workers are women).¹³ As a result of COVID-19-related containment, lockdowns and school and care centre closures, the increasing volume of unpaid care and domestic work continues to be carried out by women and girls,¹⁴ exacerbating the prevailing and entrenched gender division of labour.

14. Women's economic and political participation and decision-making power at all levels, from the household to parliament, are key to their empowerment, but they remain largely excluded. Slightly more than 55 per cent of women of 15 to 49 years of age make their own decisions about sexual and reproductive health and rights, which has direct implications for their economic and political empowerment; women make up 39 per cent of the world's workers but hold only 28 per cent of managerial positions; and less than 7 per cent of Heads of State are women, while women hold only a quarter of the seats in national parliaments and a little over 36 per cent in local deliberative bodies.¹⁵ More progress can be seen at the ministerial level, with women holding 54 per cent of positions related to the environment, natural resources and energy (compared with 20.7 per cent overall).¹⁶

15. The economic, political and social impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic have exposed the enduring unequal relations of power between men and women and the constraints on women's empowerment, security and decision-making capacity in private and public life. Yet, in countries led by women, confirmed deaths from COVID-19 are six times lower than in others.¹⁷ While this may be attributable to a variety of factors, including rapid response by women leaders with a focus on social and environmental well-being, it is critical that women be equitably represented in leadership and decision-making related to the pandemic and that socioeconomic recovery packages and budgets be gender-responsive to build a more equal and sustainable future for all. In this challenging context, the agreed conclusions and their recommended actions for the gender-responsive implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals are highly relevant.

IV. National implementation efforts

16. The 25-year review and appraisal demonstrated the synergies and linkages between the Beijing Platform for Action and the 2030 Agenda (see [E/CN.6/2020/3](#)) and, therefore, the importance of the Commission's agreed conclusions of 2016 and their implementation. Recent efforts by Member States have encompassed targeted responses to the challenges to women's empowerment and sustainable development posed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

¹¹ United Nations, "Policy brief: the impact of COVID-19 on women, 9 April 2020.

¹² ILO, "ILO monitor: COVID-19 and the world of work", 3rd ed., 29 April 2020.

¹³ UN-Women and Department of Economic and Social Affairs, "Progress on the Sustainable Development Goals".

¹⁴ *The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2020*.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ UN-Women and Department of Economic and Social Affairs, "Progress on the Sustainable Development Goals".

¹⁷ Ibid.

A. Strengthening normative, legal and policy frameworks

17. The agreed conclusions emphasized the importance of strengthening normative, legal and policy frameworks to advance gender equality and realize women's human rights and the empowerment of all women and girls. The accelerated implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the gender-responsive implementation of all Sustainable Development Goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda in a manner that reflects its universal, integrated and indivisible nature and the full implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, nearly 40 years after it entered into force, are critical in this regard.

18. Member States have taken steps that advance implementation. Recently, several countries submitted periodic reports under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. Armenia established an inter-agency commission on the implementation of the Convention in 2019 to prepare the country's seventh periodic report. Guyana is training interministerial gender focal points on gender mainstreaming and planning in relation to the Convention. France and Mexico are co-hosting the Generation Equality Forum in 2021, designed to take advantage of the momentum of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Beijing Platform for Action to achieve gender equality for this and future generations.

19. The incorporation of the gender-responsive implementation of the 2030 Agenda into national development planning and policy frameworks (Andorra, Armenia, Azerbaijan, China, Colombia, Ethiopia, Japan, Mauritius, Mexico, Montenegro, Morocco, Republic of Korea and Switzerland) continues, but it is unclear whether this practice has become generalized at the global level. China covers the gender equality targets of the 2030 Agenda in the outline for the development of women of the Thirteenth Five-Year Plan (2016–2020) and intends to use the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the 2030 Agenda as a benchmark in the next outline (2021–2030). The National Development Plan of Colombia (2018–2022), the country's principal vehicle for implementing the Sustainable Development Goals, addresses gender equality through eight public policy approaches, including a public care policy. The 2030 Sustainable Development Strategy of Switzerland incorporates the Goals, with social cohesion and gender equality constituting one of eight fields of action. Other countries have incorporated the Goals in international development cooperation strategies, for example, the Austrian Development Agency requires projects and programmes to report on Goal indicators.

20. The promulgation of legal and constitutional frameworks that promote gender equality and eliminate gender-based discrimination has been a key achievement (Andorra, Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Botswana, Costa Rica, Cuba, Ethiopia, France, Greece, Malawi, Mauritius, Mongolia, Morocco, Mozambique, Norway, Peru, Portugal, Republic of Korea, Romania and Saint Kitts and Nevis). Act No. 13/2019 on equal treatment and non-discrimination in Andorra establishes legal guarantees against discrimination in public and private spheres and mandates gender mainstreaming in policies, programmes and regulations. The Constitution of Cuba of 2019 stipulates that all people are equal before the law, receive the same protection and treatment from the authorities and enjoy the same rights without discrimination based on sex, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, age, ethnic origin, skin colour, religious belief, disability or national or territorial origin. Law 4604/2019 of Greece is aimed at ensuring substantive gender equality and the elimination of gender inequalities in public, social and economic life, introducing gender mainstreaming and gender budgeting for the first time. The Gender Impact Analysis and Assessment Act of the Republic of Korea is applicable to all laws, regulations and major policies and plans.

21. Entrenched discriminatory social norms and structural barriers continue to marginalize women and girls worldwide and are likely to be exacerbated by the pandemic.¹⁸ Member States have taken legal and policy measures to realize women's social, economic and cultural rights and address gender-based discrimination in a number of areas, including public administration (Andorra, Netherlands and Norway); police and armed forces and peacekeeping missions (Bosnia and Herzegovina); marriage and divorce (Portugal); land, property and inheritance (Afghanistan, Morocco and Mozambique); work and employment (Andorra, Azerbaijan, Morocco, Norway and Romania); equal pay (Andorra, Bahrain, Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Netherlands and Portugal); maternity, paternity and parental leave (Bangladesh, Cuba, Ethiopia, Japan, Netherlands, South Africa and Sweden); sexual orientation and gender identity (Argentina); gender-biased sex selection (Azerbaijan); disability (Austria and Azerbaijan); sexual and reproductive health (Ghana and Mexico); comprehensive sexuality education (France); and migration (Netherlands).

B. Responding to the COVID-19 crisis

22. While women have demonstrated exceptional leadership and contributed disproportionately to the response of the health workforce, the COVID-19 pandemic has posed unprecedented challenges for women's empowerment and sustainable development; its economic and social fallout could reverse progress made on achieving the 2030 Agenda across the Sustainable Development Goals, and specifically Goal 5. Aggravating the health crisis, lockdowns and containment measures have had pernicious effects on women's employment and income, safety and security and disproportionate share of care responsibilities. Virtually all countries have undertaken emergency response measures to contain the virus, to cope with collapsing health and social security systems and to mitigate impacts with socioeconomic recovery and fiscal stimulus packages intended to keep the economy, institutions and households afloat. However, the vast majority of those packages are not designed with a gender lens and most measures contained therein are gender-blind. The COVID-19 Global Gender Response Tracker has analysed 2,517 of those measures across 206 countries and territories and determined that 992 are gender-sensitive, as follows: 704 measures across 135 countries, or 28 per cent of the total, focus on preventing or responding to violence against women and girls; 177 involve women's economic security; and 111 involve unpaid care work, encompassing social protection and economic, fiscal and labour market measures.¹⁹

23. Member State submissions reflect that pattern. Many reported measures are not gender-specific, although they may indirectly benefit women and girls. Among those that are explicitly gender-responsive, the plan for economic reactivation of Colombia includes a package of actions for women, while in Peru, new regulations for workplaces on adequate leave and compensation, the reduction of working hours and telework must take into consideration gender, interculturality and intersectionality and respect human rights.

24. Member States are directing support to hard-hit sectors in which women are overrepresented, which should shore up the implementation of Sustainable Development Goals 5 and 8, in particular. France, Hungary and Malawi are supporting health workers, the majority of whom are women, through negotiated salary increases and bonuses in recognition of their front-line work. Argentina,

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ The COVID-19 Global Gender Response Tracker was launched in September 2020 by UN-Women and the United Nations Development Programme. See <https://data.undp.org/gendertacker/>.

Bolivia (Plurinational State of) and Peru are reinforcing and defending the rights of domestic workers to salary and paid leave during lockdowns and protection from sexual harassment. Bangladesh is providing \$58 million in compensation for job and income loss to garment industry workers and \$2.35 million to women migrant workers who lost their jobs since the COVID-19 outbreak and returned home. Bahrain, Costa Rica and Cyprus are supporting the tourism sector and workers. Czechia is targeting self-employed persons to offset losses in feminized sectors and jobs, such as hair salons and beauty parlours. South Africa is providing debt relief to micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises, with women representing nearly 33 per cent of the beneficiaries. Ecuador is participating in a campaign to highlight the role of rural women producers and food security during the crisis, and Guyana launched the COVID-19 Relief Kitchen Garden Initiative to support food security and women's self-sufficiency. However, few submissions address the critical need to build the resilience of women producers and communities facing the combined health, economic, climate and environmental crises.

25. Measures that provide for employment and income security, in line with Sustainable Development Goal 8, among other Goals, are intended to alleviate the impact of layoffs and job losses. Botswana continues to pay the salaries of employees in government and public works programmes, where women are the majority. Malawi provides for flexible working or teleworking for women and men civil servants with monthly salaries maintained. Costa Rica, Cyprus, Ethiopia and Peru are protecting the labour rights of women and men in formal employment. Cyprus, Iran (Islamic Republic of) and South Africa provide unemployment benefits and insurance. A third of unemployed beneficiaries of the Social Relief Distress grant in South Africa are women, while domestic workers are eligible for the Unemployment Insurance Fund special lockdown benefit and 82 per cent of the beneficiaries of a compensation fund for workers who contracted the virus at work are women, in particular health practitioners. France is giving a bonus to health-care staff in hospitals and nursing homes in areas most affected by the virus. Mexico guarantees paid leave for adults over 65 years of age and groups of people at risk, including pregnant and lactating women and people with disabilities. Women's re-employment centres in Japan provide services for women whose careers have been interrupted by COVID-19.

26. Member States are supporting women entrepreneurs and enterprises to help them to survive the crisis. Afghanistan is purchasing and distributing masks made by women tailors; a stimulus package in Bangladesh includes interest-free loans for women entrepreneurs; the Plurinational State of Bolivia facilitates safe access for women rural producers to mobile urban markets; Costa Rica provides training and technical assistance to women entrepreneurs struggling with the health crisis; the Enterprise Development Fund in Malawi has increased support to women and young people; and in the Republic of Korea, women's businesses benefit from the Job Stabilization Fund. Costa Rica has made funding for women's organizations more flexible, allowing informal organizations and those having difficulties caused by the pandemic to seek support.

27. Social protection initiatives, created or expanded to support women and their families through the crisis, support the implementation of Sustainable Development Goals 1, 3, 5, 8 and 10. Mexico has strengthened social protection and welfare programmes, in their majority benefiting women. Boosting family incomes through cash transfers and food provision are common approaches (Argentina, Burundi, Botswana, Costa Rica, Ecuador, El Salvador, France, Ghana, Guyana, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Morocco and Saint Kitts and Nevis). The Emergency Family Income programme in Argentina covers informal workers and people with no other income, reaching 90 per cent of households, and over half of its beneficiaries are women. Costa Rica supports workers, including informal and temporary workers, and women

received nearly 50 per cent of the 265,000 grants. The Urban Productive Safety Net Project in Ethiopia has been expanded to cover more households and reach women in the informal economy. The Active Solidarity Income in France has been augmented by an exceptional grant of €150 for participating households, 54 per cent of which are headed by women. The Islamic Republic of Iran allocated 10 million rials in cash subsidies to 17 million households, prioritizing women-headed households. Botswana committed \$35 million for food packages to households, 55 per cent of which are headed by women. El Salvador is delivering food packages to 1.3 million families, benefiting women leaders and heads of household, single mothers and indigenous, rural and peasant women.

28. Member States are addressing the care crisis confronting women and families during lockdowns, teleworking and school and care centre closures through various mechanisms, including paid leave (Andorra, Cuba, Cyprus, Czechia, Greece, Japan, Montenegro, Portugal, Romania and Sudan) with varying conditions and applicable largely to women, both employed and, in some cases, self-employed; grants to caregivers (South Africa); care allowances for staying at home with children (Norway); emergency childcare (Hungary and Republic of Korea); support for single parents, in their majority women (Ireland and Japan) and single mothers (France); support for the care of children with separated parents (Argentina); childcare assistance for essential workers in the public and private sectors, especially women (Guyana); mental health-care services for women who are the main family caregivers (Peru); subsidies for self-employed care workers and those cared for by independent care workers (Austria); bonus for home carers of the elderly and people with disabilities (France); and tax allowances for companies that provide childcare (Hungary).

29. The COVID-19 health crisis has further constrained the delivery of sexual and reproductive health-care services to women and girls (Sustainable Development Goals 3 and 5).²⁰ Some Member States are expanding health coverage and sick leave provisions for workers and women in situations of vulnerability (Cuba and Japan). China and Portugal have taken measures to reduce the risk of infection for pregnant women. Mexico has a 24-hour free-of-charge hotline on COVID-19 prevention and protection specifically for pregnant and post-partum women. Morocco is providing COVID-19 hygiene and prevention kits for women victims of violence, pregnant women, women health workers, midwives, migrant women and incarcerated women and established 147 centres across the country to provide health and care services to the homeless, including women and girls.

30. Significant legislative and policy efforts have been made to end violence against women and girls (Armenia, Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Czechia, El Salvador, France, Greece, Mongolia, Morocco, Portugal, Republic of Korea, Romania and Saint Kitts and Nevis), femicide (Plurinational State of Bolivia), harmful practices (France, Ghana, Malawi, Mozambique and Sudan) and the trafficking in and smuggling of women and children (Azerbaijan, Ethiopia and Republic of Korea). Preventing and ending violence against women and girls have taken on increased urgency with spiralling violence in the wake of COVID-19 lockdowns and stay-at-home containment measures.

31. Reporting Member States have acted to stem the shadow pandemic of violence against women and girls through the provision of essential services, including innovative technology to facilitate access thereto by women and girls. In addition to awareness-raising campaigns (Colombia, Cyprus, Ghana, Greece, Kyrgyzstan,

²⁰ Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), “Response, recovery and prevention in the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic in developing countries: women and girls on the frontlines”, 22 September 2020.

Mongolia, Morocco, Mozambique, Myanmar, Portugal and Sudan), services cover guidance for women experiencing violence and their families (Bolivia (Plurinational State of) and Peru), parents confined home (France), migrant camps (Plurinational State of Bolivia) and multilingual support for migrant women (Greece); hotlines and online services for reporting, support and emergency services (Botswana, El Salvador, Ghana, Lebanon, Myanmar, Netherlands, Peru and Romania), including mobile phone applications (Montenegro and Morocco), an online reporting platform for workplace sexual harassment (Peru) and a “don’t strike” hotline for perpetrators of violence (France); increased funding for services and shelters (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Botswana, Burundi, France, Mexico and Mongolia) and temporary services and shelters (Kyrgyzstan, Myanmar and Portugal); and continuation of judicial and security services during lockdowns and the closure of institutions (Ethiopia, Hungary and Portugal), police training to increase responsiveness (Plurinational State of Bolivia), the relaunch of women’s police stations (Nicaragua), strengthened referral and reporting mechanisms and access to justice (Lebanon, Malawi and Portugal) and the provision of information on legal and judicial services and remedies (Mexico). Sweden is funding civil society organizations dedicated to providing services, and the United Nations trust fund in support of actions to eliminate violence against women, in partnership with the European Union and the Spotlight Initiative, allocated \$9 million to civil society grantees in sub-Saharan Africa to continue to work through the crisis.

C. Enhancing national institutional arrangements

32. The agreed conclusions call for strengthening the authority, capacity and visibility of and funding for national gender equality mechanisms at all levels and supporting coherence and coordination by mainstreaming gender perspectives across all policies, programmes and sectors of government. Not only do these mechanisms serve as the gender focal points for Governments, undertaking the coordination and monitoring of the gender-responsive implementation of the 2030 Agenda, but they are also typically responsible for ensuring that national planning, policymaking and budgeting effectively advance gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. Such institutional arrangements have taken on renewed necessity in the COVID-19 response and recovery period.

33. In 2018, 192 countries had one or more national gender equality mechanisms or focal points, with varying status and authority and often inadequate financial resources, capacity and decision-making power to undertake gender mainstreaming effectively (see [E/CN.6/2020/3](#)). Reporting Member States have created new national gender equality mechanisms and strengthened existing ones to enhance their authority, capacity and visibility in government and society (Andorra, Argentina, Armenia, China, El Salvador, France, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Ireland, Malawi, Montenegro, Morocco, Myanmar, Netherlands, Republic of Korea, Norway, Peru and Portugal).

34. In 2019, Andorra created the position of Secretary of State for Equality and Citizen Participation, responsible for implementing the law on equality and non-discrimination and guaranteeing the principle of equality, including between men and women, in all public policy, in accordance with the National Strategic Plan for the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The same year, Argentina established the Ministry for Women, Genders and Diversity, which is responsible for formulating, coordinating and implementing policies to guarantee the rights of women and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and other identity persons, and the National Directorate for Economy, Equality and Gender and the Directorate for Women and Gender Issues under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to mainstream gender

considerations in economic and foreign policies, respectively. In Peru, the Ministry for Women and Vulnerable Populations coordinates with regional and local governments to implement gender equality policies. The Republic of Korea appointed gender equality policy officers in eight major ministries in 2019.

35. Member States increased gender mainstreaming efforts to ensure that gender equality considerations were integrated into the implementation of all Sustainable Development Goals and targets (Andorra, Argentina, Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Botswana, China, Costa Rica, Cuba, Ecuador, Lebanon, Malaysia, Mauritius, Morocco, Peru and Republic of Korea). Bosnia and Herzegovina integrated gender equality into ministerial policies and annual operational plans under its third Gender Action Plan (2018–2022), and Botswana commenced gender mainstreaming in the water, housing and agriculture sectors. In China, all 31 provinces, autonomous regions and municipalities have established mechanisms for gender analysis and mainstreaming. The National Policy for Effective Equality between Women and Men (2018–2030) of Costa Rica commits 50 public institutions to advancing gender equality, many for the first time. In 2019, Malaysia completed the Gender Mainstreaming Framework and Policy Recommendations for the Implementation of the Eleventh Malaysia Plan, and the Republic of Korea conducted 29,395 gender analyses, yielding 8,561 tasks to make policies more gender-responsive. Through its National Strategy for Women and Girls (2017–2020), Ireland is mainstreaming period poverty mitigation measures across all relevant government departments and public bodies.

36. Governments have maintained or increased funding for national gender equality mechanisms (Austria, Cyprus, Ethiopia, Guyana, Iran (Islamic Republic of) and Portugal) or, in some cases, decreased it in the wake of the COVID-19 crisis (Mauritius). In Austria, the allocation for the Division for Women and Equality rose from €10.15 million to €12.15 million in 2020. In Cyprus, the budget of the National Machinery for Women's Rights increased from €235,000 in 2016 to €370,000 annually in 2018, 2019 and 2020. In Ethiopia, increased earmarked budgets for the Ministry for Women, Children and Youth Affairs, its regional counterparts and gender offices in sector ministries have enhanced gender mainstreaming. Guyana increased the allocation for the Women and Gender Equality Commission in 2019 by almost 50 per cent from previous years. In the Islamic Republic of Iran, the budget for the Vice-Presidency for Women and Family Affairs rose by 19 per cent from 2019 to 2020.

37. National gender equality mechanisms in some countries are extending support to women's civil society and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) during the COVID-19 pandemic. In Costa Rica, the National Institute for Women is supporting the National Forum for Indigenous Women and the National Forum for Women of African Descent to publicize and address the impacts of COVID-19 on their communities. In Cyprus, the National Machinery for Women's Rights increased funding to women's organizations to mitigate the consequences of COVID-19. In the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Vice-Presidency for Women and Family Affairs organized informational sessions on COVID-19 for 1,200 NGOs. In Ireland, women's community organizations experiencing financial difficulties as a direct result of the COVID-19 pandemic are among those receiving grants from the €35 million COVID-19 Stability Fund for Community and Voluntary Organizations, Charities and Social Enterprises. At the global level, the COVID-19 Emergency Response Window of the Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund is supporting women's civil society organizations in 25 countries facing conflict and crises.

38. National gender equality mechanisms are taking steps to protect women's rights during the crisis. In Ecuador, the National Council for Gender Equality issued implementation guidelines for State institutions to guarantee the rights of women and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex people and facilitated the provision

of benefits and food kits for people on its registry of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons in need, mainly transgender women. The National Women's Institute in Mexico conducted an awareness-raising campaign about gender inequality during the COVID-19 pandemic and the needs of women and girls in relation to economic autonomy, care, sexual and reproductive health, and violence.

D. Financing gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls

39. The agreed conclusions reaffirm the commitments made in the Addis Ababa Action Agenda of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development with reference to gender-responsive public financial management, gender-responsive budgeting and tracking of public expenditure, and call for significantly increased investment in gender equality and women's empowerment through the mobilization of financial resources from all sources and the fulfilment of official development assistance obligations. Member States have made progress on gender-responsive budgeting, but many countries do not yet have systems to track allocations for gender equality. An analysis of 69 countries showed that only 13 countries met the criteria of a viable tracking system that measures and publicizes such budgets and that 41 countries approached the requirements. Although 90 per cent had policies and programmes to address gender gaps, only 43 per cent had the resources to implement them,²¹ which underscores the persistent inadequacy of financing to meet long-standing commitments to gender equality, to the detriment of the well-being and empowerment of women and girls.

40. At the same time, international financing for gender equality also remains far less than what is required to close gender gaps (see [E/CN.6/2020/3](#)). The percentage of bilateral overseas development assistance from countries members of the Development Assistance Committee of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development destined principally for gender equality has remained the same for over a decade, at roughly 4 per cent, reaching an average of \$4.6 billion per year. In addition, an estimated 10 per cent of blended finance and 5 per cent of philanthropic contributions are dedicated primarily to gender equality and women's empowerment.²²

41. Gender-responsive budgeting is the most common approach used by reporting Member States to allocate and monitor financial resources for gender equality and women's empowerment (Bahrain, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ethiopia, France, Ireland, Japan, Malawi, Mexico, Mongolia, Morocco, Peru, Portugal, Romania, South Africa and Sweden). Countries have institutionalized gender-responsive budgeting using multiple approaches, including integration into sectoral and national budgetary processes (Ethiopia, Japan, Mexico, Morocco and Peru), gender equality markers for national budgets (Costa Rica and Mexico), training for government entities at the national and subnational levels (Colombia) and budgeting for national COVID-19 response and recovery plans (Malawi).

42. In Ireland, the Equality Budgeting programme examines the likely impact of budgetary measures across areas, such as income, health and education, and how

²¹ *The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2019* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.19.I.6).

²² Cushla Thompson and Jenny Hedman, *Putting Finance to Work for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment: The Way Forward*, OECD Development Policy Papers, No. 25 (Paris, OECD, 2020). The Development Assistance Committee gender equality marker tracks aid that focuses on gender equality and women's empowerment as either a principal/primary or significant/secondary policy objective.

outcomes differ according to gender, age, ethnicity and other factors, to support government decision-making. Since 2008, Mexico has mandated national development planning and budgets with a gender perspective, and all policies and budgets carry gender equality markers. Morocco publishes an annual gender-responsive budgeting report that serves as an accountability and monitoring tool. Peru approved a results-oriented budget programme for the reduction of violence against women that applies across sectors and government. The Republic of Korea applied the findings of a gender impact analysis to gender-responsive budgeting, allocating 31,796 billion won to 35 agencies and 284 programmes in 2020. South Africa adopted the Framework on Gender-Responsive Planning, Budgeting, Monitoring, Evaluation and Auditing at the end of 2018. Mongolia and Sweden made specific allocations to finance gender equality measures in national budgets.

43. Few Member States reported advances in tracking gender equality in overseas development assistance (Austria, France and Republic of Korea) to help to ensure the gender-responsive implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. Current overseas development assistance financing priorities include women's economic empowerment (Austria), leadership in community development (Republic of Korea), gender-responsive family policies (Austria), financial inclusion for migrant women (Austria), sexual and reproductive health (Austria and France), implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) (Austria) and support for feminist organizations (France). The Austrian Development Agency reported that 79 per cent of the projects that it supported, equivalent to €82.4 million, had gender equality as a primary or secondary focus. France has committed to directing by 2022 50 per cent of its official development assistance to projects with a significant gender equality focus; in 2019, it announced the establishment of a fund of €120 million to support feminist organizations worldwide.

44. Member States have directed funding for gender equality and women's empowerment towards the implementation of laws and strategies on equality and non-discrimination (Andorra and Portugal); elections (Bosnia and Herzegovina); literacy and education, including in the fields of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (Afghanistan, Colombia and Malaysia); childcare centres (Malaysia and Saint Kitts and Nevis); women's economic empowerment and livelihoods (Bangladesh, Lebanon, Myanmar and South Africa); decent work and employment (Botswana, China, Colombia, Ireland, Malaysia, Portugal and Saint Kitts and Nevis); women's entrepreneurship (Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Botswana, Burundi, China, Ireland, Kyrgyzstan, Malaysia, Montenegro, Morocco, Nicaragua, Portugal, Romania and South Africa); engaging with the private sector (Andorra, Bahrain and Ireland); digital financial services (Ghana); research on gender equality and work (Norway); vocational training for refugees (Myanmar) and assistance for returning migrant women (Armenia); violence against women and girls (Armenia, Bangladesh, Bolivia (Plurinational State of) and Portugal); sexual harassment in the workplace (Colombia, France, Malaysia and Peru); sexual and reproductive health (Armenia, Azerbaijan and Colombia); maternity allowances (Bangladesh); and civil society and NGOs (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Czechia, Montenegro, Portugal and Republic of Korea).

E. Strengthening women's leadership and their full and equal participation in decision-making

45. The agreed conclusions call for women's full, equal and effective participation, leadership and decision-making in all areas of sustainable development and at all levels and in public, social, economic and political life, including through temporary special measures, education and training and by removing barriers, such as poverty,

violence, disproportionate care responsibilities and discriminatory social norms (see also [E/CN.6/2021/3](#)). Although some progress has been made, only 13 per cent of countries have reached gender balance (i.e., 40 per cent of women or more) in national parliaments and 15 per cent in local government, largely through legislated gender quotas.²³ Even as the need for peacekeeping processes burgeons and women's participation has been key for their durability, between 1992 and 2019, women represented, on average, 13 per cent of negotiators in major peace processes worldwide. Between 2015 and 2019, 225 women human rights defenders, journalists and trade unionists were reported killed, according to available data across 81 countries.²⁴

46. In 2019, some 80 countries had legislated gender quotas in place (see [E/CN.6/2020/3](#)). The Latin American and Caribbean region, which has a long-standing practice of applying quotas, reached 31.6 per cent of women in parliament, the highest percentage in the world.²⁵ Reporting Member States have introduced and increased quotas to bolster women's political and economic representation. Some countries plan to maintain or increase quotas for women's parliamentary representation to 30 per cent (Armenia and El Salvador), while others aim for 40 per cent (Greece and Portugal), gender parity (Mexico and Peru) or to broaden the scope of quotas in the State administration (Austria, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Ireland, Mexico and Portugal) or to the local level (El Salvador, Kyrgyzstan, Malaysia and Portugal) and to apply them to other excluded groups.

47. Austria is committed to increasing the quota for women in the Federal Government to 40 per cent. The Islamic Republic of Iran has a strategy to increase women's representation in ministry management to 30 per cent. Ireland has published guidelines to encourage State bodies that have not reached 40 per cent representation in State boards to take steps to meet the target. Kyrgyzstan intends to extend the practice of gender quotas of 30 per cent to local government. Malaysia is setting a 30 per cent quota for women representatives in the village community management councils to increase the participation of rural women in decision-making. The constitutional reforms of 2019 in Mexico require gender parity in decision-making positions in the three branches of government. Portugal is extending the 40 per cent quota for women to top civil servant positions in public administration and public higher education institutions, as well as to elective municipal bodies and parish councils. Argentina has established a one per cent quota in federal employment for transgender persons, and the Netherlands has created diversity charters for government ministries to encourage the recruitment, retention and promotion of employees, regardless of gender, age, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity or cultural, ethnic or religious background.

48. Member States are raising awareness about and offering incentives to increase women's involvement in politics and government (Afghanistan, Bahrain, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cyprus, Czechia, Ethiopia and Ireland), as well as leadership and political training for women candidates at the community, local and regional levels (Azerbaijan, Botswana, Burundi, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ethiopia, Ghana, Guyana, Malawi and Republic of Korea). In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Central Election Commission encouraged political parties to nominate and promote women candidates in the local elections of 2020. In Cyprus, the National Action Plan on Gender Equality (2019–2023) contains specific measures to promote women's leadership. Czechia held gender equality workshops for political parties. In Ethiopia, the amount of

²³ *The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2020*.

²⁴ UN-Women and Department of Economic and Social Affairs, "Progress on the Sustainable Development Goals".

²⁵ Inter-Parliamentary Union, *Women in Parliament: 1995–2020 – 25 Years in Review* (Geneva, 2020).

government support for political parties depends on the number of women candidates, women members and women in leadership positions in the party.

49. In the context of COVID-19, efforts are being made to raise the profile of women who have played leading roles in response and recovery efforts and to ensure the leadership of women going forward (Cyprus, Czechia and Ireland). Czechia has made recommendations for gender balance in government COVID-19 advisory committees. In Ireland, women have strong representation in the COVID-19 government response teams, and the National Public Health Emergency Team, which provides direction, support and expert advice on the COVID-19 strategy, has a gender-balanced membership, with 42 per cent of women.

50. Member States are also applying quotas to support the participation of women in economic decision-making on public and private sector boards. Austria has committed to increasing to 50 per cent the proportion of women on supervisory boards of State-owned companies. In Ireland, the independent Balance for Better Business Review Group, established by the Government to improve gender balance in senior business leadership, has set a 25–33 per cent target for women’s representation on boards, depending on the type of company. In Greece, Law 4706/2020 provides for the first time a gender quota of 25 per cent on the boards of listed companies. In the Netherlands, listed companies are obliged to appoint at least 30 per cent of women to their supervisory boards.

51. Several Member States are supporting the leadership and participation of women in peacebuilding and peacekeeping (Austria, Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Ghana, Sudan and Switzerland) and as human rights defenders (Colombia). Austria supports the implementation of resolution [1325 \(2000\)](#) by strengthening the participation of women and young people in building sustainable peace in several contexts. National action plans for the implementation of resolution [1325 \(2000\)](#) in Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Ghana and the Sudan identify concrete measures to increase women’s engagement in peacekeeping missions and conflict prevention, resolution and peacebuilding. In Colombia, the Comprehensive Programme of Safeguards for Women Leaders and Human Rights Defenders addresses the threats and attacks against and the killings of women human rights defenders and community leaders, including from indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities, that have persisted during the COVID-19 pandemic.

F. Improving gender-responsive data collection, follow-up and review processes

52. The agreed conclusions call for a gender-responsive approach in the national follow-up to and review of the 2030 Agenda, taking into account the agreed global indicator framework, to produce high-quality, reliable and timely data disaggregated by sex, age and income and other characteristics, for the collection, analysis and dissemination of gender statistics on, inter alia, poverty, income, unpaid care work, access to, control and ownership of assets and productive resources, participation at all levels of decision-making and violence in order to measure progress for women and girls towards the Sustainable Development Goals. However, the global indicator framework is gender-sensitive in only six Goals (1, 3, 4, 5, 8 and 16) and gender-blind in seven (6, 7, 9, 12, 14, 15 and 17), while the four remaining Goals (2, 10, 11 and 13) contain few gender-specific indicators.²⁶ General progress has been made towards internationally comparable data for monitoring, but less than half of 194 countries have such data for four of the 17 Goals and, for Goal 5, only four in 10

²⁶ UN-Women and Department of Economic and Social Affairs, “Progress on the Sustainable Development Goals”.

countries have the data, impeding assessment of trends and gaps in progress for women and girls.²⁷ This lack of basic health, social and economic data has compromised the monitoring of the impacts of the pandemic, and the COVID-19 crisis has in turn interrupted statistical operations at the global level.²⁸

53. Mechanisms to support the monitoring of the Sustainable Development Goals have been developed in some countries. The Statistical Committee in Armenia has developed a national reporting platform for Goal indicators. In Colombia, the strategy of 2018 for the implementation of the Goals identified 22 indicators for Goal 5. Ethiopia is setting up a national Goal dashboard to ensure quality data collection and analysis. The National Statistics Office of Mongolia launched a Goal implementation monitoring system in 2019.

54. Several Member States reported advances in capacity to produce and report on gender statistics. Andorra established an observatory to compile and analyse data on gender equality and non-discrimination. Bahrain prepared a national gender balance report and Costa Rica published a guide for incorporating a gender perspective in the production and dissemination of statistics by the National Statistical System in 2019. Cyprus and Portugal are creating more comprehensive systems for gender statistics. Mexico is supporting the Global Centre of Excellence on Gender Statistics. Myanmar is preparing a national survey on women's life experiences. South Africa reports quarterly on data disaggregated by sex, age and disability. In Sweden, Statistics Sweden has been presenting gender statistics on its website since 2012. Other countries are developing surveys on violence against women (Argentina, Armenia, Guyana, Mongolia and Republic of Korea), women's health and family status (Turkmenistan) and women's time use (Plurinational State of Bolivia).

55. A promising development is the collection and analysis of COVID-19-related sex-disaggregated data and gender statistics (Costa Rica, Colombia, Cyprus, Ecuador, Ethiopia, Ghana, Ireland, Malawi, Norway and South Africa). Costa Rica compiles and reports statistics on the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on women every month. In Cyprus, the Statistical Service added questions to two surveys to track and monitor gender-specific impacts and response measures. In Ireland, the Central Statistics Office has set up a website dedicated to COVID-19, with sex-disaggregated data. The Malawi Police Service records and publishes comparative figures on gender-based violence before and during the pandemic. Norway is mapping and reporting on the impacts of the pandemic on gender inequality. In South Africa, a COVID-19 gender tracking tool monitors the implementation of response measures by government departments and whether public expenditure has benefited women.

V. Conclusions

56. Since the previous review of the agreed conclusions on women's empowerment and the link to sustainable development, Member States have continued their implementation, even as the COVID-19 pandemic disrupts development efforts at the global level. The assessment of the submissions and other sources for the present report indicates that implementation has been uneven and fragmented across the agreed conclusions. Crucial gender gaps and inequalities remain and, in some cases, have shown alarming increases, as in the rates of extreme poverty and violence against women and girls. Women farmers and others dependent on natural resources are at particular risk, as the combined health, climate and environmental crises jeopardize their livelihoods. Persistently inadequate financing for gender equality and

²⁷ *The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2020*.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

limited availability of robust data and statistics to monitor and report progress for women and girls are of great concern.

57. Member States have demonstrated commitment to strengthening normative, legal and policy frameworks, national gender equality mechanisms, institutional gender mainstreaming and women's political participation at the local level. However, five years after the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, the gender-responsive implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals has not been fully incorporated into national sustainable development and statistical frameworks, and the potential of gender-responsive budgeting remains unrealized. Gender balance has yet to be achieved in terms of women's participation in national public life, and constraints on women's decision-making power remain in force. Decreasing support for women's civil society organizations has weakened the mobilization and active participation of women worldwide and may put women human rights defenders further at risk. Despite concerted Member State action in response to the COVID-19 crisis, insufficient strategic and financial investment in gender equality and women's empowerment, made more acute in the context of the pandemic, has impeded progress towards the Goals. The crisis has revealed critical weaknesses in economic, social and health systems, highlighting the continued relevance and urgent need for accelerated implementation of the agreed conclusions. To regain lost ground, build the resilience of women and girls and make decisive progress towards attaining the Goals, significantly augmented action and funding will be required.
