



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
15 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

Ministerial round tables: good practices and policies for the design, and the provision and implementation, of social protection, public services and sustainable infrastructure, including for the promotion of women’s representation in various sectors and at all levels

Chairs’ summary

1. On 11 March 2019, the Commission on the Status of Women held two ministerial round tables on the topic “Good practices and policies for the design, and the provision and implementation, of social protection, public services and sustainable infrastructure, including for the promotion of women’s representation in various sectors and at all levels” under the priority theme “Social protection systems, access to public services and sustainable infrastructure for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls”. Participants exchanged experiences, lessons learned and good practices in relation to the topic, with an emphasis on access to social protection and public services, women’s participation and leadership, decent work and enhanced employment opportunities, challenging stereotypes and interlinkages and partnerships.

2. The Minister of Health and Labour of Estonia, Riina Sikkut, chaired the first round table and made introductory remarks. Ministers and high-level officials from 20 Member States and one observer participated. The Executive Director of the United Nations Population Fund, Natalia Kanem, made closing remarks. The Mayor of Baghdad, Dhikra Muhammad Jabir Alwash, chaired the second round table and made introductory remarks. Ministers and high-level officials from 20 Member States participated. The Executive Director of the United Nations Office for Project Services, Grete Faremo, made closing remarks.



Social protection and public services

3. Participants stressed the right to social protection as being critical for the empowerment of women throughout the life cycle. They highlighted the importance of investments in quality social protection systems, in the form of pensions and health care, and of the provision of social assistance grants and cash transfers. They presented a range of modalities, such as contributory, non-contributory, conditional and non-conditional schemes, for such protection systems.

4. Participants discussed the need for universal access to affordable and safe public services, including transportation, water and sanitation facilities and education and health infrastructure, and the importance thereof for women's and girls' full participation in social and economic life. They called for the provision of affordable and accessible care services in order to reduce unpaid care and domestic work that is disproportionately the responsibility of women and girls. Participants emphasized the importance of policies and programmes to improve access to quality education for women and girls at all levels of education.

5. Speakers stressed that particular attention was required to ensure that groups of women in vulnerable situations, including young women, pregnant women, single mothers, widows, women living in rural areas, women with disabilities, indigenous women and older women, had access to public services and social protection. They highlighted measures such as the provision of targeted social assistance grants and cash transfers, as well as of universal coverage. Participants emphasized the need for social protection and public services to protect and empower victims and survivors of gender-based violence through the provision of shelters and access to medical and legal support.

Women's participation and leadership

6. Speakers emphasized the importance of enhancing women's leadership at all levels and in all sectors and called for the meaningful participation of women in the development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies in the areas of social protection, public services and sustainable infrastructure. Participants reported significant progress in women's participation in the labour force, as well as in politics at all levels, and provided illustrative examples of national quota policies to increase the number of women in politics and on corporate boards. A range of policy measures had resulted in the increased participation of women in the formal labour market, facilitated their re-entry after a career break and provided support for their career development. Participants also gave examples of how women decision makers had influenced policy priorities, for example, by drawing attention to childcare needs and by working to improve education, health care and other public services.

Decent work and enhanced employment opportunities

7. Participants discussed women's equal access to decent work and their increased participation in the formal economy and in high-skilled jobs as a way to enhance their empowerment and economic independence and increase their resilience. Speakers drew attention to the challenges faced by young women, pregnant women and mothers, who are affected by higher rates of unemployment and may suffer pregnancy-related discrimination or experience difficulties in re-entering the workforce after caring for their children or other dependants. Participants gave examples of national laws and policies, as well as cooperation initiatives with the private sector, to establish minimum wages, decrease existing gender pay gaps and ensure equal pay for equal work or work of equal value. More efforts were needed to eliminate occupational segregation and promote women's employment in non-traditional sectors and in highly skilled and better remunerated work.

8. Given that women continue to perform most of the unpaid care and domestic work in households, participants called for, and provided examples of, legislation and policies to enable flexible working arrangements and remote work opportunities, including those made possible by developments in information and communications technologies. Such measures contribute to better work-life balance and facilitate women's active participation in the labour force. Participants gave examples of new and more flexible paid maternity leave policies and of increased child allowances. A few speakers also reported on paternity leave policies and campaigns to promote the redistribution of unpaid care and domestic work between women and men.

Challenging stereotypes

9. Participants discussed the need for female and male role models who challenge stereotypes in the home and in the workforce. Participants gave examples of campaigns, programmes and policies in support of shared domestic work that promoted paternity leave and supported fathers in taking such leave.

10. Participants expressed concern about the overrepresentation of women in service and care sectors and their underrepresentation in science, technology, engineering and mathematics. Participants reported on measures, such as study grants and mentorship programmes, that incentivize girls to pursue careers in non-traditional sectors, and on initiatives that support women in taking on leadership roles in non-traditional sectors by addressing social and institutional barriers to career advancement. Participants drew attention to the role of male leaders in supporting women and promoting women's leadership.

Interlinkages and partnerships

11. In order to demonstrate the interlinkages between the three areas under consideration, participants gave examples of national action to enhance access to public services, such as girls' access to quality education at all levels, adequate physical infrastructure, including school buildings with safe sanitation facilities for girls, and safe roads and transportation to schools.

12. Participants agreed that policies in the areas of social protection, public services and sustainable infrastructure should be well coordinated and integrate a gender perspective. They highlighted the need for institutional structures to strengthen coordination and policy coherence across sectors and levels of government, including local governments and communities. Collaboration with civil society organizations and private providers was likewise critical to ensure that social protection, public services and infrastructure policies complement each other in their goals and objectives. There was a need for adequate funding and for monitoring from a gender perspective to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.