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## Commission on the Status of Women

### Sixty-fourth session

9–20 March 2020

Item 3 of the provisional agenda\*

**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”**

## **Discussion guide for the ministerial round tables to be held on the occasion of the 25-year review and appraisal of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action**

Note by the Secretariat

### **I. Introduction**

1. In its resolution [2015/6](#) on the future organization and methods of work of the Commission on the Status of Women, the Economic and Social Council decided that the session of the Commission would include a ministerial segment to reaffirm and strengthen political commitment to the realization of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, as well as their human rights, and to ensure high-level engagement and the visibility of the deliberations of the Commission, and that the segment would include ministerial round tables or other high-level interactive dialogues.

2. In accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution [2018/8](#), the Commission, at its sixty-fourth session, will undertake a review and appraisal of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcomes of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, including an assessment of current challenges that affect the implementation of the Platform for Action and the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of women and its contribution towards the full realization of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development through a gender perspective. As part of the review and appraisal, the Commission will hold ministerial round tables to provide ministers with opportunities to engage in interactive dialogues to exchange experiences, lessons learned and good practices and to focus on key strategies and priorities for further action to address gaps and challenges.

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\* [E/CN.6/2020/1](#).



## **II. Organizational matters**

### **A. Topics for the review and appraisal**

3. In the context of the review and appraisal of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcomes of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, including an assessment of current challenges that affect the implementation of the Platform for Action and the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of women and its contribution towards the full realization of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development through a gender perspective, the Commission will hold four ministerial round tables on the following topics:

- (a) Inclusive development, decent work and poverty eradication;
- (b) Peaceful societies, access to justice and freedom from violence;
- (c) Participation, institutional mechanisms and accountability;
- (d) Environmental protection and climate action.

4. The ministerial round tables will be focused on current challenges and on the way forward in relation to the topics. Ministers will be encouraged to look ahead towards realizing gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, as well as their human rights. In addition, they will be encouraged to highlight policies that work and to identify steps and measures that are necessary and planned in order to ensure that national responses contribute effectively to the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls through the full, effective and accelerated implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the gender-responsive implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

### **B. Participants**

5. The round tables will provide ministers attending the sixty-fourth session of the Commission with the opportunity to engage in dialogue and discussion. They will be open to all Member States and observers.

6. Ministers are invited to indicate, in advance and preferably no later than 26 February 2020, the ministerial round table in which they would prefer to participate, as well as their second preference. Approximately 20 to 25 ministers are expected to participate in each round table. The Chairs of the ministerial round tables, supported by a moderator, will guide the discussion with a view to promoting interaction. While they will have a list of ministers who have signed up for each round table, no list of speakers will be prepared in advance.

7. Each ministerial round table will begin with a moderated dialogue among up to five ministers on key issues arising under the topic. Following their moderated dialogue, the ministers will be invited to contribute lessons learned and good practices, exchange views and focus on key strategies and priorities for further action to address gaps and challenges. Interventions are not to exceed three minutes, and emphasis will be placed on dialogue. Time permitting, ministers may be given the opportunity to make more than one intervention. Written statements are strongly discouraged.

### C. Times and locations

8. The ministerial round tables will be held at Headquarters, in New York, on Wednesday, 11 March 2020, from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. and from 3 to 6 p.m., at the times set out in the table below.

<i>Round table</i>	<i>Time</i>	<i>Location</i>
Inclusive development, decent work and poverty eradication	10–11.30 a.m.	Conference room 4
Peaceful societies, access to justice and freedom from violence	11.30 a.m.–1 p.m.	Conference room 4
Participation, institutional mechanisms and accountability	3–4.30 p.m.	Conference room 4
Environmental protection and climate action	4.30–6 p.m.	Conference room 4

### D. Outcome

9. The outcomes of the ministerial round tables will be in the form of Chairs' summaries, prepared in consultation with the regional groups through the members of the Bureau.

## III. Items for discussion in the ministerial round tables

### A. Background

10. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action remain the most comprehensive agenda for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of women. The Platform for Action called for the removal of systematic and structural barriers that prevent women and girls from enjoying their human rights across the social, economic, political and environmental dimensions of development and set out definitive policy actions to achieve that goal. The vision of the Platform for Action was affirmed in 2015, when Heads of State and Government adopted the 2030 Agenda. Building on the Platform for Action, the 2030 Agenda made clear that development will be sustainable only if its benefits accrue equally to women and men, and that women's rights will become a reality only if they are part of broader efforts to protect the planet and ensure that all people can live with respect and dignity.

11. Against that backdrop, new policy and programmatic directions have emerged in the past five years to advance gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls. As shown in the report of the Secretary-General on the review and appraisal of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcomes of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly (E/CN.6/2020/3), the importance of unpaid care and domestic work is receiving greater recognition, with three quarters of States introducing or strengthening maternity, paternity or parental leave. More than half of States have introduced or strengthened legislation and regulation to address violence against women and girls facilitated by technology. The focus on addressing sexual harassment has increased, and a small but growing number of States are addressing violence against women in politics specifically. The number of countries with national action plans on women

and peace and security has increased by 52 per cent since 2015. These actions have resulted in important progress.

12. Overall, however, the picture is far from what States committed to in 1995, and, in some areas, there are concerning signs of stagnation or regression. While political representation by women has doubled since 1995, men still control more than three quarters of the seats in single or lower houses of parliament throughout the world. More girls are in school than ever before, but higher levels of education are not translating into greater equality in the labour market. Violence against women and girls remains pervasive, with 17.8 per cent of women reporting that they had experienced violence at the hands of an intimate partner in the previous 12 months. While global maternal mortality ratios have declined, they remain alarmingly high in countries affected by conflict and crisis. Globally, the proportion of women with an unmet need for family planning has stagnated at 10 per cent since 2000; in 2019, 190 million women of reproductive age who did not want to become pregnant were not using any contraceptive method. While the proportion of peace agreements with gender-responsive provisions stood at an average of 26 per cent between 2001 and 2010, it dropped to a dismal 7.7 per cent in 2018.

13. Slow and piecemeal progress must be seen in the context of fundamental shifts in the global gender equality landscape in the past five years. Rising inequalities and economic exclusion are symptoms of development models in which gains have not been shared equitably. Many countries have experienced declines in the quality of their democracies. Social tensions and violent conflict are on the rise, and the pushback against gender equality is becoming stronger. The climate crisis is exacerbating existing inequalities within and between countries. Rapid technological and demographic change is having an impact on every aspect of economic, social and political life, creating new opportunities as well as new risks and uncertainties. In the face of such complex challenges, the need for transformative approaches is more urgent than ever, if the 2030 Agenda is to be achieved within the next 10 years. The accelerated implementation of the Platform for Action, with its definitive policy guidance, can help to put the world on the right track and deliver on the promise of making women's rights a reality, for today's generation and the next.

14. During the round tables, ministers will be invited to focus on what needs to be done to accelerate the implementation of the Platform for Action to realize gender equality, including in the context of the 2030 Agenda. In addition, they are encouraged to highlight the transformative measures necessary to unblock bottlenecks, as well as the role and responsibilities of various stakeholders in accelerating progress towards gender equality. Ministers are also encouraged to use the discussion guide below and to consult the report of the Secretary-General on the review and appraisal of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcomes of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly ([E/CN.6/2020/3](#)).

## **B. Discussion guide**

### **Inclusive development, decent work and poverty eradication**

15. Inclusive development and decent work remain elusive to the majority of women in the world. Although women are more educated than ever before, the global gender gap in labour force participation persists, and gender pay gaps remain pervasive in the face of deeply entrenched occupational segregation. The nature of work is changing as a result of new technologies. Digitalization and automation are creating new opportunities, as well as risks. Data on the countries of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development show that women are severely underrepresented in companies and professions that drive technological development

and innovation. While the proliferation of digital platforms offers new possibilities for the employment of women, such platforms are currently not more inclusive of women than the offline economy, with gender gaps being particularly stark in developing countries. When opportunities do become available to women, quality of employment remains a challenge owing to gaps in labour regulations and a lack of social protection. In most developing countries, the majority of women work informally, without the protection of labour regulation or access to social protection, and most take up informal work not by choice, but owing to a lack of opportunities in the formal economy and to their disproportionate share of unpaid care and domestic work.

16. While global poverty has declined, it remains highly feminized, affecting, in particular, women in their peak reproductive years. Globally, women between 25 and 34 years of age are 25 per cent more likely than men to live in extreme poverty. Many women in that age range are mothers, who, in the absence of supportive public policies, struggle to provide care to their children while earning an income that could lift them and the children out of poverty. For many women and girls, income poverty is compounded by other deprivations, including a lack of access to essential public services. While the education and health outcomes of women and girls have improved, along with their access to services and social protection, significant gaps remain in some regions. Globally, women and girls in the lowest wealth quintiles are still much less likely to be in school or to obtain access to essential maternity care than those in higher wealth quintiles.

17. Slow progress for women overall and persistent inequalities between different groups of women are also results of economic models that have contributed to the concentration of income, wealth and power among the few, while creating economic insecurity and social exclusion for the many. Current macroeconomic policies are not resulting in the level and type of employment and livelihoods needed to make development inclusive or enable a transition towards green economies, nor do they generate the resources needed to take the provision of gender-responsive social protection and public services to scale. Fiscal austerity has consistently produced regressive outcomes, for low-income women in particular. However, few countries assess or monitor the differential impact of expenditure cuts on women and men.

18. Ministers are invited to consider the following questions to help to focus the dialogue:

(a) What policies and investments have proved successful in providing women with sustainable, long-term routes out of poverty and supporting their transition from the informal economy into decent work?

(b) What steps are Governments taking to manage the risks of seize the opportunities resulting from ongoing changes in the world of work to accelerate gender equality and the empowerment of women, including with regard to the impact of new technologies?

(c) What policies and other measures have helped to translate gains in the education of women and girls into greater access to decent work and more equal labour market outcomes, including a reduction in the gender wage gap?

(d) How have social protection measures and public services, such as education and health care, been used by Governments successfully to empower women and girls and transform unequal gender relations?

#### **Peaceful societies, access to justice and freedom from violence**

19. All data available on violence against women and girls indicate that it is a universal problem affecting women in all countries, socioeconomic groups and

locations, as well as at all levels of education. Girls are at particular risk of various forms of violence owing to the intersection of their age and gender. There are significant data gaps with regard to some forms of violence, and inadequate legal protection of women and girls from violence, as well as a lack of enforcement and of provision of services for survivors, persists. Cultures also persist in which the excusing, minimizing and normalizing of violence are deeply ingrained, reflecting unchanging discriminatory social norms. Rapid technological change is resulting in a more challenging context and creating more spaces for the perpetration of violence against women and girls. Stereotypical representations and the significant underrepresentation of women in the media contribute to the shaping of harmful attitudes of disrespect and violence towards women and girls. Attacks against women human rights defenders, humanitarians and peacebuilders continue to increase.

20. Peace and stability are preconditions for sustainable development and gender equality. At the same time, gender equality is essential for creating inclusive societies. In countries affected by conflict and humanitarian crises, progress achieved by women and girls with regard to key economic and social indicators is impeded by the breakdown of basic infrastructure and public services. The most recent data available show that 50 per cent of crisis- and conflict-affected countries had high or very high levels of maternal mortality, more than double the proportion for all countries worldwide. Notwithstanding evidence of the contributions that women make at various stages and levels to resolve conflict and negotiate peace, exclusion, rather than inclusion, has remained the norm in formal peace processes. Financing for action on women and peace and security has improved in recent years, but significant gaps remain, in particular in funding for women's organizations.

21. States have prioritized the introduction, implementation and enforcement of laws to address violence against women and have created a range of support services for survivors. Increased attention is being paid to prevention, but overall efforts to prevent violence against women remain ad hoc and short-term. Funding remains woefully inadequate to respond effectively to the scale of the problem, too often leaving underfunded women's organizations and civil society to fill the gap. Increasingly, however, States have integrated global peace, security and humanitarian agendas into the development and implementation of their national action plans and have prioritized the participation of women in peace processes and security sector reform. Humanitarian actors, including States, the United Nations system and civil society, are making progress towards ensuring that crisis and emergency relief efforts are responsive to gender equality.

22. Ministers are invited to consider the following questions to help to focus the dialogue:

(a) What policies and other measures have been successful in addressing violence against women and girls in various settings (such as public spaces, online, in the workplace and in areas of conflict) and how have the measures been financed?

(b) What are good-practice examples of measures taken by Governments to eliminate barriers to access to justice and ensure that survivor-centred services are provided to victims and survivors of violence against women and girls?

(c) What steps and measures have led to measurable results with regard to increasing the full and effective participation and leadership of women in building peaceful, inclusive and just societies? What specific efforts have achieved results in post-conflict contexts?

(d) What measures have been put in place by Governments to prevent attacks against women-led organizations and women human rights defenders, and how have perpetrators of the attacks been held accountable?

**Participation, institutional mechanisms and accountability**

23. Although representation by women in national and local elected deliberative bodies has increased, progress has been slow, with few States achieving gender balance in decision-making positions. Member States have applied a range of measures to promote the political participation of women, and nearly 80 countries have put legislated gender quotas in place. In order for quotas to be effective, their design and enforcement is key. To increase the political participation of women, additional measures, such as dedicated funding, capacity-building and awareness-raising, must be taken. Entrenched discrimination in political institutions, a lack of resources and a disproportionate share of care responsibilities, combined with threats of violence and intimidation, remain barriers to the political participation and leadership of women.

24. A properly resourced national machinery vested with the appropriate mandate and authority, together with a robust gender mainstreaming strategy, is critical to translate gender equality commitments into policies and programmes. States are supporting a range of structures to oversee gender equality policies and are mainstreaming a gender perspective into sectoral policies, strategies and programmes. However, such efforts continue to lack authority, capacity and resources. In a positive development, increasingly, States are prioritizing gender-responsive budgeting and the collection of sex-disaggregated data. However, large gaps remain between State commitments to gender equality and the financing directed for implementation. Effective costing of and full funding for national gender equality action plans and the implementation of gender-responsive budgeting throughout all sectors and departments is crucial if States are to accelerate progress towards their national commitments to gender equality.

25. In addition to formal institutions, civil society plays a crucial role in holding decision makers to account by monitoring gender equality commitments and demanding redress when duties and commitments are not met. The equal participation of women in the media is also critical to ensure that women's perspectives are reflected properly and that they can influence and shape public debate. Currently, shrinking space for civil society, violence against women in politics and increasing attacks on women in public life, including women human rights defenders, members of women's rights organizations and women in the media, are limiting the ability to demand accountability in that regard.

26. Ministers are invited to consider the following questions to help to focus the dialogue:

(a) What are good-practice examples of measures taken by Governments to achieve gender balance at all levels of government?

(b) What government measures have proved successful in helping to make institutions gender-responsive, including through the involvement of national machineries for gender equality?

(c) What progress have States made in addressing financing gaps at the national level and how can they increase financing for gender equality?

(d) What measures are Governments taking to protect women in public life, including politicians and human rights defenders, from harassment and violence, and how are Governments ensuring an enabling and safe environment in which women can play a critical role in demanding decision makers' accountability for the realization of the human rights of women and girls?

**Environmental protection and climate action**

27. Since 1995, and in particular in the past five years, land degradation, biodiversity loss, global warming and pollution have accelerated rapidly, intensifying into widespread and interlinked environmental and climate crises. The long-standing activism of women, in particular young and rural and indigenous women, at the forefront of environmental movements has made it evident that environmental degradation affects all people with regard to poverty, health and livelihood, in particular women and girls, and rural and indigenous women most of all.

28. Environmental degradation and climate change amplify existing gender inequalities because of the persistent unequal power dynamics between men and women in the household and in economies and societies. The unequal participation of women in decision-making at all levels, coupled with their dependence on and unequal access to the environment – land, water and other natural resources – and public services and infrastructure, including energy, transport, water and sanitation, results in their being affected disproportionately. The capacity of women to withstand and recover from natural disasters is also strongly influenced by gender inequalities. In most disasters, mortality rates among women are significantly higher than among men, and poverty levels among women increase in disaster-prone areas. Such impacts on women are compounded by their limited mobility and the structural barriers and discriminatory social norms that continue to constrain their decision-making power in households, as well as their political participation in communities and more broadly.

29. Approaches to addressing such challenges tend to be fragmented and to inadequately integrate gender equality and sustainability in their full dimensions. The gender-related drivers of the environmental and climate crises remain neglected. Inadequate attention has been paid to the potential impacts of policies and inaction on marginalized groups as climate change and environmental degradation continue to intensify inequalities. Poor women and girls, in particular in underserved rural and urban communities, are at the greatest risk of being left behind in the wake of the climate and environmental crises.

30. Ministers are invited to consider the following questions to help to focus the dialogue:

(a) What are good-practice examples of holistic and gender-responsive approaches to realizing the right of women to land and natural resources and enhancing their environmental and climate resilience?

(b) What investments are Governments making in gender-responsive and sustainable infrastructure and public services to support women and their communities in coping with environmental degradation and climate change?

(c) What measures are Governments taking to prevent and respond to the disproportionate impacts of natural disasters on women and girls?

(d) How are Governments ensuring the participation and leadership of women in environmental and climate-related decision-making, policies and programmes?