



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
22 March 2021

Original: English

Commission on the Status of Women

Sixty-fifth session

15–26 March 2021

Agenda item 3

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”

Ministerial round table on “Getting to parity: good practices towards achieving women’s full and effective participation and decision-making in public life”

Chairs’ summary

1. On 15 and 16 March 2021, the Commission on the Status of Women held a ministerial round table on the theme “Getting to parity: good practices towards achieving women’s full and effective participation and decision-making in public life,” in the context of the priority theme “Women’s full and effective participation and decision-making in public life, as well as the elimination of violence, for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls”. Participants exchanged experiences, lessons learned and good practices in relation to the topic, with an emphasis on measures that have been taken to reach parity in participation and decision-making in public life.

2. The Ambassador for Gender Equality of Australia, Julie-Ann Guivarra, chaired the first round table and made introductory remarks. The Deputy Secretary-General, Amina J. Mohammed, made an opening statement. Ministers and high-level officials from 18 Member States and one observer State participated. The Minister of National Solidarity, Family and the Status of Women of Algeria, Kaouter Krikou, chaired the second round table and made introductory remarks. Ministers and high-level officials from 13 Member States participated. The Executive Director of the United Nations Children’s Fund, Henrietta Fore, summarized key messages and made closing remarks.

Recognizing the importance of women’s full and effective participation, particularly in the context of the pandemic

3. Participants emphasized the centrality of gender equality and women’s empowerment within the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, emphasizing



that targets for gender parity in political and public life will not be reached at the current rate of progress. Speakers underlined that women's full and effective participation not only benefits women and girls, but is essential for inclusive and participatory decision-making and institutions, and prosperous societies.

4. Ministers stressed that the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic has had a disproportionate impact on women and girls, with women facing higher rates of unemployment, an increased share of unpaid care and a higher risk of violence. Women are also on the front line of fighting the pandemic and have led the response in many aspects, and the need for women's full and effective participation is more urgent than ever to ensure that we build back better and achieve sustainable development.

5. Participants discussed the need for measures that address the pandemic to be gender-responsive in recognition of the unique challenges faced by women and stressed that the barriers to women's full and effective participation need to be eliminated, including violence.

6. Speakers underscored the importance of civil society and women's organizations in achieving gender parity and the necessity of dialogue and collaboration between government and civil society.

Measures to promote women's participation in the public sphere

7. Participants provided examples of the effectiveness of temporary special measures, including quotas, parity codes and other affirmative action initiatives, to hasten women's equal representation in elected and non-elected public offices. Ministers provided examples of quotas that increased women's representation in decision-making bodies, both at the national and local levels, such as laws mandating that women constitute a certain percentage of candidates on electoral lists, or reserved seats in parliaments and municipal councils. Speakers also mentioned measures requiring equal representation of men and women on party lists.

8. Speakers highlighted that the promotion of women's participation in politics is underpinned by national legal frameworks, such as a constitution that enshrines gender equality, especially to bring forward legislation that supports gender parity in politics and public life. They drew attention to priority actions for gender equality and the empowerment of women, which are aimed at, inter alia, promoting inclusive and gender-equal participation, increasing women's access to leadership positions, and eliminating all forms of violence against women and girls, including violence against women in political and public life. Speakers also referenced the need to increase women's decision-making and leadership roles in peace processes, as well as in efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security.

9. Ministers also spoke about the importance of specialized training and skills enhancement programmes, particularly for young women, so that women are better equipped to attain leadership positions and fully participate in public office.

Gender-responsive measures to increase women's leadership in the private sector

10. Ministers highlighted the importance of achieving gender parity in managerial positions, in particular by encouraging women's leadership in the private sector through quotas and targets for women's participation on boards of administration and labour unions, as well as incremental targets with respect to business leadership. Women's full and equal participation in the labour force was acknowledged as a crucial part of achieving gender equality in leadership positions in the public and private sectors, particularly given women's disproportionate exodus from the labour force as a result of the pandemic.

11. Participants emphasized the need for legislation that protects women's labour rights, including laws and amendments to close the gender pay gap and promote equal career opportunities for women. A number of participants highlighted that equal pay between men and women is guaranteed in their countries and that, while some progress has been made, equal pay has not been achieved in the private sector.

12. Speakers stressed the need to invest in social protection and the care sector, including increased paid parental leave for mothers and fathers and systems of care for dependants, as necessary steps to encourage women to participate in the labour force and enable them to have a seat at the decision-making table. Indeed, speakers drew attention to the government's role in facilitating opportunities that make it easier for women to enter the labour force.

Measuring progress and changing social norms to increase gender parity

13. Ministers also underscored the importance of ensuring that progress can be independently tracked and monitored through the collection of disaggregated data and statistics and independent bodies such as observatories and commissions. Speakers highlighted the importance of being able to measure actual progress and identify the areas that require more support.

14. The important role of education and awareness-raising measures in changing the social norms that perpetuate women's inequality in public life and communities at large was also raised. Topics included the equal sharing of household responsibilities and norms that see women's role as being largely in the home and that discourage women from seeking and holding political power. Speakers emphasized the need to start educating children early, re-examining curricula to ensure that harmful gender stereotypes are not perpetuated and that negative social norms are changed, as well as the importance of role models for girls and young women.

15. Participants pointed to the hopeful trend of the increase in the number of women graduating from third-level education and to the continued need to invest in women's education, particularly in such non-traditional spheres as the sciences and security. Ministers stated that the presence of women in leading academic positions was important for a rich and diverse exchange of ideas and for growth and potential opportunities for future leaders.