



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
14 December 2023

Original: English

Commission on the Status of Women

Sixty-seventh session

New York, 11–22 March 2024

Item 3 (a) (ii) 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”: implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives: review theme: social protection systems, access to public services and sustainable infrastructure for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls

Review of the implementation of the agreed conclusions of the sixty-third 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 Commission on the Status of Women at its sixty-third session, held in 2019, on social protection systems, access to public services and sustainable infrastructure for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. The review was conducted at a decisive moment for realizing gender equality and women's and girls' empowerment worldwide. Only seven years remain before the end of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and the world is in the throes of the combined repercussions of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, cost-of-living, food, fuel and debt crises, environmental and climate emergencies and escalating conflicts. These cascading crises have disproportionate impacts on women and girls, rendering them increasingly vulnerable to poverty, exclusion and violence. Renewed and robust investment and development efforts are needed to strengthen social protection, public services and sustainable infrastructure to ensure the economic and social security, resilience and well-being of women and girls.

* E/CN.6/2024/1.



I. Introduction

1. In its resolution [2022/4](#) on the future organization and methods of work of the Commission on the Status of Women, the Economic and Social Council decided that, at each session, the Commission would evaluate progress in the implementation of the agreed conclusions on a priority theme of a previous session, as its review theme. It requested the Secretary-General to submit to the Commission a report on progress made on the review theme at the national level. In accordance with Council resolution [2020/15](#) on the Commission's multi-year programme of work, the review theme at the Commission's sixty-eighth session, in 2024, will be "Social protection systems, access to public services and sustainable infrastructure for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls", in accordance with the agreed conclusions adopted by the Commission at its sixty-third session, held in 2019.

2. The present report serves to assess the implementation by Member States of the agreed conclusions on the theme "Social protection systems, access to public services and sustainable infrastructure for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls" over the past five years, including their actions in the following areas: strengthening normative, legal and policy frameworks; improving women's and girls' access to social protection, public services and sustainable infrastructure; and enhancing investments in women's participation and leadership and in the collection of data and evidence. It also considers the combined impacts of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, the environmental and climate emergencies and the cost-of-living, food, fuel and debt crises on women and girls.

3. The report is informed by information received from Member States¹ and other sources, including the reports of the Secretary-General on progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals and by the United Nations system on social protection, public services and sustainable infrastructure.

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

II. Context for the implementation of the agreed conclusions

5. The agreed conclusions adopted by the Commission at its sixty-third session (see [E/2019/27](#)) reflect a strong accord on achieving gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls through social protection systems, access to public services and sustainable infrastructure. The Commission underscored that social protection systems, public services and sustainable infrastructure are interlinked and mutually reinforcing and that policy coherence, coordinated approaches and financing are needed to avoid reversing progress and to address remaining gaps. The agreed conclusions contain comprehensive normative, policy and programmatic measures to increase access to and funding for gender-responsive social protection systems, public services and sustainable infrastructure aimed at eradicating poverty, reducing inequalities, reversing exclusion, preventing and addressing gender-based violence, reducing and redistributing unpaid care and domestic work and increasing decent work, resilience and well-being.

¹ Albania, Algeria, Andorra, Argentina, Armenia, Australia, Austria, Belarus, Bulgaria, Burkina Faso, Canada, Cyprus, Greece, Guatemala, Iceland, Israel, Jordan, Liberia, Luxembourg, Nepal, Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Russian Federation, Serbia, Singapore, Slovenia, Türkiye, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, United Arab Emirates and Zimbabwe.

6. Normative frameworks, conventions and standards support the agreed conclusions and their implementation. Articles 22 and 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights state that:

Everyone, as a member of society, has the right to social security.

...

Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control.

Motherhood and childhood are entitled to special care and assistance.

These are fundamental considerations that are affirmed in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, particularly articles 9 through 13.

7. International Labour Organization (ILO) standards constitute an essential underpinning for women's and girls' access to social protection, public services and sustainable infrastructure, including the Social Security (Minimum Standards) Convention, 1952 (No. 102); the Equality of Treatment (Social Security) Convention, 1962 (No. 118); the Invalidity, Old-Age and Survivors' Benefits Convention, 1967 (No. 128); the Maternity Protection Convention, 2000 (No. 183) and its associated Recommendation 191; the Social Protection Floors Recommendation, 2012 (No. 202); and the Transition from the Informal to the Formal Economy Recommendation, 2015 (No. 204).

8. The gender-responsive implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (see General Assembly resolution 70/1) as a transformative, interlinked framework and the achievement of all Sustainable Development Goals is essential to realize this vision. The agreed conclusions are relevant to all the Goals, but are notably relevant to Goal 1, on ending poverty in all its forms everywhere, including target 1.3 on social protection systems and floors and 1.4 on access to basic services; Goal 5, on achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls, including target 5.4 on recognizing and valuing unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies; Goal 7, on ensuring access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all; Goal 8, on promoting inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all; Goal 9, on building resilient infrastructure; and Goal 10, on reducing inequality within and among countries, including target 10.4 on adopting social protection policies.

9. Nonetheless, the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030 appears increasingly unlikely, making the ambition of Our Common Agenda to accelerate the implementation of the Goals ever more urgent.² The Secretary-General has put forward two concrete proposals to promote investment in the Goals: the Sustainable Development Goal stimulus, which aims at unlocking at least \$500 billion per year in concessional and non-concessional finance, and the Global Accelerator on Jobs and Social Protection for Just Transitions, which will help create a minimum of 400 million quality jobs, focusing on the green, digital and care sectors, and expand social protection coverage.³

² *The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2023: Towards a Rescue Plan for People and Planet*, Special ed. (United Nations publication, 2023).

³ See "United Nations Secretary-General's SDG Stimulus to Deliver Agenda 2030", February 2023, available at www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/SDG-Stimulus-to-Deliver-Agenda-2030.pdf; and "Global Accelerator on Jobs and Social Protection for Just Transitions", available at www.unglobalaccelerator.org.

10. The world is not on track to achieve Goal 5 on gender equality by 2030. Of the 18 Goal 5 indicators, only 2 – seats held by women in local governments and laws on equal access to sexual and reproductive health care, information and education – are close to being on target globally, while 4 others – time spent on unpaid care and domestic work, decision-making on sexual and reproductive health, mobile phone ownership and gender-responsive budgeting – are far or very far from being reached. Only slightly more than half the data needed to monitor progress are available, pointing to the need to reinforce the production and use of gender data and statistics in national statistical systems.⁴

11. In his report on the 25-year review and appraisal of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (E/CN.6/2020/3), the Secretary-General underscored that ameliorating women's poverty and ensuring their right to an adequate standard of living depended on targeting persistent inequalities in access to social protection, public services and sustainable infrastructure. Women and girls who face multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination are particularly subject to exclusion and poverty. Moreover, spending on gender-responsive social protection, public services and sustainable infrastructure is an investment with many positive effects related to creating employment and decent work, meeting care needs and supporting women's and girls' mobility and access to schools, markets and work.

12. During the period under review, global poverty increased in 2020 for the first time in over three decades, with 90 million people falling into extreme poverty in the wake of the pandemic.⁵ In 2021, COVID-19-induced poverty was exacerbated by waves of virus resurgence, lack of global vaccination, soaring debt levels, rising food prices and massive losses of jobs and livelihoods, especially among women in the informal economy. Despite the renewed attention to social protection and public service provision globally, fragile social protection systems and inadequate basic services in many developing countries left the poorest unprotected. Inequalities between and within countries widened as rates of recovery between rich and poor countries diverged, with COVID-19 intensifying poverty among the world's poorest people.⁶ In 2022, the pandemic's lingering impacts and the sluggish recovery in many countries were worsened by rising inflation and the rippling effects of the war in Ukraine. Developing country capacity to mitigate these impacts by applying social protection measures has been limited by shrinking fiscal space due to the exigencies of the COVID-19 response and recovery effort and the cost-of-living, food, fuel and debt crises.⁷

13. In 2023, overall global poverty is close to pre-pandemic levels, but the trend since 2020 has been starkly uneven. Extreme poverty in middle-income countries has decreased while high- and upper-middle-income countries had already experienced declines in poverty in 2020 due to the rapid adoption of social assistance programmes.⁸ However, extreme poverty is worse than before the pandemic in low-income, fragile or conflict-affected countries, which experienced slight increases in poverty between 2022 and 2023. Over 8.5 per cent of the world's population, or 691

⁴ Ginette Azcona and others, *Progress on the Sustainable Development Goals: The Gender Snapshot 2023* (United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) and United Nations, New York, 2023).

⁵ Nishant Yonzan, Daniel Gerszon Mahler and Christoph Lakner, "Global poverty in the 2020s is on a new, worse course", World Bank, blog, 14 October 2022.

⁶ Carolina Sánchez-Páramo and others, "COVID-19 leaves a legacy of rising poverty and widening inequality", World Bank, blog, 7 October 2021.

⁷ Daniel Gerszon Mahler and others, "Pandemic, prices, and poverty", World Bank, blog, 13 April 2022.

⁸ Nishant Yonzan, Daniel Gerszon Mahler and Christoph Lakner, "Poverty is back to pre-COVID levels globally, but not for low-income countries", World Bank, blog, 3 October 2023.

million people, are projected to live in extreme poverty in 2023,⁹ including just over 10 per cent of the world's women. By 2030, some 8 per cent, or 342.4 million women and girls, most of whom live in sub-Saharan Africa, will remain in extreme poverty unless decisive action is taken to significantly augment gender-responsive social protection, public services and sustainable infrastructure while supporting women's voices, agency and leadership.¹⁰

14. Developing countries have struggled to secure financial resources to respond to and recover from the impacts of cascading crises and have been hard-pressed to repay their debts. Their quandary is whether to service their debts or their people – 3.3 billion people live in countries that spend more on interest payments than on education or health.¹¹ In 2021, low- and middle-income countries spent 27.5 per cent of their budgets on debt service, which was nearly 12 times that spent on social protection.¹² In 2022, 59 developing countries had high levels of public debt – exceeding 60 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP) – up from 22 countries in 2011.¹³ Moreover, debt-related austerity measures and budget cuts in public services have strongly gendered impacts, foremost on women's and girls' increasing poverty, exclusion and unpaid care and domestic work.¹⁴

15. The latest available data indicate that less than half the world is covered by at least one social protection benefit (excluding health) and less than a third of the working-age population globally is covered by comprehensive social security systems. Thus, the majority, or 4 billion people, have only partial or no social protection at all, with a significant gender gap of 8 percentage points between men's and women's coverage. This huge gap is largely attributable to chronic and pervasive underinvestment in social protection; globally, an average of 12.9 per cent of GDP is allocated to public social protection expenditure (excluding health), with wide variation among countries, ranging from 1.1 per cent in low-income countries to 2.5 per cent in lower-middle-income countries, 8.0 per cent in upper-middle-income countries and 16.4 per cent in high-income countries.¹⁵

16. Social protection coverage varies. Regarding support for families, parents and children, in 2021, 184 countries had some form of paid maternity leave, but less than two thirds complied with the ILO standard of 14 weeks, while 117 countries had some paid paternity leave and 53 countries provided some paid parental leave. Just under 45 per cent of women with newborns worldwide receive a cash maternity benefit.¹⁶ Roughly 40 per cent, or 350 million children too young to attend primary school need but do not have access to childcare, while an estimated 606 million working-age women are kept from paid employment because of unpaid care work. At the same time, at least 43 million jobs could be created in the childcare sector alone.¹⁷

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Azcona and others, *Progress on the Sustainable Development Goals*.

¹¹ Global Crisis Response Group and others, "A world of debt: a growing burden to global prosperity", July 2023.

¹² Jo Walker and others, *The Commitment to Reducing Inequality Index 2022* (Oxford, Oxfam and Development Finance International, 2022).

¹³ Global Crisis Response Group and others, "A world of debt".

¹⁴ ActionAid, "The vicious cycle: connections between the debt crisis and climate crisis", April 2023.

¹⁵ ILO, *World Social Protection Report 2020–22: Social Protection at the Crossroads – in Pursuit of a Better Future* (Geneva, 2021).

¹⁶ Ibid.; and World Bank, Women, Business and the Law Database, available at <https://wbl.worldbank.org/en/wbl>.

¹⁷ Hana Brix and others, "Expanding access to childcare helps women, children, and economies", World Bank, blog, 10 October 2022.

17. Over three quarters of people above retirement age receive some form of old-age pension, but significant disparities exist between women and men, rural and urban areas and among regions. Because of their lower participation in the labour force and lower lifelong income, women are less likely than men to contribute to and receive a pension; globally, 38.7 per cent of working-age men compared with 26.3 per cent of women are covered under a pension scheme. Non-contributory pensions can help provide some security in old age to both women and men, but benefit levels are often too low to meet basic needs.¹⁸

18. For the estimated 740 million women in the informal economy who have little or no social protection, including essential workers, domestic workers and migrant workers, the pandemic brought on debilitating economic hardship in the form of increasing poverty, food insecurity, asset depletion and indebtedness.¹⁹ Self-employed workers, especially in the informal economy, suffered disproportionately as income support and other measures only offered short-term livelihood protection.²⁰ Care and health workers, of whom women represent the vast majority, were more publicly visible and recognized for their efforts during the pandemic, but that was not reflected in higher wages and improvements in social protection.²¹ Women's physical and mental health, including sexual and reproductive health, bore the brunt of the crisis, largely due to disruptions in health-care services and overwhelming paid and unpaid care work demands.²²

19. The COVID-19 pandemic saw an increase in measures to provide protection and shore up the economy. However, these measures were largely not designed with a gender lens and most measures were gender-blind. The United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) COVID-19 Global Gender Response Tracker analysed nearly 5,000 of these measures across 226 countries and territories and determined that 1,605 (32 per cent) were gender-sensitive and that, of those measures, 853 in 163 countries dealt with violence against women and girls. Of the 3,099 social protection and labour market measures adopted, only 12 per cent supported women's economic security and a mere 7 per cent responded to the care crisis.²³

20. The relative preponderance of measures addressing gender-based violence reflects the shadow pandemic of violence against women and girls during COVID-19, which was aggravated by the food, fuel and water crises brought on globally by the war in Ukraine and accelerating climate change. These situations exemplify the surge of gender-based violence that occurs in crisis and conflict contexts, in which women and girls facing multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination are particularly subject to violence and exclusion.²⁴ However, the provision of essential services has been insufficient to respond to gender-based violence worldwide.

¹⁸ ILO, *World Social Protection Report 2020–22*.

¹⁹ UN-Women, *Beyond COVID-19: A Feminist Plan for Sustainability and Social Justice* (New York, 2021).

²⁰ ILO, "ILO monitor: COVID-19 and the world of work", Seventh ed., 25 January 2021.

²¹ UN-Women, *Beyond COVID-19*.

²² Abiola Awofeso and others, "COVID-19 and women and girls' health in low and middle-income countries: an updated review of the evidence", Center for Global Development Policy Paper, No. 234 (Washington, D.C., Center for Global Development, 2021).

²³ UN-Women and UNDP, *Government Responses to COVID-19: Lessons on Gender Equality for a World in Turmoil* (New York, 2022).

²⁴ UN-Women, "COVID-19 and violence against women and girls: addressing the shadow pandemic", Policy Brief, No. 17 (New York, 2020); and UN-Women and United Nations, "Global gendered impacts of the Ukraine crisis on energy access and food security and nutrition", 2022.

21. The increased and disproportionate share of women's and girls' unpaid care work – care for children, the sick and the elderly, as well as the provision of food, water and energy – has been particularly acute given the limited availability of and access to social, care and health services and to clean, safe and affordable water, sanitation and energy, again with wide variation between developing and developed countries and across regions.²⁵ Water, sanitation and energy services and infrastructure are critical for women's economic empowerment and livelihoods, and for women's and girls' access to health care, education, food security, an adequate standard of living and overall well-being.

22. Women and girls are largely responsible for providing water for their families' survival – for drinking, cooking, sanitation and hygiene – in many developing countries and in remote, rural and impoverished areas worldwide. In the absence of water services and infrastructure and particularly during droughts, women and girls must queue for lengthy periods for water, walk long distances to collect water and cope with the lack of potable water. Indeed, 1.8 billion people worldwide rely on drinking water from off-premises supplies, with women and girls primarily responsible for collecting water in 7 out of 10 households.²⁶

23. In 2022, more than a quarter of women globally, or over 1 billion women, lacked access to safely managed drinking water services; although this is a significant improvement compared with a third of women without access in 2000, it nevertheless represents a daunting challenge. In 2023, some 380 million, or nearly 10 per cent, of the world's women and girls are living with high or critical water stress – a number that is estimated to reach 674 million by 2050.²⁷ While 3.5 billion people still lacked safely managed sanitation in 2022, the global coverage of basic hygiene services had increased by 8 per cent since 2015, which means that in the 50 countries with available data, over 80 per cent of women and adolescent girls have a private place to wash and change during menstruation.²⁸

24. The Special Rapporteur on the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation has highlighted the devastating impact of war and armed conflict on water and sanitation services and infrastructure and the concomitant costs to public health and hygiene and loss of lives. The cut-off of fuel supplies to Gaza has had calamitous consequences, including the collapse of water supply, sewage and sanitation services, desalinization plants, telecommunications and health care, with women and children under the age of 5 the most severely affected. Some 70 per cent of the people in Gaza are drinking salinized and polluted water from unsafe sources, causing dehydration and the spread of waterborne diseases.²⁹ The war in Ukraine has devastated both water and electricity networks, with over 6 million people with no or limited access to safe drinking water.³⁰

25. Soaring costs of oil and gas due to the war in Ukraine, coupled with the economic fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic, led to the first global increase in 20 years in the number of people without access to electricity, reaching 760 million in 2022, with deleterious effects on women's and girls' already unequal access and

²⁵ UN-Women, "COVID-19 and the care economy: immediate action and structural transformation for a gender-responsive recovery" (New York, 2020).

²⁶ United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and World Health Organization (WHO), *Progress on Household Drinking Water, Sanitation and Hygiene 2000–2022: Special Focus on Gender* (New York, 2023).

²⁷ Azcona and others, *Progress on the Sustainable Development Goals*.

²⁸ UNICEF and WHO, *Progress on Household Drinking Water*.

²⁹ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, "Israel must stop using water as a weapon of war: UN expert", 17 November 2023.

³⁰ UNICEF, "1.4 million people without running water across war-affected eastern Ukraine", 15 April 2022.

energy poverty. The global energy crisis caused many in developing countries who had only recently gained energy access to lose it, among them 15 million sub-Saharan Africans, and people found themselves unable to pay for modern fuels, including for clean cooking. Data show that the number of people without access to clean cooking globally fell to 2.3 billion in 2021 from 2.9 billion in 2010. Meanwhile, some 3.2 million deaths per year are attributable to household air pollution from cooking with polluting fuels and technologies, with women and children at greatest risk. Women and girls continue to be relegated to collecting biomass for heating and cooking in the absence of electricity and clean cooking options.³¹

26. Globally and across regions, women experience more food insecurity than men. Although the global gender gap in food insecurity widened during the COVID-19 pandemic from 1.7 to 3.8 percentage points in 2021, it narrowed to 2.4 percentage points in 2022 even as the war in Ukraine sent food, fuel and fertilizer prices spiralling. The gender gap narrowed in Asia and in Latin America and the Caribbean and widened in Africa, Northern America and Europe. Overall, 29.6 per cent of the global population – 2.4 billion people – experienced moderate or severe food insecurity in 2022, 391 million more than before the pandemic in 2019.³² If current trends continue, close to one in four women and girls will experience moderate or severe food insecurity by 2030 and as many as 236 million more women and girls (compared with 131 million more men and boys) are projected to be food-insecure by 2050 under a worst-case climate scenario.³³

27. Gender parity in education globally – both enrolment and attendance – was close to being achieved before the COVID-19 pandemic led to 1.6 million students leaving school and an estimated 11 million girls at risk of not returning, adding to the 130 million girls already out of school. Gender gaps remain problematic in some regions (sub-Saharan Africa) and progress has been reversed in some countries (Afghanistan).³⁴ While girls' completion rates in primary and secondary school exceed those of boys globally, in 2022 more young women aged 15 to 24 were not in education, employment or training than young men (32.1 versus 15.4 per cent), with the greatest gender gaps in Central and Southern Asia (48.7 per cent compared with 15.4 per cent).³⁵

28. The COVID-19 pandemic also brought to the fore the indispensability of digital access, Internet capability and mobile phone use, which helped mitigate distance, isolation and sickness by providing online information, health care, education, employment, income-generating opportunities, e-commerce, financial and social protection services and essential services to prevent and address violence. At the same time, the constraints of the global digital divide and the gender digital divide are starkly apparent, since those lacking digital, Internet and mobile access are at even greater risk of being left behind. Reliance on digital and mobile infrastructure and technologies also makes visible the risks of cyberbullying and violence and the

³¹ International Energy Agency, *World Energy Outlook 2023* (Paris, 2023); International Energy Agency, *Tracking SDG 7: The Energy Progress Report 2023* (Washington D.C., 2023); and UN-Women and United Nations, "Global gendered impacts of the Ukraine crisis".

³² Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and others, *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2023: Urbanization, Agrifood Systems Transformation and Healthy Diets across the Rural-Urban Continuum* (Rome, 2023); and FAO and others, *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2022: Repurposing Food and Agricultural Policies to Make Healthy Diets More Affordable* (Rome, 2022).

³³ Azcona and others, *Progress on the Sustainable Development Goals*.

³⁴ United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), *Global Education Monitoring Report 2022: Gender Report – Deepening the Debate on Those Still Left Behind* (Paris, 2022); and UNESCO, *When Schools Shut: Gendered Impacts of COVID-19 School Closures* (Paris, 2021).

³⁵ Azcona and others, *Progress on the Sustainable Development Goals*.

imperative to protect personal data and monitor and ensure cybersecurity and accountability.³⁶

29. Globally, 69 per cent of men compared with 63 per cent of women, or 259 million more men than women, were using the Internet in 2022. Women make up a disproportionate share of the global offline population, outnumbering men by 18 per cent in 2022, up from 11 per cent in 2019.³⁷ Regions with the highest Internet use tended to reach gender parity, namely the Americas, Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States. The Asia-Pacific region and the Arab States have made some improvements towards gender parity, while progress in Africa and in the least developed countries has stalled since 2019. In low- and middle-income countries, progress in reducing gender gaps in mobile Internet use and mobile phone and smartphone ownership has also stalled primarily because of barriers related to affordability, literacy and digital skills and safety and security, particularly among women who are unemployed, have low incomes, are older than 55, live in rural areas or have a disability.³⁸

30. Given the challenges to gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls in the context of cascading crises, the agreed conclusions of the sixty-third session of the Commission and their recommended actions to improve social protection, public services and sustainable infrastructure remain timely and urgent.

III. National implementation efforts

31. Member States have made progress on implementing the agreed conclusions since their adoption in 2019 despite the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic and compounding crises and conflicts. Their efforts have yielded good practices and innovative possibilities to achieve gender equality and women's and girls' empowerment through social protection, public services and sustainable infrastructure. The full, effective and accelerated implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the gender-responsive implementation of the 2030 Agenda, in tandem with national gender equality strategies and frameworks, are crucial in this regard.

A. Strengthening normative, legal and policy frameworks

32. The agreed conclusions emphasize strengthening normative, legal and policy frameworks to fully implement existing commitments for the achievement of gender equality and the rights and empowerment of all women and girls. They recognize the progress made in women's and girls' access to social protection, public services and sustainable infrastructure and call for sustaining the levels of protection achieved and addressing the significant gender gaps that remain.

33. The majority of reporting Member States made significant progress in advancing gender equality and eliminating gender-based discrimination through the promulgation or strengthening of national strategies, laws and policy frameworks, encompassing social protection, public services and sustainable infrastructure (Albania, Andorra, Armenia, Australia, Austria, Belarus, Canada, Greece, Iceland,

³⁶ Matthew Shanahan and others, *The Mobile Gender Gap Report* (London, GSMA, 2022); and Elira Jorgoni, "Albania's digital transformation of public services delivery," European Social Policy Network Flash Report, No. 2020/30 (Brussels, 2022).

³⁷ International Telecommunication Union, *Measuring Digital Development: Facts and Figures 2022* (Geneva, 2022).

³⁸ Shanahan and others, *The Mobile Gender Gap Report*.

Jordan, Liberia, Nepal, Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Russian Federation, Singapore, Slovenia, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, United Arab Emirates).

34. The 2019 Law on Social Assistance of Albania aims at alleviating poverty and social exclusion for women, men and families through improved targeting and by modernizing administration. The 2022 Federal Act of Austria, on compensation for high living and housing costs due to inflation, provides for housing, food and financial support for low-income households and single parents. The 2022 Federal 2SLGBTQI+ Action Plan launched by Canada advances rights and equality for two-spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex and additional sexually and gender diverse people. The tenth National Social Protection Strategy (2019–2025) of Jordan provides for a comprehensive, transparent and equitable social protection system, targeted social assistance for the poor and women's and girls' empowerment. Turkmenistan amended its Code on Social Protection of the Population in 2021 to support women's early retirement depending on the number of children they have and their participation in compulsory pension insurance. The Philippines incorporated social protection floor recommendations into its Labor and Employment Plan (2023–2028). Serbia developed the Strategy for Deinstitutionalization and Development of Community-based Social Services (2022–2026). The Strategy for Government Services (2021–2025) of the United Arab Emirates aims at enhancing accessibility, transparency and accountability, overcoming digital divides and focusing on women and children.

35. Several Member States specifically focused on care responsibilities within these frameworks (Greece, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Russian Federation, Slovenia). In Greece, the Labour Reform Law (2021) incorporates the European Union Work-life Balance Directive on improving work-life balance for parents and carers, including the right to flexible work arrangements and teleworking for parents and carers. Poland also reflected this Directive in its national legislation in 2023, focusing on equal care responsibilities between men and women, and Romania instituted unpaid childcare leave in 2022. The 2019 Informal Caregiver Statute of Portugal mandates the right of informal caregivers to specific measures to reconcile work and caregiving, including teleworking, leave and part-time work with the equivalent pay recorded as a social security contribution. The 2023 amendments by the Russian Federation to the law on financial support for families with children establishes the right for fathers to take childcare leave. The 2023 Child Guarantee National Action Plan of Slovenia emphasizes universal, equal access to early childhood care and education.

36. Member States enacted legislation to strengthen and extend maternity, paternity and parental leave (Australia, Greece, Iceland, Jordan, Philippines, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia). An act passed by Iceland in 2020 extends maternity/paternity leave from 9 to 12 months, with flexibility for parents to share this leave while supporting women to remain in or re-enter the labour market. In the Philippines, the 2019 Expanded Maternity Leave Law increases the number of maternity leave to 105 days with an option to allocate 7 days to the child's father.

37. A number of national strategies and plans support women, men, girls and boys living with disabilities (Australia, Belarus, Canada, Serbia, Turkmenistan, Ukraine). The National Strategy for Creating a Barrier-Free Environment in Ukraine until 2030 calls for the annual monitoring and assessment of barrier-free physical environment facilities and services for persons living with disabilities and other low-mobility groups, taking into account gender considerations.

38. Countries also specifically addressed gender-based violence, including in cyberspace. The National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence (2022–2032) of Canada ensures reliable and timely access to culturally appropriate and accessible protection and services to prevent and address gender-based violence and empower victims and survivors. Romania adopted a national strategy to promote equal

opportunities and treatment between women and men and prevent domestic violence for the period 2022–2027. The Online Safety Act (2021) of Australia and the Online Safety Bill (2023) of Singapore address cyberbullying, abuse and harm, and the online safety of women and children.

B. Improving women's and girls' access to social protection, public services and sustainable infrastructure

39. The agreed conclusions call for gender-responsive social protection systems, quality public services and sustainable infrastructure that works for women and girls.

40. Member States are implementing a diverse array of social protection instruments. The Strengthening the Social Protection System in Burkina Faso (2020–2023) project, supported by the European Commission, ILO and the United Nations Children's Fund, aims for a sustainable, universal social protection system with gender-responsive schemes, a social protection floor and adaptive social protection, universal health insurance, community-based social services and targeting mechanisms for poor and vulnerable households. Some 92 per cent of the country lacks social protection, mainly women, children, adolescents and people living with disabilities. Since 2021, the State Employment Service of Ukraine has provided special benefits to women and transgender people, particularly victims and survivors of discrimination, violence and trafficking, to support their reintegration into employment with unemployment insurance and maternity and family protection.

41. Member States have taken steps to protect and extend social protection to informal workers. As of June 2023, Argentina had nearly 1.3 million rural workers in temporary, precarious and seasonal work, 66 per cent of whom were women, and its National Registry of Popular Economy Workers, launched in 2020, registered some 3.4 million self-employed workers, 63 per cent of whom were women. In 2022, Nepal approved procedures covering the social security of migrant workers and informal workers. The Expanded Maternity Leave Law (2019) of the Philippines covers workers in the informal economy.

42. Pension reform was another area of focus. Since 2021, a programme entitled "Recognition of contributions for care tasks" in Argentina has assigned one year of contributions for each child, focusing on extending social security coverage to women between 60 and 64 years of age without income or social security. In Portugal, pensions are updated annually and supplements, such as the Solidarity Supplement for the Elderly, are applied to reduce poverty and improve protection for elderly women. The national post of Ukraine, Ukrposhta, facilitates international postal transfers of pensions and cash benefits to the significant number of Ukrainians, mainly women, who have fled abroad to escape the war, and its municipal nanny programme partially covers the cost of nannies for children up to 3 years old and ensures that participating care workers receive credit towards their pensions.

43. Member States undertook measures to support childcare, elder care and other care workers (Argentina, Australia, Cyprus, Greece, Poland, Portugal, Singapore). A national home care programme in Argentina trains care workers to provide quality care for the elderly at home; as of July 2023, 11,163 people were participating (10,262 women, 879 men and 18 transgender people). The Australian Carer Gateway provides free in-person, online and telephone support, and its Carer-Inclusive Workplace Initiative encourages employers to support employees with caring responsibilities. The Childcare Services Grant Scheme (2022) of Cyprus for children up to 4 years old provides nursery/kindergarten fee subsidies. Since 2020, Greece has granted a benefit of €2,000 for every child born in the country, and its Nannies of the Neighbourhood programme (2021) subsidizes childcare for working mothers of children aged

2 months to 2-and-a-half years and provides online training and certification for new mothers who wish to return to the labour force as care workers. Toddler+ (2022–2029) in Poland supports care infrastructure for children under the age of 3, including children living with disabilities and those requiring special care, and co-finances care facilities to increase the availability and affordability of nurseries, children’s clubs and day care. In addition, the country’s Care 75+ programme (2022) supports municipalities in improving access to care services for persons aged 75 or older. Portugal provides free childcare for families in the lowest income brackets. Singapore plans to expand full-day preschools over the next five years to create 22,000 more places, with fee caps for operators and subsidies for parents; 90 per cent of Singaporean children aged 3 to 6 are enrolled in preschool today. In 2022, Türkiye announced that it intended to expand preschool centres and services in organized industrial zones to support women’s employment.

44. Member States addressed burgeoning food insecurity. The Food Benefit (2023) of Argentina is a monthly transfer of cash to purchase food and hygiene products, prioritizing mothers with children up to 14 years old, pregnant women after the first trimester and people living with disabilities. The school feeding programme (2021–present) in Liberia covers 300,000 students and provides take-home rations to 3,000 adolescent girls, and its adolescent nutrition programme (2021) is being piloted in 124 schools, reaching over 30,000 adolescent girls. The Child Guarantee National Action Plan (2023) in Slovenia aims at achieving universal, equal access to early childhood care and education services and nutrition (at least one hot meal a day for every child), giving priority to children at risk of social exclusion, including minority girls. The Food Deficit Mitigation Programme in Zimbabwe provided food assistance to approximately 30 per cent of the population during the period under review and its Pfumvudza/Intwasa Programme, launched in 2020, builds resilience to drought and fortifies food security in 1.6 million vulnerable households through maize, sunflower, small grain and soybean production.

45. The shadow pandemic of violence prompted many countries to strengthen and expand essential services for victims and survivors of gender-based violence (Andorra, Argentina, Austria, Cyprus, Greece, Guatemala, Israel, Romania, Serbia, Türkiye). Andorra offers direct, integrated services to women suffering discrimination or gender-based violence while preventing and minimizing revictimization during contact with the public administration. Argentina has launched several programmes, including a telephone number, “Line 144”, in 2020 for access to specialized personnel and resources; the Red Mask initiative (2020) alerting pharmacies that a woman is in a situation of gender-based violence, which emerged during the pandemic when women were often in lockdown with perpetrators of violence; reparations for the children of femicide victims, with 1,518 payments made through May 2023; and, since 2020, psychosocial and financial support equivalent to the minimum wage for six months for women and LGBTI+ persons in situations of gender-based violence. In 2022, Greece established 73 police-run centres for domestic violence services throughout the country to improve police coordination and handling of gender-based violence cases and, as of late 2022, was piloting a “panic button” application whereby women can push a button on a mobile phone to call for police assistance. Serbia has launched a similar “SOS Vojvodina” network mobile application. Guatemala trains justices of the peace (2019–2023) to strengthen the prevention of violence against women in local and municipal government and to better support victims and survivors. Türkiye has expanded its network of women’s shelters in 2023.

46. Member States highlighted the implementation of water, sanitation and hygiene infrastructure and services. In Guatemala, the Potable Water and Sanitation for Human Development programme benefited over 40,000 rural women and girls. The 2022 national budget of Zimbabwe allocated ZWD 1.23 billion for the provision of

sanitary wear with the goal of reaching at least 80 per cent of rural girls. Liberia launched the Transformative Accelerated Community Development Project in partnership with UNDP in 2022, which invests in water and irrigation systems for farmers, hydropower plants and off-grid electricity, boreholes and wells, sanitation facilities and health centres.

47. Countries have piloted the online provision of public services and social protection. The “e-Albania” online social services platform responded to heightened need for access during the pandemic and since 2019 has made 96 per cent of public services available online, ensuring equal access to electronic social services for women and men. While over 88 per cent of Albanian households had Internet access in 2021, the population’s digital literacy and skills vary, with more than half of those over 65 expressing unfamiliarity with the Internet. The full roll-out of the platform will require widespread digital skills and training. The “Diya” portal in Ukraine provides online access to social services and assistance with utilities, childbirth registration and unemployment benefits.

C. Enhancing investments, data and evidence and women’s participation and leadership

48. The COVID-19 pandemic prompted an unprecedented global expansion of social protection, public services and, to some extent, sustainable infrastructure. It also exposed the inadequacies of financing, particularly in developing countries struggling to cope with multiple long-term crises, unanticipated shocks and untenable debt burdens. The financing gap in social protection – to guarantee minimum provision for all through social protection floors – has increased 30 per cent since the onset of the pandemic. It is estimated that each year, low-income countries would need to invest an additional \$77.9 billion, or 15.9 per cent of GDP; lower-middle-income countries an additional \$362.9 billion, equivalent to 5.1 per cent of GDP; and upper-middle-income countries an additional \$750.8 billion, or 3.1 per cent of GDP.³⁹ However, these estimations of the vast amounts needed to close financing gaps do not cover public services or sustainable infrastructure, nor do they take into account gender equality considerations.

49. Member States with the capacity to do so are investing in social protection, public services and sustainable infrastructure. Annual social protection spending in Albania since 2019 has hovered just under 10 per cent of GDP. In 2021, Argentina established a Care Infrastructure Fund with 8.5 per cent of the annual national budget. The 2023 AUD 14.6 billion cost-of-living package in Australia seeks to increase social assistance benefits to students and job-seekers, including those over 55 years old, and in its May 2022–2023 budget the country announced an AUD 19.4 million investment in the Community Child Care Fund to support services in disadvantaged, regional, remote and Indigenous communities and the professional development of early childhood education and care workers. In 2021, Canada invested CAD 30 million over five years to build a nationwide early learning and childcare system, including in Indigenous areas, which will allow mothers to enter, remain in and re-enter the job market and provide jobs for workers in the sector, most of whom are women. Canada launched the Feminist Response and Recovery Fund in 2022, supporting 237 projects with CAD 100 million to tackle systemic barriers facing marginalized and underrepresented women. The 2022 State Aid Scheme in Cyprus provided €15.3 million in grants to local authorities and non-governmental organizations for 290 social care programmes for children, the elderly and persons

³⁹ ILO, *World Social Protection Report 2020–22*.

living with disabilities. Slovenia co-financed 181 social assistance programmes with €21.7 million in 2022.

50. Austria, Liberia, Nepal, Ukraine and Zimbabwe emphasized the importance of gender-responsive budgeting processes. Austria has increased its budget for gender equality from €10.2 million in 2019 to €24.3 million in 2023. Nepal has seen a four-fold rise in direct gender-responsive budgeting from 11 per cent in 2007–2008 to 40 per cent in 2022–2023.

51. The Joint Sustainable Development Goals Fund of the United Nations has granted \$125 million across 61 countries that are working on integrated social protection policy solutions to leave no one behind. As of the time of writing it had funded 230 joint programmes on integrated social protection or Sustainable Development Goal financing.

52. As of December 2021, the World Bank's Rapid Social Response Adaptive and Dynamic Social Protection Umbrella Trust Fund had approved \$141 million to fund 384 activities in 109 countries. Since 2018, its gender window has distributed \$16 million to gender-transformative social protection programmes in 50 countries, leveraging \$8 billion in World Bank financing.

53. The lack of sex-disaggregated data and gender statistics is an important factor rendering women and girls and their needs and priorities invisible to policymakers, as exemplified by the COVID-19 policy response, in which women's rights and issues were sidelined. At the time of writing, it is not possible to gauge the financing required for a minimum standard of gender-responsive social protection, public services and sustainable infrastructure. Estimations of social protection financing gaps are based on analysis of coverage, but insufficient sex-disaggregated data are available to measure the adequacy of coverage for women and girls.

54. Member States report progress on gender data and evidence despite the disruptions to statistical operations caused by COVID-19. National statistical offices have taken steps to improve gender data and statistics to inform policies and programmes (Albania, Australia, Bulgaria, Canada, Liberia, Luxembourg, Nepal, Philippines, Portugal, Russian Federation). The annual "Women and men in Albania" report, supported by the UN-Women "Making every woman and girl count" initiative, introduced a new chapter on gender-disaggregated social indicators in 2020. The initiative also supported time-use surveys to assess women's unpaid care and domestic work in Bangladesh, Colombia, Kenya, Senegal and Uganda, and plans are under way to support 20 more countries by 2025. Bulgaria initiated a time-use survey in 2022.

55. Australia established the Gender Data Steering Group in 2022 to maximize government data as evidence for gender equality policy, and the Gender Data Asset Register to catalogue gender-disaggregated data across the federal government. The Canadian Disaggregated Data Action Plan (2019) aims at providing detailed statistical information on diverse population groups, including women, Indigenous Peoples, racialized populations and people living with disabilities, to inform public policies through an intersectional lens. Luxembourg established a gender equality observatory in 2020 and will finalize monitoring indicators for each focus area – domestic violence, employment, decision-making, work-life balance, education, income and health – by the end of 2023.

56. The experience of the pandemic also demonstrated the challenges to women's participation and leadership and the difficulty women have when trying to take their place at policy- and decision-making tables. Of the 262 COVID-19 task forces across 130 countries and territories with sex-disaggregated data, women accounted for 24 per cent of members while men were the majority in 82 per cent of task forces.

Only 14 countries had at least one task force that reached gender parity and just three countries reached gender parity in all their task forces.⁴⁰

57. Member States reported on good practices regarding women's participation and leadership in the management and administration of social protection, public services and sustainable infrastructure. The Australian Public Service Gender Equality Strategy (2021–2026) establishes minimum standards for women's representation and leadership as well as accountability by public service agencies. In Canada, the 50-30 Challenge is intended to encourage Canadian organizations to increase the representation and inclusion of diverse groups on boards and in senior management towards gender parity (50 per cent women and/or non-binary people) and significant representation (30 per cent) of members of marginalized or underrepresented groups. In 2019, Portugal enacted a law on balanced representation, which calls for a minimum threshold of 40 per cent of both women and men in management and staff of public administration. Singapore established the Council for Board Diversity in 2019 to promote greater numbers of women on the boards of listed companies, statutory boards and non-profit organizations.

IV. Conclusions

58. Member States undertook the implementation of the agreed conclusions of the sixty-third session of the Commission in complicated crisis contexts that both demanded the expansion of social protection, public services and sustainable infrastructure and militated against it, with highly uneven results across countries.

59. Significant gender gaps and inequalities persisted and, in some cases, grew. Extreme poverty, food insecurity and gender-based violence, among other issues, had disproportionate impacts on women and girls during the period under review. Equally troubling is the global inability to provide adequate, affordable and quality coverage and access to social protection, public services and sustainable infrastructure to ameliorate the unprecedented combined impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, conflicts and the climate and environment crises. The disparities in the capacities of higher income and developed countries versus struggling low-income and developing countries to secure the fiscal space to make gender-responsive investments is of critical concern.

60. Member State submissions demonstrate a strong commitment to enhancing and extending normative, legal and policy frameworks to advance gender equality and eliminate gender-based discrimination, with specific attention paid to social protection, the provision of care and the prevention of gender-based violence. However, the promise of these frameworks was not matched by the scope and pace of implementation, which was hampered by immense investment and financing gaps, revealing the divergence in fiscal capacity and ambition between rich and poor countries.

61. Member States reported on an array of measures expanding and deepening childcare provision, paid maternity, paternity and parental leave and early childhood care and education, taking into account the needs and welfare of children, parents, caregivers and care workers and supporting new mothers in attaining or returning to employment. A strong commitment to preventing and addressing gender-based violence has been expressed in a growing number of initiatives since the start of the pandemic. Fewer submissions dealt specifically with sustainable infrastructure, except for water, sanitation and hygiene services and supply.

⁴⁰ UN-Women and UNDP, *Government Responses to COVID-19*.

62. Based on Member State submissions, renewed efforts are needed to design, fund and implement policies and initiatives to provide decent work to essential workers and the large number of women in the global formal and informal economies to withstand the disproportionate consequences of crises. Systematic attention is required to reach gender parity in education in those regions where progress has stalled. Policies and programmes supporting girls in the completion of their education and transition to work are missing. Few countries reported on addressing women's and girls' food insecurity and energy poverty, which have reached alarming proportions in many regions. Resolute and collaborative efforts are required to end poverty, hunger and malnutrition.

63. The Secretary-General's Sustainable Development Goal stimulus and Global Accelerator on Jobs and Social Protection for Just Transitions promise to unlock investments to expand social protection coverage and create jobs in the care and green economies that benefit women and girls.

64. Other areas that merit greater attention are gender data and statistics and women's participation and leadership. The production, analysis and use of gender data and statistics remains incomplete. While some progress has been reported, increased policy attention and financial investment are needed to attain adequate levels of both quantitative and qualitative information on women and girls to inform policies and action that will bring about tangible improvements in social protection, public services and sustainable infrastructure. Similarly, women's and girls' voices, agency, representation and leadership must be supported and strengthened if change is to happen. Most efforts that show progress should be scaled up to have widespread and lasting effects.

65. The contemporary context of compounding and cascading crises has signalled the continued relevance and urgent need for accelerated implementation of the agreed conclusions. Significantly increased investment and action will be required to recover lost ground, strengthen women's and girls' economic and social security, resilience and well-being and make decisive progress towards achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls by 2030.
