



# Economic and Social Council

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## Commission on Population and Development

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**Population and sustainable development, in particular  
sustained and inclusive economic growth**

**Statement submitted by ACT Alliance – Action by Churches  
Together, African Women’s Development & Communication  
Network (FEMNET) and Sonke Gender Justice, non-governmental  
organizations in special consultative status with the Economic and  
Social Council<sup>1</sup>**

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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<sup>1</sup> The present statement is issued without formal editing.



## Statement

As networks of rights and faith-based organisations, we affirm our commitment to the Programme of the International Conference on Population and Development. We urge its full implementation and call for a joint resolution at the fifty-fifth session of the Commission on Population and Development. Working in over 100 countries, we are engaged in all pillars of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development. We affirm, as committed at the Nairobi Summit, the integrated, holistic mandate of the International Conference on Population and Development agenda and the outcomes of its reviews, including the regional outcomes.

Around the world, women and girls in all their diversity are living through multiple and intersecting forms of crisis, including COVID-19, the shadow pandemic of gender-based violence, pushback against women's rights, the climate emergency, racial inequalities, and conflicts. We welcome the theme of "Population and sustainable development, in particular sustained and inclusive economic growth", as economic disparities and inequalities, exacerbated by the COVID-19 crisis, impact the most marginalised. We commit to stand up for the integrity of the United Nations and the importance of addressing power inequalities, to achieve democratic multilateralism and cooperation. We echo the calls from the Generation Equality Forum that catalytic action is required, which includes increased investment and strong multi-stakeholder partnerships. Civil society, including faith actors, working for human rights are critical for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and Agenda 2030.

We call upon Member States to agree to comprehensive structural solutions for women's socio-economic justice and sexual and reproductive health and rights, including gender-responsive universal social protection systems, and changing discriminatory laws and social norms.

### COVID-19 and just economies

We are committed to working for economic justice and rights, which is essential for social change. Many economic models are exploiting women and girls in all their diversity. To fundamentally change the broken economic model requires a feminist model of organising, which challenges power dynamics and prioritises services that benefit women and children living in the margins. Christian Aid estimates that illicit financial flows cause tax losses of \$416 billion in the global south. We must tackle systemic injustices, including ending illicit financial flows, promoting tax justice and sustainable debt relief, re-shaping the economic landscape, the establishment of social protection floors (International Labour Organization standards), and reforming family laws.

The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed pre-existing structural injustices and inequalities. According to Oxfam International the pandemic has cost women around the world at least \$800 billion in earnings, a figure that is more than the combined Gross Domestic Product of 98 countries. Work carried out in the context of the family, home, and communities are often side-lined in economic policies. Women and girls in all their diversity continue to spend two to ten times more time on unpaid care work than men and boys. This includes providing formal and informal social protection systems for communities, especially during climate, economic and health crises.

Discriminatory legislation, including religious and customary family laws, continue to restrict women's full enjoyment of economic freedom and right to bodily autonomy including sexual and reproductive health and rights. This includes laws that restrict women from participating in the formal work force or accessing financial

services without permission from a husband or male guardian. We advocate for the integration of family law reform into the implementation of the International Conference on Population and Development Programme of Action. This includes acknowledging that various forms of family exist, and that any reference to family must always be paired with a recognition of the human rights of individuals within families.

### **Economic justice and sexual and reproductive health and rights**

Everyone should have the ability to decide freely and responsibly on matters related to their sexuality and sexual and reproductive health, free from discrimination, coercion and violence. There have been increased gaps between sexual and reproductive health and rights policy frameworks and the constrained socio-economic lived realities where these frameworks are implemented. We advocate for the sustained presence of civil society in all spheres of gender and economic policy interventions, and to deepen partnership with national and regional civil societies to influence policies towards gender-based budgeting, equitable resource allocation, and public spending targeting pro-poor sectors, including health, education and agriculture.

Civil society is central to demanding accountability efforts for the implementation of policies and improved service delivery on the comprehensive access to sexual and reproductive health and rights information and services. Faith based actors are an integral part of civil society and are often a major health provider. For example, an average of 40 per cent of health services in Sub-Saharan Africa are provided by faith-based organisations. We recognise that Member States have the primary responsibility to fulfil universal social protection including universal health coverage, but nonetheless all providers must be included in strategies. Faith actors can also be a barrier to gender justice, but religious and cultural practices are not stagnant, nor operate in isolation. They are influenced and motivated by their social, economic and political contexts. Feminist theologians and religious leaders have power to bridge theological and rights language. We advocate for the critical engagement of faith actors, who are rooted in communities and can be allies in transforming social norms to advance gender equality and promote human rights. Despite being closely aligned with community needs, they often go unrecognised because they usually operate outside government planning processes.

### **Adopting feminist and intersectional lens to address structural barriers**

We urge Member States to adopt an intersectional lens and collaborate with feminist actors to remove structural barriers to achieve justice, by creating gender-responsive and gender-transformative economies and establishing universal social protection floors as a step towards fulfilling the universal right to social security, eliminating poverty, and addressing inequalities.

To guarantee that action is transformative and sustainable, at every level, we must ensure that inclusive, qualitative and disaggregated data informs policies and practices. Ensuring social protection floors, in accordance with International Labour Organization Recommendation 202, give all a basic income security is a crucial intervention for the whole agenda and we recall the global commitments of the Political Declaration on Universal Health Coverage, with specific mention of “social protection mechanisms”. Universal social protection is an investment that in principle should be financed through domestic resources. However, as some countries do not have enough fiscal space to build social protection floors, international support is needed, for example via the Global Fund for Social Protection.

We recognise the absolute need to advance the leadership of women, young women, and girls in all their diversity, in all spheres of society. Grassroot-led feminist movements, including faith-based actors, are critical stakeholders in addressing the power dynamics and barriers that currently exist in achieving justice. We advocate for Member States to invest in strategic partnerships to break silos. As feminist actors, including faith-based actors, we are mobilising against systems and processes that oppress and marginalise, amplifying and representing the voices of many who would otherwise be neglected.

### **Recommendations**

- 1. Fully implement the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and its reviews. Develop national implementation plans to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.**
- 2. Fulfil previous commitments to the Programme of Action and subsequent declarations, including the commitments in Nairobi +25.**
- 3. Increase investment to close resource gaps, including investing in universal social protection floors, for achieving gender equality and the economic empowerment of women and girls.**
- 4. Tackle illicit financial flows and support the establishment of a Global Fund for Social Protection for countries that do not have the fiscal space.**
- 5. Ratify and implement relevant conventions, including the ratification of the Violence and Harassment Convention (International Labour Organization 190) and Social Protection Floors (International Labour Organization 202).**
- 6. Fulfil commitments to the Political Declaration of the High-level Meeting on Universal Health Coverage.**
- 7. Strengthen innovative and strategic partnerships to transform social norms, including with feminist and faith-based alliances, and men and boys, to promote women's rights and gender equality. Moreover, mainstream feminist analysis into economic policy spaces at all levels, from the local to the global.**
- 8. Reform discriminatory legislation, including religious and customary family laws that restricts women's economic empowerment and bodily autonomy. Tackle systemic issues related to the recognition and redistribution of unpaid care work.**
- 9. Invest in multi-stakeholder partnerships, including Generation Equality, to ensure there is co-created work and analysis between multiple actors.**
- 10. Strengthen a plurality of economic models, including community economies, informal economies, and solidarity economies, and work to ensure the full and protected participation of women in inclusive and just economies.**