



Contribution to the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, 2021

“Sustainable and resilient recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic that promotes the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development: building an inclusive and effective path for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda in the context of the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development”.

Commission on the Status of Women

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development confirms the centrality of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls to sustainable development and poverty eradication, and for progress across all the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and targets. It envisages a world in which every woman and girl enjoys full gender equality and all legal, social and economic barriers to their empowerment have been removed.

At its sixty-fifth session which took place from 15 – 26 March 2021, the Commission on the Status of Women considered “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” as its priority theme. The Commission also reviewed implementation of its agreed conclusions from the sixtieth session on “Women’s empowerment and the link to sustainable development” and held an interactive dialogue on the priority theme “Building back better: women’s participation and leadership in COVID-19 response and recovery”.

The present input to the 2021 high-level political forum on sustainable development is based on the agreed conclusions on “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” (E/CN.6/2021/L.3), adopted by the Commission on 26 March 2021, as well as the Chair’s summary of the interactive dialogue “Building back better – women’s participation and leadership in COVID-19 response and recovery” (E/CN.6/2021/L.10).

(a) Impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the implementation of the SDGs

In its agreed conclusions, the Commission expressed concern that the COVID-19 pandemic is having a disproportionate impact on women and girls and is deepening pre-existing inequalities that perpetuate multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination. The pandemic has further exacerbated vulnerabilities in women's and girls' social and economic situations, including their access to essential health-care services and access to education, especially of girls who have been particularly at risk of dropping out of and not returning to schools, as well as their safety, well-being and livelihood. The Commission also expressed deep concern over the increased demand for unpaid care and domestic work and the reported surge of all forms of violence during confinement, as well as harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation. These disproportionate impacts compound existing obstacles to women's full and effective participation and decision-making in public life.

(b) Actions, policy guidance, progress, challenges and areas requiring urgent attention

Participants in the interactive dialogue "Building back better – women's participation and leadership in COVID-19 response and recovery" acknowledged that, despite their critical role in the pandemic response, women continue to be underrepresented in decision-making roles. In some instances, the lack of women's representation may explain the lack of a gender-sensitive emergency response to COVID-19.

The Commission emphasized the critical role that women play in the COVID-19 pandemic response as well as in economic recovery and growth, and recommended strengthening gender-responsive institutional reforms in COVID-19 response and recovery efforts. In this regard, the Commission urged governments at all levels and other stakeholders to take account of the specific needs of women and girls in COVID-19 response and recovery efforts and to increase women's leadership in those efforts, including through gender balance in task forces, standing committees and other decision-making bodies. The Commission also called for the participation of members of women's organizations in decision-making bodies and processes.

Further, the Commission called for response and recovery plans that promote sustainable development and drive transformative change towards inclusive and just societies by, inter alia, targeting women and girls. In this regard, economic response, including poverty eradication measures, social assistance and protection, and fiscal and stimulus packages should be inclusive and target women and girls and specifically address their disproportionate share of unpaid care and domestic work. Measures should also ensure equal pay for work of equal value, including in the public health sector where women are the vast majority of frontline health and social workers and are significantly engaged in the delivery of essential and public services. The Commission also called for governments at all levels and other stakeholders to promote women's entrepreneurship and strengthen women's participation and leadership in economic activity.

Further, the Commission recognized the need to ensure women's access to decent work, just and favourable work conditions, including living wages and universal access to social protection supported by national strategies, policies, action plans and adequate resources.

(c) Measures and policy recommendations on building an inclusive and effective path for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda in the context of the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development

Participants in the interactive dialogue “Building back better – women’s participation and leadership in COVID-19 response and recovery” acknowledged that, although many women have held leadership roles at all levels during the pandemic, in many cases, women have experienced the severe effects of the pandemic in the form of increased rates of violence against women and girls. Speakers recognized that the current crisis represents an opportunity to address structural inequalities and empower the most marginalized women, to scale up community-level innovations in a meaningful way, and to better recognize women’s leadership at the local level.

The Commission emphasized the necessity to strengthen the full, equal, and meaningful participation and leadership of women, including women with disabilities, in all stages of COVID-19 response and recovery, and called on governments at all levels and stakeholders to take appropriate measures to:

- Create a safe, enabling, and violence-free working environment for women, especially front-line workers.
- Address the specific physical, and mental health needs of women and girls and provide them with psychological and psychosocial support.
- Provide appropriate personal protective equipment, essential hygiene and sanitation items, as well as access to safe and affordable drinking water.

The Commission called on the United Nations system to continue to mainstream a gender perspective in the COVID-19 response and recovery.
