

Commission on the Status of Women

Contribution to the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development 2023

“Accelerating the recovery from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) and the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at all levels

The 2030 Agenda recognizes that realizing gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls will make a crucial contribution to progress across all the Goals and targets. As the principal global intergovernmental body exclusively dedicated to the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) has reaffirmed its commitment to support the gender-responsive implementation of the 2030 Agenda, so as to leave no girl or woman behind.

From the perspective of the CSW, progress towards gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls has not been fast or deep enough and in some areas, has been uneven. Obstacles persist and major gaps remain. No country has fully achieved gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, and many women and girls experience violations of their human rights, multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, sexual and gender-based violence, vulnerability and marginalization throughout their life course. This hampers progress across all the Goals and targets.

At its sixty-seventh session which took place from 7-16 March 2023, CSW considered “Innovation and technological change, and education in the digital age 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 its sixty-second session on “Challenges and opportunities in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls” and held an interactive dialogue on the emerging issue “Getting back on track: Achieving gender equality in a context of overlapping emergencies”.

(a) Progress, experience, lessons learned, challenges and impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the implementation of SDGs 6, 7, 9, 11 and 17 from the vantage point of your intergovernmental body, bearing in mind the three dimensions of sustainable development and the interlinkages across the SDGs and targets, including policy implications of their synergies and trade-offs.

The Commission has addressed the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic at its sixty-fifth, sixty-sixth and sixty seventh sessions in its programme of work as part of its consideration of the priority themes and emerging issue/focus area dialogues. In its Agreed Conclusions, the Commission expressed concern about the disproportionate impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on women and girls and called for the specific needs of women and girls to be taken into account in COVID-19 response and recovery efforts, and for an increase in women’s leadership in those efforts. Specifically, the Commission:

- Recalled that women represent the vast majority of front-line health and social workers and that they are significantly engaged in the delivery of essential and public services.
- Recognized that sustainable and inclusive recovery strategies are needed to reduce risks of future shocks, including through strengthening health systems.
- Called for COVID-19 pandemic response and recovery plans that promote sustainable development and drive transformative change towards inclusive and just societies by, inter alia, targeting women and girls.

- Underlines that economic response, including poverty eradication measures, social assistance and protection, and fiscal and stimulus packages should be equally accessible to all.
- Recognized the need to expand women's and girls' access to adequate, safe and clean water and sanitation facilities, including for menstrual health and hygiene, especially in disaster relief and humanitarian emergencies.
- Urged Governments and other stakeholders to take measures to reduce and redistribute women's and girls' disproportionate share of unpaid care and domestic work, ensure equal pay for work of equal value for women, including in the public health sector, as well as take action to promote women's entrepreneurship and strengthen women's participation and leadership in economic activity.

During the interactive dialogue among youth representatives of Member States on the priority theme for CSW67, speakers noted that access to technology and technological infrastructure is essential for progress towards the achievement of gender equality, however, the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the disparities in access to technology and increased the gender digital divide.

(b) Key areas where transformative actions for accelerated progress have been successful, and key areas where support is most urgently needed, with regard to the cluster of SDGs under review in July 2023.

CSW67 reviewed the implementation of the agreed conclusions from CSW62 on “Challenges and opportunities in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls”. The review showed that while some progress was made between 2015 and 2020 in the use of safely managed drinking water, which rose from 70 to 74 per cent of the global population, 2 billion people still lacked this service when the pandemic struck. This includes 1.2 billion people without even basic drinking water service, 80 per cent of whom live in rural areas and half in least developed countries. Soaring costs of oil and gas have had deleterious effects on the energy poverty of women and girls and their already unequal access to energy for women and girls. The economic fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic caused many in developing countries who had only recently gained energy access to lose it, among them 15 million sub-Saharan Africans. The pandemic also meant that many people could not pay for modern fuels, including those for clean cooking.

The chances of rural girls completing primary and secondary education are jeopardized not only by poverty but also by additional burdens such as the need to spend precious time on unpaid care and domestic work and the lack of improved drinking water or electricity in their households.

(c) Examples of specific actions taken to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic that also accelerate progress towards multiple SDG targets, including actions identified by your intergovernmental body, building on interlinkages and transformative pathways for achieving SDGs.

- The Commission has highlighted the need for gender mainstreaming efforts in job recovery plans with a focus on closing gender gaps in employment, achieving equal pay, including for female frontline workers, and promoting women's entry and retainment in strategic, male-dominated sectors, including the information and communications technology and energy sectors, through tax incentives, training and improvement of working conditions for women.
- The Commission emphasized that the strengthening of local support systems and increased investments in care infrastructure are actions that can be taken to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic and accelerate progress towards SDGs 9 and 11.
- The Commission has noted that measures to promote women's participation and leadership in national and local recovery efforts, and their growing presence in political office are essential to the achievement of all SDGs.
- To address the “shadow pandemic” of violence against women, Member States highlighted the importance of ensuring that cities and human settlements are inclusive, safe and resilient for all women and girls and provide survivors with safe spaces.

- The pandemic drew attention to the need to harness the synergies between care, livelihoods and the environment through investments in jobs for women via public employment; improvements in pay and working conditions for care workers; enhanced social infrastructure, including through the use and repurposing of vacant facilities for essential services; and protecting women’s businesses against disasters and future pandemics.

(d) Assessment of the situation in the mid-point of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs, against the background of the COVID-19 pandemic and within the respective areas addressed by your intergovernmental body, and policy recommendations, commitments and cooperation measures for promoting a sustainable, resilient and inclusive recovery from the pandemic while advancing the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda

Women and girls are facing an unprecedented set of overlapping threats: the COVID-19 pandemic, higher poverty rates, skyrocketing food and commodity prices, coupled with the climate crisis and conflict have dramatically reversed the course of progress on gender equality, including on implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. Approaching the midpoint of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the world is not on track to achieve gender equality by 2030. Based on available data, 28 per cent of the SDG 5 indicators and sub indicators are very far or far from target; about one in three are at moderate distance from target, a quarter are close to target and only 12 per cent are at target met or almost met.

Against this background, CSW67 addressed the emerging issue “Getting back on track: Achieving gender equality in a context of overlapping emergencies”, which was considered through an interactive dialogue during the session. Participants in the dialogue expressed concern about the existence of multiple overlapping emergencies and its adverse impact on gender inequality. They noted that the compounded effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change, and conflict have reversed gender equality gains made and that based on the current pace of progress, it is projected to take approximately 300 years to attain gender equality. Speakers highlighted that COVID-19, climate change, and conflicts have widened the pre-existing inequalities between men and women in terms of food security and malnutrition, as underscored by the fact that 150 million more women face food insecurity compared to men, which is 8.4 times more in 2021 than in 2018. Furthermore, they added that 25 million more women and girls live in extreme poverty compared to men and boys. In this context, speakers argued that it is critical to prioritize gender-responsive climate resilient food programs that also address women in vulnerable situations, disabled women and girls, and those living in rural areas.

Member States presented examples of actions taken to address the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and its disproportionate impact on women and girls, such as establishing gender-related policies, addressing gender-based violence during lockdowns, and funding and reforms to achieve inclusive economic growth. Highlighting that women continue to bear a disproportionate burden in the domestic sphere with unpaid work and childcare responsibilities, participants also called for the establishment of affordable quality care services and shared steps taken to redistribute the burden of unpaid care work equally between women and men through the introduction of family friendly policies.

Participants proposed to strengthen policies and recovery efforts and empower women and girls affected by overlapping emergencies. Several speakers highlighted the need to collect more up-to-date and reliable sex-disaggregated data to monitor the impacts of crises on gender equality and to inform policies, programmes, and investment plans. Speakers further stressed the need to prioritize universal, gender-responsive social protection systems to provide a bulwark against economic and environmental shocks and conflicts and address the specific risks and challenges faced by women and girls, to contribute to the gender-responsive implementation of the 2030 Agenda and leave no one behind.

(e) Key messages for inclusion into the Political Declaration of the September 2023 SDG Summit

- Take action to fully implement existing commitments and obligations with respect to the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of all women, adolescents and girls, and the full and equal enjoyment of their human rights and fundamental freedoms without discrimination of any kind, so as to improve

progress towards women's full and effective participation and decision-making in public life, as well as the elimination of violence.

- Protect and promote the right to work and rights at work of all women and ensure the equal access of women to decent work and quality jobs in all sectors, by eliminating occupational segregation, discriminatory social norms and gender stereotypes and violence and sexual harassment, supporting the transition from informal to formal work in all sectors, ensuring their equal pay for work of equal value, protecting against discrimination and abuse and ensuring the safety of all women in the world of work, and promoting the right to organize and bargain collectively to advance, as well as access to sustainable livelihoods, including in the context of a just transition of the workforce.
- Ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights, in accordance with the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome documents of their review conferences, including universal access to sexual and reproductive health-care services, including for family planning, information and education and the integration of reproductive health into national strategies and programmes, and recognizing that the human rights of women include their right to have control over and decide freely and responsibly on all matters related to their sexuality, including sexual and reproductive health, free of coercion, discrimination and violence, as a contribution to the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of women and the realization of their human rights.
- Take targeted measures to address the growing digital divides within and among countries in order to achieve gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls, through, inter alia, strengthened enabling policy environments at all levels, legal and regulatory frameworks conducive to increased investment and innovation, public-private partnerships, low cost technology, universal access strategies and international cooperation to improve affordability, capacity-building, financing, investment and technology transfer.
- Deepen cooperation, including financing, to strengthen sustainable and resilient digital infrastructural development and promote knowledge sharing and technology transfer, including the development, dissemination and diffusion of environmentally sound technologies to developing countries on favourable terms, including on concessional and preferential terms, as mutually agreed, and strengthen digital and data capacity-building and governance, to address the gender digital divide and support the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.
- Eliminate, prevent and respond to all forms of violence against all women and girls in public and private spaces, online and offline, such as sexual and gender-based violence, including domestic violence, gender-related killings, including femicides, all harmful practices, including child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation, sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment, as well as trafficking in persons and modern slavery and other forms of exploitation, through multisectoral and coordinated approaches to investigate, prosecute and punish the perpetrators of violence and end impunity, and take appropriate measures to create a safe, enabling and violence-free working environment for women, including by ratifying key international treaties that provide protection against gender-based violence and sexual harassment.
- Promote women's full, effective and equal participation in decision-making on water and sanitation and ensure that all WASH services and infrastructure are gender-responsive to bolster the resilience of all women and girls and take measures to reduce the time spent by women and girls on collecting household water and fuel and protect them from threats, assaults and sexual and gender-based violence while doing so and when accessing sanitation facilities outside of their home or practicing open defecation and urination, and ensure access to water and sanitation and hygiene for all women and girls, especially those in marginalized and vulnerable situations.