



63rd Session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women, 11 – 22 March 2019 The Netherlands' Civil Society Priorities for the Agreed Conclusions

Adequate, coordinated and well-organized systems of social protection, public services, and sustainable infrastructure are necessary in the process of achieving gender equality and women's empowerment. In light of the priority theme of CSW63 – *Social protection systems, access to public services and sustainable infrastructure for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls* – the members of the Dutch civil society have identified a set of key issues related to the priority themes in a consultative meeting on 21 January 2019 for the Agreed Conclusion of CSW63.

Linkages between social protection, access to public services and sustainable infrastructure

Social protection, infrastructure and public services are the three main focus areas that are set out in Goal 5 of the Sustainable Development Goals.ⁱ The interconnections between social protection, public services and sustainable infrastructure are essential for long term and sustainable progress towards gender equality and women's empowerment.ⁱⁱ Interlinking the three focus areas with each other can improve the transformation of social and economic structures in order to realize women's rights and to secure their positions. For example, education is regarded as a public service, but it cannot function without adequate sustainable infrastructure. Or without affordable and qualitative childcare, women often struggle to stay on the labor market and to secure their social security rights. Special attention is needed for women in armed conflict or countries affected by natural disasters where social infrastructure is destroyed. The loss of access to information and communication systems, to cash services and the lack of a social protection system, worsens women's position in society and leaves them more vulnerable to e.g. sexual and gender-based violence. These examples show that policies regarding social protection, public services and sustainable infrastructure must be gender-transformative and complement each other in their objectives, functions and funding.ⁱⁱⁱ

Where do we stand?

Unfortunately, there is still a lot of work that needs to be done in these areas:

- Worldwide women are still disadvantaged in social protection systems.^{iv} Gender gaps and biases in the case of old-age pensions, unemployment benefits and maternity protection are still very common in social protection systems: for example, **only 26.4% of working-age women** are covered by old-age protection.^v
- **57 million unpaid workers** are providing long-term care globally. The large majority of whom are women who have given up their own jobs to care for family members.^{vi}
- Lack of access to information and decision-making power and **(intersectional) discrimination, stigma and abuse** may also keep women and girls away from public services.^{vii} For women and girls who are **survivors of violence**, public care services remain insufficient and underfunded.^{viii}
- A lot of women and girls **rely disproportionately on walking and public transport**.^{ix}
- **In 80% of the household's** women and girls are responsible for water collection while 2,1 billion people lacked access to safely managed drinking water.¹¹

Recommendations

Social protection systems, access to public services and sustainable infrastructure must be designed, financed, implemented, monitored and evaluated according to universal human rights and gender transformative norms and standards. They must reflect the reality of where and how women and girls live and work, and of their multiple roles.^x The following recommendations are key to achieving this.

1. Social protection systems

For women, much more often than for men, social protection systems are uncertain. Due to the fact that women more often combine formal with informal or invisible work such as care for dependents and household work, social protection systems such as family benefits, unemployment support, and retirement benefits, are anything but self-evident. Divorce or retirement create great uncertainty and the lack of economic independence increases the enormous impact on a woman's life when such social changes occur. In addition, displaced women and women in armed conflict and countries affected by natural disaster hardly have any access to social protection systems as the majority of these women take part in the informal economy, such as agriculture or working from a home-based business.

The Agreed Conclusions therefore must:

- Call on Member States to ensure a universal gender transformative social protection floor, including coverage for health care, social security and pensions for **unpaid caregivers**, and to reduce gender gaps in access and all benefit levels;
- Call on Member States to design and implement policies that promote family responsive legislations such as **accessible and quality childcare and other care facilities** that promote men's equitable responsibilities with respect to household work;
- Call on Member States to expand **paternity and paid parental leave** and promote policies and initiatives supporting **the reconciliation of work through flexibility in working arrangements** without reductions in labour and social protections. This should exist on an individual basis and should also be accessible to **self-employed women**;
- Call on Member States to design and implement **shock responsive gendered social protection systems** in armed conflict or countries affected by natural disaster. These systems are additional to the social protection systems in place while recognizing the additional needs of the different family members of a household that experience shock in or marginalization after conflict. These social protection systems should allow for the host state to further adopt the system after conflict;
- Call on Member States to design and implement **gendered cash assistance programs**. E.g. programs that adapt to the specific needs and contexts of women. Especially those working in the informal sector, or living in natural disaster or conflict-affected contexts.

2. Access to Public Services

Guaranteed access to affordable, adequate and qualitative public services is essential to promote women's and girls' empowerment. However, even though some of these public services are a human right, not all women across the globe have access to such public services. Public services such as health care, maternity care and public safety are still facing barriers. Without these public services, women often struggle to remain in the labour market and secure social protection.

The Agreed Conclusions therefore must

- Stress that equal and full access to a public service such as **education for all women and girls is of utmost importance**, a human right, and is imperative to realising gender equality;
- Call on Member States to insure **the integration of comprehensive sexuality education** that includes accurate non-judgemental information about sexuality, sexual diversity and human rights and **ensure the realization of all women's and girls' sexual and reproductive human rights** by removing barriers that constrain women's and girl's access to SRHR services;
- Call on Member States to design and implement policies that put **a human right as the fundamental basis of a public service**, not an economic or market-value incentive. Public services should be **affordable, qualitative and accessible**, free from **discrimination, violence and stigma**;
- Call on Member States to ensure **full access to financial institutions and cash services**. States must tackle any restriction and inequality that worsens women's economic position or that restricts them from attaining cash assistance in case of social protection.

3. Sustainable infrastructure

Sustainable infrastructure promotes sustainable development in economic, social and environmental terms. Safe public transport, for example, enhances the mobility of women and girls and gives them access to education, markets, labour and, most importantly, water.^{xi} Women and men benefit from infrastructure in a different manner and it is essential that this difference is taken into account in the development of sustainable infrastructure.

The Agreed Conclusions therefore must:

- Call on Member States to **regard women and children as the basic users of the city** when designing urban development and take their perspective into account. For example, create spaces for women in public places for breastfeeding, and provide more public toilets for women;
- Call on Member States to invest in **safe and accessible infrastructure** for women by putting lampposts closer together, recommend sidewalks in all infrastructure projects and provide an elaborate public transport system;
- Stress that **participation of all women and girls, and especially local women** should be involved in the decision-making process at all levels when developing infrastructure.

- ⁱ Chopra, D. and Campos Ugalde, A.C.: *Initiating women's empowerment; achieving gender equality: Interlinkages amongst social protection, infrastructure, and public services*, 2018
- ⁱⁱ Chopra, D. and Campos Ugalde, A.C.: *Initiating women's empowerment; achieving gender equality: Interlinkages amongst social protection, infrastructure, and public services*, 2018
- ⁱⁱⁱ Secretary General: *Social protection systems, access to public services and sustainable infrastructure for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls*, 2018. See: <https://undocs.org/E/CN.6/2019/3>
- ^{iv} ITUC: *Economic and Social Policy Brief: Gender Gaps in Social Protection*, 2018. See: https://www.itucsi.org/IMG/pdf/policy_brief_gender_gaps_social_protection_en.pdf
See: https://www.itucsi.org/IMG/pdf/policy_brief_gender_gaps_social_protection_en.pdf
- ^v ITUC: *Economic and Social Policy Brief: Gender Gaps in Social Protection*, 2018
See: https://www.itucsi.org/IMG/pdf/policy_brief_gender_gaps_social_protection_en.pdf
- ^{vi} ILO: *World Social Protection Report 2017–2019: Universal Social Protection to Achieve the Sustainable Development Goals*, 2017
- ^{vii} Secretary General: *Social protection systems, access to public services and sustainable infrastructure for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls*, 2018. See: <https://undocs.org/E/CN.6/2019/3>
- ^{viii} UN-Women and others: *Essential Services Package for Women and Girls Subject to Violence: Core Elements and Quality Guidelines*, 2015
- ^{ix} Tanu Uteng: *Addressing the interlinkages between gender and transport in developing economies*, expert paper prepared for the UN-Women expert group meeting, 2018
- ^x Expert Group, Report of the Expert group: *Social protection systems, access to public services and sustainable infrastructure for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls*, 2018. See: <http://www.unwomen.org/en/csw/csw63-2019/official-documents>
- ^{xi} UN-Women, *Turning Promises into Action: Gender Equality in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* 2018