



## OFFISIELLE DOKUMENTER CSW SAMMENFATTET

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**Annotated provisional agenda and proposed organization of work**

**Provisional agenda**

1. Election of officers.
2. Adoption of the agenda and other organizational matters.
3. 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”:
  - a) Implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives:
    - (i) Priority theme: 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;
    - (ii) Review theme: women’s empowerment and the link to sustainable development (agreed conclusions of the sixtieth session);
  - (b) Emerging issues, trends, focus areas and new approaches to questions affecting the situation of women, including equality between women and men;
  - (c) Gender mainstreaming, situations and programmatic matters.
4. Communications concerning the status of women.
5. Follow-up to Economic and Social Council resolutions and decisions.
6. Provisional agenda for the sixty-sixth session of the Commission.
7. Adoption of the report of the Commission on its sixty-fifth session.

**Annotations**

**1. Election of officers**

The Commission on the Status of Women elect its Bureau for a two-year period. At the 1st meeting of its sixty-fourth session, on 22 March 2019, the Commission elected, Mher Margaryan (Armenia) as Chair of the sixty-fourth and sixty-fifth sessions of the Commission. The Commission also elected, by acclamation, Jo Feldman (Australia) as Vice-Chair for its sixty-fourth and sixty-fifth sessions. At the 2nd meeting of its sixty-fourth session, the Commission elected, , Ahlem Sara Charikhi (Algeria) as Vice-Chair for the sixty-fourth and sixty-fifth sessions. The Commission elected, by silence procedure, 2020, Na Sang Deok (Republic of Korea) as Vice-Chair for the sixty-fifth and sixty-sixth sessions. The Commission postponed the election of the remaining Vice-Chair to a later date, on the understanding that upon endorsement by the Latin America and Caribbean group, the candidate would be allowed to participate in the meetings of the Bureau held in preparation for the sixty-fifth session of the Commission.

The Commission appoints five of its members to serve a two-year term on the Working Group on Communications on the Status of Women. At the 1st meeting of its sixty-fourth session, the Commission appointed the Russian Federation to serve as a member of the Working Group at its sixty-fourth and sixty-fifth sessions. At its 2nd meeting, 2020, the Commission appointed Israel as a member of the Working Group for the sixty-fourth and sixty-fifth sessions of the Commission. The Commission appointed, by silence procedure, on 9 July 2020, Brazil to serve as a member of the Working Group on Communications at the sixty-fifth session of the Commission.

In the absence of nominations from the African and Asia-Pacific States, the Commission postponed the appointment of the remaining two members of the Working Group on Communications to a later date, on the understanding that upon nomination by their respective Groups, the endorsed members of the Commission would be allowed to participate fully in the proceedings of the Working Group on Communications. At its 1st meeting, the Commission will be called upon to appoint the remaining members of the Working Group.

## **2. Adoption of the agenda and other organizational matters**

The rules of procedure provides that the Commission, at the beginning of each session, shall adopt the agenda of that session.

The preparations, consultations and organization of work were informed by the constraints imposed by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic on the conduct of intergovernmental meetings at United Nations Headquarters in the first quarter of 2021. The Commission is expected to meet in person and virtually from Monday, 15 March, to Friday, 26 March 2021.

Following past practice, statements delivered by representatives of delegations of members and observers of the Commission during the general discussion shall be limited to 5 minutes, and statements made on behalf of groups of delegations to 10 minutes. It is also recommended that interventions from non-governmental organizations on themes relevant to the session be integrated into the general discussion and the interactive dialogues, taking into consideration geographical balance.

## **3. 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”**

(a) Implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives:

- (i) Priority theme: 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;
- (ii) Review theme: women’s empowerment and the link to sustainable development

In its resolution 2020/15, the Economic and Social Council decided that, at its sixty-fifth session, in 2021, the Commission would consider as its priority theme “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”, and also decided that it would consider as its review theme “Women’s empowerment and the link to sustainable development”, in follow-up to the agreed conclusions adopted by the Commission at its sixtieth session.

The session of the Commission will include a ministerial segment to reaffirm and strengthen political commitment to the realization of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls as well as their human rights and to ensure high-level engagement and the visibility of the deliberations of the Commission, and that the segment would include ministerial round tables or other high-level interactive dialogues to exchange experiences, lessons learned and good practices, as well as a general discussion on the follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly.

## **Ministerial segment**

The Ministerial segment of the Commission will be held from 15 to 19 March 2021 and will include two ministerial round tables and other interactive dialogues.

### *Interactive dialogues on the priority theme*

The Commission will hold three interactive dialogues with the participation of ministers and other high-level government officials, experts and representatives of the United Nations system, civil society and other stakeholder groups that work on the priority theme.

### *Interactive dialogues on the review theme*

The Commission will hold two interactive dialogues with voluntary presentations by Member States from different regions on the review theme.

## **4. Communications concerning the status of women**

In its decision 2002/235, the Council decided, in order to make the communications procedure of the Commission more effective and efficient:

(a) That the Commission, starting at its forty-seventh session, should appoint, at each session, the members of the Working Group on Communications on the Status of Women for the next session so that the members would be able to meet to enable the Secretariat to issue their report three working days before the adoption of the agenda by the Commission;

(b) To request the Secretary-General:

(i) To inform Governments about each communication pertaining to them that would be considered by the Commission and give them at least 12 weeks before the consideration of such communications by the Working Group;

(ii) To ensure that the members of the Working Group receive in advance the lists of communications, including replies from Governments, if any, to be taken into account in preparing its report for examination by the Commission.

In its resolution 2009/16, the Economic and Social Council decided that the Commission, starting at its fifty-fourth session, should appoint the members of the Working Group on Communications on the Status of Women for a two-year period.

## **5. Follow-up to Economic and Social Council resolutions and decisions**

In accordance with General Assembly resolution 72/305, the Economic and Social Council, at its integration segment, will discuss and consolidate all the inputs of Member States, the subsidiary bodies of the Economic and Social Council, the United Nations system and other relevant stakeholders to promote the balanced integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development.

The theme of the Economic and Social Council and the high-level political forum on sustainable development for 2021 will be “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”.

## **6. Provisional agenda for the sixty-sixth session of the Commission**

In accordance with rule 9 of the rules of procedure of the functional commissions of the Council, the Commission will have before it a draft provisional agenda for its sixty-sixth session, including the list of documents to be submitted for its consideration.

## **Annex**

### **Membership of the Commission on the Status of Women at its sixty-fifth session (2021)**

**(45 members; four-year term)** *Member*

*Term expires at close of session in the year*

Algeria	2022
Armenia	2023
Australia	2023
Bahrain	2021
Bangladesh	2023
Belarus	2023
Brazil	2024
Canada	2021
Chile	2021
China	2021
Colombia	2024
Comoros	2022
Congo	2022
Cuba	2023
Denmark	2024
Ecuador	2022
Equatorial Guinea	2023
Estonia	2021
Germany	2023
Ghana	2022
Haiti	2022
Iraq	2022
Ireland	2021
Israel	2021
Japan	2022
Kenya	2022
Malaysia	2023
Mexico	2024
Mongolia	2024
Namibia	2021
Nicaragua	2022
Niger	2021
Peru	2021
Philippines	2024
Republic of Korea	2022
Russian Federation	2024
Saudi Arabia	2022
Senegal	2024
Somalia	2024
South Africa	2023
Switzerland	2024
Togo	2023
Tunisia	2021
Turkmenistan	2022
United States of America	2023

## Proposed organization of work

Monday, 15 March

10–11 a.m. (in-person meeting)	1	Election of officers
	2	Adoption of the agenda and other organizational matters
	3	Ministerial segment
		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”
		Opening statements
		Introduction of reports
4–6 p.m. (virtual meeting)	3 (a) (i)	Ministerial segment
		Priority theme: 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
		Ministerial round tables to exchange experiences, lessons learned and good practices 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
4–5 p.m.		Round table 1: getting to parity: good practices towards achieving women’s full and effective participation and decision-making in public life
5–6 p.m.		Round table 2: creating an enabling environment for women’s full and effective participation and decision-making in public life

Tuesday, 16 March

9 a.m.–1 p.m. (virtual meeting)	3 (a) (i)	Ministerial segment
9–10 a.m.		Round table 3: getting to parity: good practices towards achieving women’s full and effective participation and decision-making in public life
10–11 a.m.		Round table 4: creating an enabling environment for women’s full and effective participation and decision-making in public life
11 a.m.–1 p.m.	3	General discussion <sup>a</sup>

Wednesday, 17 March<sup>b</sup>

9–11 a.m. (virtual meeting)	3 (a) (i)	Ministerial segment
		Eliminating violence against women in public life
		Interactive dialogue
4–6 p.m. (virtual meeting)		Building alliances for women’s full and effective participation in public life
		Interactive dialogue

Thursday, 18 March

9 a.m.–1 p.m. (virtual meeting)	3	Ministerial segment
9–11 a.m.	3 (a) (i)	Building back better – women’s participation and leadership in coronavirus disease (COVID-19) response and recovery  Interactive dialogue
11 a.m.–1 p.m.	3	General discussion ( <i>continued</i> )
1 p.m.		Deadline for submission of proposals under agenda item 3 to the Secretariat

Friday, 19 March

9 a.m.–1 p.m. (virtual meeting)	3	Ministerial segment
9–11 a.m.		General discussion ( <i>continued</i> )
11 a.m.–1 p.m.		General discussion ( <i>continued</i> )

Monday, 22 March<sup>c</sup>

Tuesday, 23 March

9–11 a.m. (virtual meeting)	3 (a) (ii)	Review theme: women’s empowerment and the link to sustainable development  Voluntary presentations by Member States, followed by an interactive dialogue
11 a.m.–1 p.m. (virtual meeting)	3	General discussion ( <i>continued</i> )

Wednesday, 24 March

9–11 a.m. (virtual meeting)	3 (a) (ii)	Review theme: women’s empowerment and the link to sustainable development  Voluntary presentations by Member States, followed by an interactive dialogue
11 a.m.–1 p.m. (virtual meeting)	3	General discussion ( <i>continued</i> )

Thursday, 25 March

9–11 a.m. (virtual meeting)	3	General discussion ( <i>continued</i> )
11 a.m.–1 p.m. (virtual meeting)	3	General discussion ( <i>conclusion</i> )

Friday, 26 March

10–10.15 a.m. (in-person meeting)	4	Communications concerning the status of women Consideration of the report of the Working Group on Communications on the Status of Women ( <i>closed meeting</i> )
10.20 a.m.–1 p.m. (in-person meeting)	5	Follow-up to Economic and Social Council resolutions and decisions
	3	Introduction of draft proposals Action on draft proposals
	6	Provisional agenda for the sixty-sixth session of the Commission Consideration of the provisional agenda for the sixty-sixth session of the Commission
	7	Adoption of the report of the Commission on its sixty-fifth session Consideration of the draft report Closure of the sixty-fifth session

**E/CN.6/2021/2**

**Normative aspects of the work of the United Nations  
Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women  
Report of the Under-Secretary-General/Executive Director of  
The United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the  
Empowerment of Women**



## **I. Introduction**

In 2020, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) continued to support Member States in accelerating progress towards gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls, including through research, policy analysis and recommendations in reports of the Secretary-General. The Entity placed a high priority on the activities related to the 25-year review and appraisal of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, as well as the twentieth anniversary of the adoption by the Security Council of resolution 1325 (2000) on women and peace and security.

The impacts of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic on the business continuity of intergovernmental processes required significant adjustments to the Entity's efforts and capacity to support the strengthening of global norms and standards; and also affected the Entity's support in translating normative frameworks into benefits for women and girls at the regional, national and local levels as part of its operational activities. In addition to the scaled-back sixty-fourth session of the Commission on the Status of Women, the postponement, cancellation or reduced scope of other intergovernmental meetings required the modification of a number of the Entity's activities, as well as reprioritization to support Member States in analysing, addressing and responding to the disproportionate impacts of the pandemic on women and girls. The Entity also pivoted to online platforms for large parts of the normative aspects of its work.

As in previous years, the provision of substantive support to the Commission on the Status of Women, the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council, the Security Council, the Human Rights Council and other intergovernmental bodies remained a central feature of the normative aspects of the Entity's work, also within the constraints created by the pandemic. With the aim of strengthening the integration of a gender perspective into the work and outcomes of those bodies, the Entity continued to focus on synergies between achieving gender equality and the empowerment of women and progress in other areas of sustainable development.

With the COVID-19 pandemic threatening to undermine or even reverse gains in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls, the Entity has taken a leading role in responding to the crisis and offering sustainable gender-responsive solutions during the decade of action for the Sustainable Development Goals.

## **II. Gender equality and the empowerment of women**

### **A. Twenty-five years after the Fourth World Conference on Women**

As the substantive secretariat of the Commission on the Status of Women, UN-Women continued to provide substantive and logistical support to the Commission for its sixty-fourth session. The session marked the first review and appraisal of

the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action to be conducted in the context of the 2030 Agenda, and this alignment was reflected in the preparations and outcome. While the two-week session had to be scaled down to an opening meeting on 9 March and a virtual closing on 14 July, the extensive preparations and mobilization of stakeholders in the context of the review and appraisal process since 2018 brought significant results.

In particular, the review and appraisal process resulted in a political declaration to mark the twenty-fifth anniversary of the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and give further impetus to its accelerated implementation. The Commission on the Status of Women recognized new challenges that have emerged requiring concerted and intensified efforts and identified cross-cutting strategies for tackling such gaps and challenges.

The national-level reviews contributed to the global synthesis report of the Secretary-General on the review and appraisal. According to the report, while important gains had been made since the adoption of the Platform for Action, including in the areas of education and health, progress towards gender equality had stalled and even reversed in some areas, such as economic security and autonomy for women, especially during their child-bearing years. The report offered eight cross-cutting strategies to advance the implementation of the Platform for Action and bring about transformational change, including through gender-responsive law reform, policymaking, programme design and financing, shifts in social norms, the use of technology, data disaggregation and gender statistics. Areas such as decent work, the care economy and women in decision-making were highlighted for cross-cutting attention.

The Entity also launched a report entitled “Gender equality: women’s rights in review 25 years after Beijing”, which highlighted important gains since the adoption of the Platform for Action as well as areas for improvement. For example, the gender gap in labour force participation among adults aged between 25 and 54 years has stagnated over the past 20 years, at 31 percentage points; 31 per cent of young women aged between 15 and 24 years were not in education, employment or training in 2020, more than double the rate for young men (14 per cent); and only 14 per cent of agricultural landholders were women. In September 2019, UN-Women convened an expert group meeting, which examined the current context, emerging issues and future prospects for gender equality and women’s rights.

Although the Generation Equality Forum, convened by UN-Women and co-hosted by France and Mexico, in partnership with civil society, had to be postponed to the first half of 2021 owing to the pandemic, the Entity continued its preparations in facilitating action coalitions, to catalyse collective action and investments and achieve tangible results on gender equality during the decade of action for the Sustainable Development Goals. The six coalitions focus on: (a) gender-based violence; (b) economic justice and rights; (c) bodily autonomy and sexual and reproductive health and rights; (d) feminist action for climate justice; (e) technology and innovation for gender equality; and (f) feminist movements and leadership. Each will establish a targeted set of concrete, ambitious and immediate actions for the period 2020–2025. The Forum is also developing a new compact for women and peace and security and humanitarian action to drive action on the fulfilment of existing financial and political commitments and to strengthen coordination across existing mechanisms and partnerships.

## **B. Gender mainstreaming across the United Nations system**

UN-Women prepared the annual report on mainstreaming a gender perspective into all policies and programmes in the United Nations. As in the past, system-wide performance

was weakest in the areas of financial resource allocation (27 per cent of entities met or exceeded expectations) and the equal representation of women (19 per cent). Coherence and financial resource tracking were also identified as areas that required strengthening.

With regard to the contribution of strategic plans to specific Sustainable Development Goals and priority thematic areas relating to gender equality, a total of 55 entities reported a focus on Goal 5 (4 more than in 2018). Most entities support gender equality in socioeconomic areas: Goal 1 (16 entities), Goal 16 (14 entities), Goal 10 (11 entities) and Goal 8 (11 entities). In contrast, only three entities focus their gender equality work on Goal 7, and two on Goal 12. In thematic areas, entities continued to prioritize the engagement and participation of women (34 entities) and the promotion of norms and standards (24 entities), while only 5 entities (the same as in 2018) prioritized financing for gender equality.

### **III. Sustainable development**

#### **A. Gender-responsive action in response to the pandemic**

From the outset of the COVID-19 pandemic, UN-Women mobilized itself to respond to the pandemic in a comprehensive manner across its mandate and functions. It supported the rapid response of the United Nations system and took the lead in ensuring that the social and economic impacts of the pandemic on women and girls were comprehensively assessed and addressed. The Entity offered targeted policy guidance for action by Governments and other stakeholders and significantly expanded its work in relevant areas such as gender statistics to respond to the needs created by the pandemic.

Following the launch in April 2020 of the policy brief of the Secretary-General on the impact of the pandemic on women, the Entity issued a series of policy briefs to support gender-responsive action through policy responses on various issues. In its report entitled “From insights to action: gender equality in the wake of COVID-19”, released in September 2020, UN-Women summarized data, research and policies on the impact of the pandemic on women and girls, including in relation to extreme poverty, employment, health, unpaid care work and violence against women and girls. As part of its series on the Sustainable Development Goals, the Entity published a paper entitled “Spotlight on gender, COVID-19 and the SDGs: will the pandemic derail hard-won progress on gender equality?”, in which it revealed how health emergencies such as the COVID-19 pandemic, and the response to them, can exacerbate gender inequality and derail hard-won progress on all the Goals.

UN-Women took an early lead role in building a strong basis of gender statistics to inform gender-specific policy and programme responses to the pandemic. The Women Count data hub, launched in 2019 and already accessed by users in 192 countries, quickly emerged as a vital resource during the pandemic, issuing up-to-the-minute data, disaggregated by sex, to inform decisions and actions to save lives. UN-Women partnered with the World Health Organization to provide the first global data on COVID-19 cases disaggregated by sex and age. The Entity and its partners also developed the “COVID-19 and gender monitor dashboard”, an inter-agency collaboration to improve the overall United Nations response, comprising headline indicators on health and health-care vulnerabilities, social, labour and macroeconomic impacts and many other relevant areas.

Through the Women Count programme, UN-Women spearheaded the collection of primary data on the socioeconomic consequences of the pandemic on the lives of women

and men. Results of the assessments, available from the page on gender and COVID-19 data of the UN-Women data hub, are being used by Governments, the United Nations system and other stakeholders to inform policymaking, emergency responses and project financing.

UN-Women, along with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), launched the COVID-19 global gender response tracker to compile information on policy measures enacted by Governments worldwide in response to the pandemic and to highlight good practices in the integration of a gender perspective, as well as policy and funding gaps. The tracker shows that, while Governments have adopted a large number of measures to prevent or respond to violence against women and girls, attention to the needs of women in the areas of social protection and employment has been much more muted, with only 18 per cent of measures addressing either the economic security or rising unpaid care demands of women.

The Entity fully utilized its mandate for United Nations system coordination to advance the Secretary-General's call for coordinated action to address the impacts of the pandemic.

## **B. Economic and social empowerment**

For the seventy-fifth session of the General Assembly, UN-Women prepared three reports of the Secretary-General. The report on the intensification of efforts to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls (A/75/274), in particular, draws attention to the shadow pandemic of gender-based violence and increased vulnerability to violence in the home owing to the impacts of the pandemic, including lockdown measures and economic recession. The report contains calls for investments in long-term prevention measures to eliminate the root causes of violence against women and girls, including sexual exploitation and harmful practices. In the report, the Secretary-General also urged that prevention strategies should not be put on hold during the pandemic but adapted to the current context.

The report on trafficking in women and girls (A/75/289) highlights the fact that 47 million more women and girls will be pushed below the poverty line as a result of the pandemic and that this greater vulnerability may increase their risk of trafficking, including through online recruitment. The report contains calls for States to strengthen measures to ensure that female victims of trafficking are not punished for the crimes that they were forced to commit during their exploitation. According to the report on intensifying global efforts for the elimination of female genital mutilation (A/75/279), the pandemic could severely undermine progress, with an additional 2 million girls undergoing female genital mutilation by 2030. This means that progress in eliminating the practice needs to be 10 times faster now in order to meet the global target of elimination by 2030. Mainstreaming the prevention of female genital mutilation into efforts to address violence against women and girls generally is proposed as a key acceleration strategy.

## **C. Follow-up to and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**

UN-Women continued its engagements with the global follow-up to and review of the 2030 Agenda through its contributions to the high-level political forum on sustainable development. While much of the preparations moved to online platforms, a key area of focus for the Entity remained its technical support for Governments in the preparation of voluntary national reviews to encourage the integration of a gender perspective. UN-Women developed a guidance note to facilitate the Entity's country-level engagement

with national Governments. Its participation in the virtual regional forums for sustainable development contributed to greater attention being given to gender equality issues.

UN-Women also contributed to the report of the Secretary-General on progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (E/2020/57), spearheading coordination efforts across agencies to compile information relating to Goal 5 and contributing the relevant data and statistics for indicators for which the Entity is the lead or co-lead agency. To complement the report, the Entity, together with the Statistics Division, released the updated edition of “Progress on the Sustainable Development Goals: the gender snapshot 2020”, which brings together the latest available evidence on gender equality across all 17 Goals. The 2020 edition also flagged the gender-specific impact of the COVID-19 pandemic across the Goals by highlighting emerging data on the acute hardships that women and girls are facing on account of the pandemic, including higher rates of poverty, increased care burdens and greater exposure to violence.

#### **D. Environmental protection and disaster risk reduction**

In the area of disaster risk reduction, UN-Women, along with the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction and other partners, developed policy guidance on disaster risk reduction and COVID-19 recovery and rehabilitation, and on the dual challenges of climate-related hazards and pandemics. The Entity also contributed to the gender-responsive COVID-19 Recovery Needs Assessment methodology issued by the World Bank, the European Union and the United Nations system to assess the loss, damage and human impact caused by the pandemic and develop targeted recovery strategies. In October 2020, UN-Women launched a knowledge hub on the resilience of women to disasters, which provides relevant research, tools and expertise to the United Nations system and practitioners to enable the gender-responsive implementation of the United Nations Plan of Action on Disaster Risk Reduction for Resilience, implemented by 50 United Nations entities.

#### **E. Financing for sustainable development**

Drawing on its work on financing for gender equality, the Entity supported the integration of a gender perspective into the Economic and Social Council forum on financing for development follow-up. The agreed conclusions and recommendations (E/FFDF/2020/3) are focused on the importance of taking bold and concerted global action to address the immediate social and economic impacts of the pandemic and achieve an inclusive and resilient recovery using the 2030 Agenda as a road map. Member States emphasized the need for gender-responsive actions on the pathway to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and committed themselves to ensuring that emergency social and economic schemes integrate a gender perspective. This commitment recognizes the disproportionate impacts of the pandemic on women and girls as front-line health workers and as those who perform the majority of unpaid care and domestic work and face increased risks of violence.

### **IV. Human rights**

UN-Women continued to provide technical support to the Human Rights Council during its regular sessions and in relation to the universal periodic review.

The Entity provided technical support on Human Rights Council resolutions on the elimination of female genital mutilation (Council resolution 44/16) and on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women and girls (Council resolution 44/17). It also provided technical support for resolutions on the safety of journalists (Council resolution 45/18), on promoting and protecting the human rights of women and girls in conflict and post-conflict situations on the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) (Council resolution 45/28) and on promoting, protecting and respecting the full enjoyment of human rights by women and girls in humanitarian situations (Council resolution 45/29).

In coordination with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, UN-Women supported the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women in all regions.

The Entity continued to provide support to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women in the development of a general recommendation on trafficking in women and girls in the context of global migration. In July 2020, UN-Women, in partnership with the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, launched a guidance report entitled Addressing Emerging Human Trafficking Trends and Consequences of the COVID-19 Pandemic.

UN-Women worked with both the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women and the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities to develop a joint statement on sexual harassment and women with disabilities, which builds on the Entity's discussion note on sexual harassment against women with disabilities in the world of work and on campus.

The Entity served as the substantive secretariat of the expert working group for addressing women's human rights in the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration. The Entity engaged closely with both Special Rapporteurs in support of their mandates and contributed to the thematic reports of the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants, including a report on the right to freedom of association of migrants and their defenders (A/HRC/44/42) and a report on ending the immigration detention of children and providing adequate care and reception for them (A/75/183), which led to a greater focus on gender equality perspectives.

To address persistent discrimination in law, the Entity worked with partners to implement the multi-stakeholder strategy for accelerated action launched in 2019, entitled "Equality in law for women and girls by 2030". The strategy seeks to repeal discriminatory laws in six thematic areas (comprehensive reforms, the economic empowerment of women, provisions on the minimum age of marriage, nationality rights, discriminatory rape laws, and family and personal status laws) in 100 countries between 2019 and 2023. practices.

The Entity published a research brief examining how women's human rights in the context of the women and peace and security agenda have been addressed in past cycles of the universal periodic review and offering recommendations for stakeholders to improve reflection, action and progress on such rights in conflict prevention, resolution and peacebuilding.

## **V. Peace and security and humanitarian action**

## **A. Security Council**

The report of the Secretary-General on women and peace and security (S/2020/946) demonstrates how the unprecedented crisis unfolding as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic has increased the sense of urgency to accelerate global action on commitments on women and peace and security in order to prevent conflict and build and sustain peace. The report contains calls for the full and equal participation of women from the earliest stages in every peace and political process that the United Nations supports, urges an end to the constant upward trend of global military spending and links the women and peace and security agenda and the 2030 Agenda in countries affected by conflict. It highlights the need for targeted action to address alarming increases in violence against women and threats against human rights defenders, women peacebuilders and civil society organizations, who are on the front lines of responses to the pandemic and left without support, as well as the lack of access to sexual and reproductive health services, the dramatic rise in acute hunger in conflict-affected settings and the increase in economic insecurity and unpaid care work among women. The report sets forward-looking goals for the next decade.

In partnership with other United Nations entities, UN-Women produced a report providing evidence of how gender norms and power structures shape the ways in which women and men of different backgrounds experience and manage climate-related security risks. The report provides entry points for integrated action across existing global agendas and contains suggestions of concrete recommendations for policymakers, development practitioners and donors.

## **B. Participation of women and financing for sustained peace**

The COVID-19 crisis has exposed systemic inequalities, skewed spending patterns and the urgency of reversing prevailing trends in financing the implementation of the women and peace and security agenda. UN-Women continues to monitor and report on global trends and has deepened its collaboration with the Peacebuilding Fund. In 2020, UN-Women contributed to the thematic reviews on transitional justice and youth and peace and security of projects supported by the Fund between 2014 and 2018. The number of UN-Women offices receiving allocations from the Fund in 2019 rose to 27, from 16 in 2018.

The Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund, for which UN-Women serves as the secretariat, provides direct, dedicated and flexible financing for women's civil society organizations. The Fund surpassed its target – of reaching \$40 million by the end of 2020.

## **C. Humanitarian action**

Following the launch of the Global Humanitarian Response Plan for COVID-19 in March 2020, UN-Women led the development of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee gender alert on the pandemic, on behalf of the Gender Reference Group. The alert provides gender analysis of the impact of the pandemic on women and girls worldwide, with a specific focus on those already affected by crisis or particularly at risk, as well as practical guidance to humanitarian practitioners on the action and minimum standards required on a cluster-by-cluster basis to address the key needs of women and girls affected by the pandemic.

During the humanitarian affairs segment of the Economic and Social Council, UN-Women organized an event to present the findings of a joint study with the United

Nations Population Fund, which highlights the benefits of gender-specific humanitarian action, indicating cost-benefit ratios averaging \$8 for every \$1 dollar spent.

## **VI. Support for implementation of policy guidance**

The operational activities of UN-Women were strongly informed by the agreed conclusions on social protection systems, access to public services and sustainable infrastructure for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, adopted by the Commission on the Status of Women at its sixty-third session. This work has become even more critical and urgent in the light of the disproportionate impacts of the pandemic on the economic and social situation of women and girls everywhere.

UN-Women supported Governments in integrating a gender perspective into national social protection systems and policies. With the Economic Commission for Europe, UN-Women also started a new project to strengthen national capacities to design and implement gender-responsive social protection policies for sustained recovery from the pandemic and increased resilience against future shocks.

## **VII. Conclusion**

Despite the challenges presented by the onset of the pandemic, UN-Women was able to provide effective normative support to intergovernmental processes and bodies, including in the context of the 25-year review and appraisal of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. It provided strong evidence of progress and gaps in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of women and contributed to the development of concrete recommendations to accelerate the implementation of commitments. The Entity continued its efforts to strengthen the integration of a gender perspective and improve coherence, consistency and coordination between the normative and operational aspects of its work. The 25-year review and appraisal process was also an opportunity to galvanize impactful initiatives and partnerships to close gaps and intensify action.

UN-Women will continue to support the work of the Commission on the Status of Women and other intergovernmental bodies, including as they strengthen a gender-responsive global normative framework in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Such policy guidance will be critical as societies rebuild after the pandemic and lay the groundwork for strengthening the resilience of women and girls to future shocks.

**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. Report of the Secretary-General**



**Summary**

The present report contains an examination of global trends, persistent barriers and opportunities with regard to 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. Progress made in women's representation at different levels, mainly through legislated gender quotas, and the impact of women's participation in decision-making and civil society, are acknowledged in the report. Systemic challenges, especially the increasing levels of violence perpetrated against women in public life and certain enduring harmful norms, require urgent attention, as do specific challenges encountered by marginalized women who face multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination. States can facilitate a more inclusive and enabling environment in which all women could participate in public life through more ambitious targets, increased political will, sustainable financing and gender-responsive institutional arrangements. The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic has compounded challenges to decision-making, and, while women have rarely been included in decision-making on COVID-19 response efforts in equal numbers to men, in several countries where they have been in leadership positions, the response to the pandemic has been particularly effective. The report concludes with recommendations for consideration by the Commission on the Status of Women.

**I. Introduction**

The sixty-fifth session of the Commission on the Status of Women in 2021 will consider, as its priority theme, 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. The present report anchors the theme in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the Convention on the Political Rights of Women, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and other international agreements.

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action emphasizes the need to address inequality between men and women in the sharing of power and highlights women's equal access to and full participation in decision-making as a critical strategy for achieving equality for women and girls. It also emphasizes that all people have an equal right to participate in their country's government through public office and informal leadership. The importance of women's participation in executive, legislative, judicial and public administrative decision-making, as well as in civil society through women's groups, networks and community-based organizations, is underlined. The present report focuses on women's participation and leadership in

these areas, while acknowledging that women's leadership in public life can help support their empowerment in other sectors, including in the arts, culture, sports, media, the private sector and finance, as well as in multilateral institutions.

Despite women's increased engagement in public life, equality is far off. Women remain significantly underrepresented in all aspects of decision-making, and violence against women in public life is widespread. Men with power often resist women's leadership, even within political parties. Women's higher levels of poverty, more limited access to finance, greater share of care duties, and challenges faced in realizing their sexual and reproductive health and rights, combined with exclusionary institutional rules and procedures, limit their full participation. The attitude that women should not have public roles, enduring norms about gender roles and legal discrimination compound these challenges and devalue women's contributions to decision-making, threatening sustainable development. Organized opposition to women in public life is sometimes strong and violent, with the situation worsened by democratic backsliding, increased social and political polarization and deepening inequality.

To reach equality in participation and decision-making in public life, it is necessary to implement international and national commitments and norms, including through temporary special measures, create more enabling environments and institutional systems, reduce violence against women in political life and strengthen the voices of women, who face multiple forms of discrimination.

Good governance and democracy require inclusive leadership and representation. While men and women are equally responsible for achieving gender equality, a larger number of women in office can influence gender-responsive public policies and institutional practices. Women have a right to be equally represented and consulted in decision-making. Younger women, in particular, have been increasingly vocal on a range of issues of international significance, such as climate change, poverty and racism. Women's participation diversifies the life experiences drawn on by policymakers and provides a platform for expressing priorities based on common, gendered lived experiences.

The quality, relevance and effectiveness of policymaking and policy implementation increases when power is shared, as recently shown by the critical roles that women have played in responses to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. Women's organizations are at the forefront of community responses in many countries but struggle because of diminishing funding, increased demands for services, restricted movement and shrinking civic space. The pandemic is rolling back the limited progress made in the past 25 years with regard to women's empowerment and gender equality, and measures to increase women's leadership in COVID-19 response and recovery efforts are urgently needed.

Women's equal participation and leadership, as well as the elimination of violence, is essential to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. Target 5.5 of the Goals, on ensuring women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life, is connected to target 16.7, on ensuring responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels. The current pace of

progress is too slow and failure to expedite women's participation will make it impossible to achieve the Goals. The central importance of women's leadership to gender equality and women's empowerment is underscored in many of the agreed conclusions of the Commission on the Status of Women.

## **II. Women are incrementally entering public life but progress is too slow**

There has been progress in the increase in the number of women elected or appointed to decision-making positions, but full gender parity is far from being reached, and women rarely hold leadership positions in executive and legislative offices. Gaps remain because of persisting structural constraints and barriers that reinforce discriminatory norms, practices and policies. Political will to change power relations in accordance with international commitments with regard to gender equality is lacking. Inequalities, conflict, violence against women, climate change and the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic are compounding existing obstacles to women's participation, especially for women facing multiple forms of discrimination and young women.

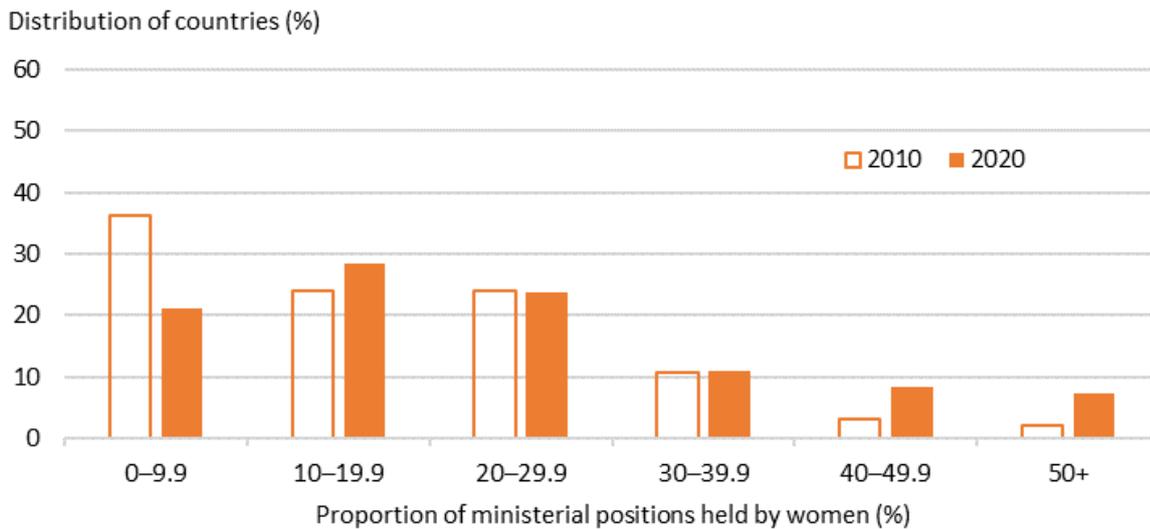
### **Women's participation in executive offices**

The highest level of power remains the furthest from achieving gender parity. Women serve as Heads of State or Government in only 21 countries (10 women Heads of State and 13 women Heads of Government), while 119 countries have never had a woman leader. At the current rate, parity at the pinnacle of power will not be reached for another 130 years. Available research demonstrates that women's and men's education, political experience and ages upon entering executive office are similar. Gendered perceptions that executive offices should be filled by men, and not on the basis of credentials, account for women's severe underrepresentation at this level.

Globally, women hold 21 per cent of ministerial positions, five points higher than in 2010 (see figure I). Just 14 countries have cabinets with 50 per cent or more positions held by women. In 16 countries, 40 to 49.9 per cent of ministers are women, but in 40 cabinets, fewer than 10 per cent of ministers are women, and in 54 cabinets women account for between 10 and 19.9 per cent of ministers. At an annual increase of just 0.52 percentage points, gender parity in ministerial positions will not be achieved before 2077. Increasingly, women lead ministries in non-social sectors, such as defence, the environment, employment and trade/industry.

Figure I

Percentage distribution of women in ministerial positions, 2010 and 2020



Source: Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and UN-Women, “Women in politics: 2010 – situation on 1 January 2010”, 2010, and “Women in politics: 2020 – situation on 1 January 2020”, 2020.

Some leaders have demonstrated political commitment to women’s equal roles by appointing 50/50 cabinets; some have also committed to diversity in their cabinets to help reverse discrimination based on age, ethnicity, sexual orientation, migration status, disability and other personal characteristics. In the United Nations, in line with the system-wide strategy on gender parity launched in 2017, gender parity of resident coordinators was achieved in 2018, and of Assistant Secretaries-General and Under-Secretaries-General was achieved in 2020. Gender balance would be achieved more quickly if more leaders show the political will to set and meet parity targets for all executive positions at all levels of government.

### Women’s representation in national and local legislatures

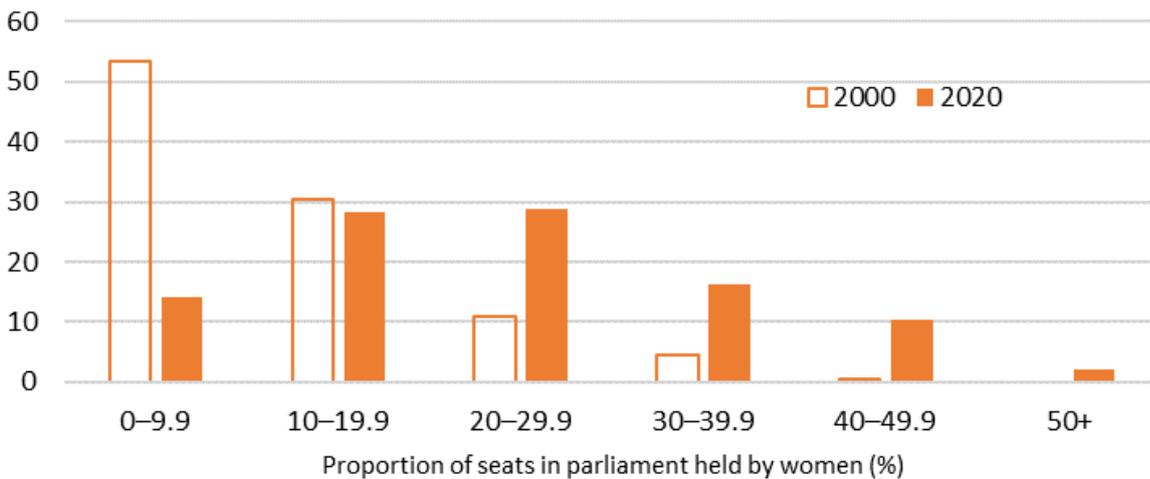
The proportion of women in parliament has doubled globally since 1995, but men still hold 75 per cent of seats. Although the primary role of national parliaments is to represent the voices of all people in decision-making, women’s representation has grown on average from only 12 per cent in 1995 to 25 per cent in 2020. At that rate, gender parity in national legislative bodies will not be achieved until 2063.

A few countries have made significant progress since 2000 (see figure II). In four countries, there are 50 per cent or more women in parliament than men, and in 24 countries, the figure stands at over 40 per cent. Most of those parliaments are in Europe, Africa or Latin America and the Caribbean. In 109 countries, however, between 10 and 29.9 per cent of members of parliament are women, and in 27 countries, women account for less than 10 per cent of parliamentarians. Just one in five national parliamentary speakers is a woman.

Figure II

Percentage distribution of women in parliament, 2000 and 2020

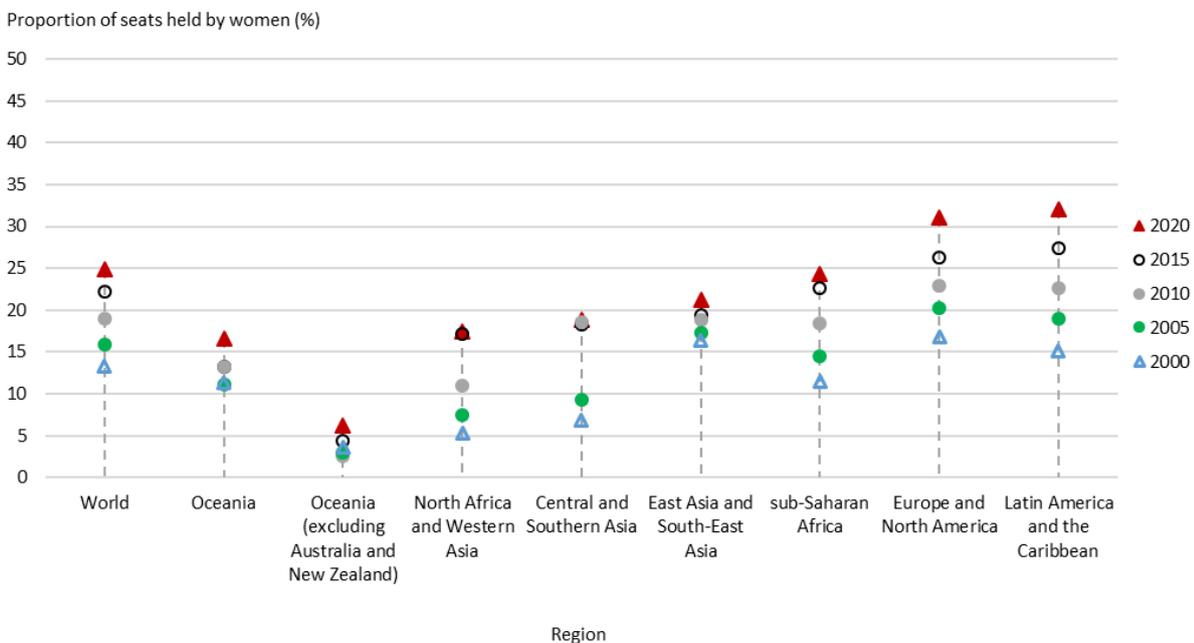
Distribution of countries (%)



Source: IPU, Parline database. Available at <https://data.ipu.org/> (accessed on 21 December 2020).

Regional disparities exist (see figure III). In Latin America and the Caribbean and in Europe and North America, over 30 per cent of parliamentarians are women, while in North Africa, Western Asia and Oceania, women account for less than 17 per cent of parliamentarians. Women’s representation is lowest in the Pacific island States: on average they hold 6 per cent of seats and, in three countries, there are no women in parliament. Women’s representation in conflict-affected countries is only 18.9 per cent.

Figure III Percentage of seats held by women in national parliaments between 2000 and 2020, by region



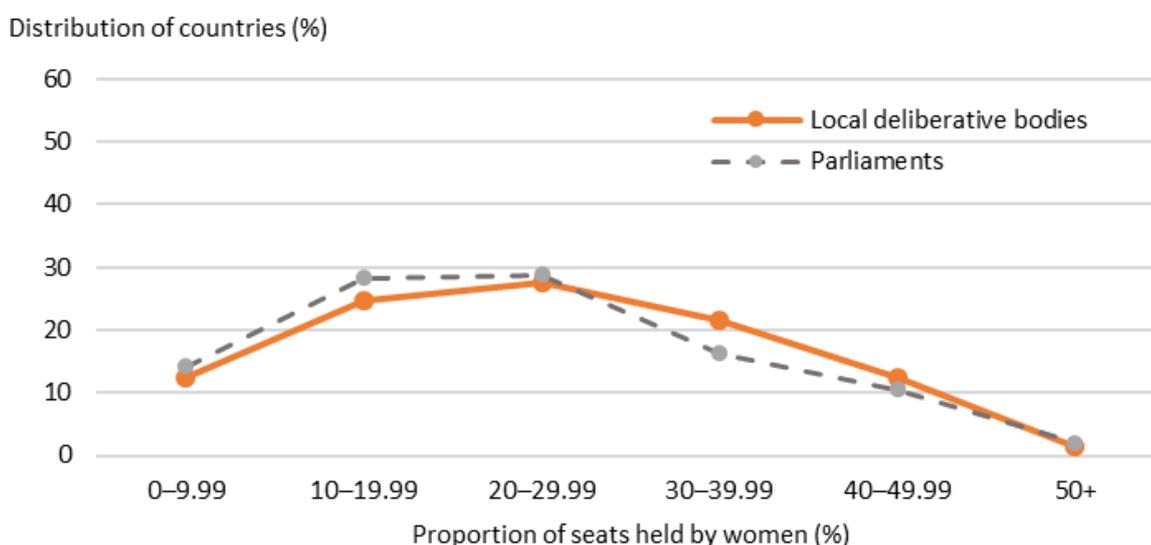
Source: United Nations, “indicator 5.5.1b”, Global SDG Indicators Database. Available at <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/indicators/database/> (accessed on 21 December 2020).

The representation of women in countries with proportional representation or mixed systems is on average 10 percentage points higher than in those with majority or plurality systems. Gender quotas have substantially contributed to this progress. Eighty-four States (44 per cent) have adopted legislation on gender quotas at the parliamentary level. In States with legislated quotas, women are on average elected to 26 per cent of seats in parliament, compared with 21 per cent in countries without such legislation. The impact of using quotas varies within regions by 11 percentage points in Central and Southern Asia, 6 points in sub-Saharan Africa and East and South-East Asia, and 5 points in North Africa and Western Asia, and in Latin America and the Caribbean.

The share of women elected to local deliberative bodies is now known as the reporting by States on Sustainable Development Goal indicator 5.5.1b. Data collected in 2019 facilitated the establishment of the first-ever global baseline on this important decision-making indicator. The data from 133 countries and areas reveal that more than 2 million women serve in local deliberative bodies, representing 36 per cent of members elected at the local level. That is a higher proportion than in parliament but not yet close to parity. In only two countries, 50 per cent or more of the local government officials are women, and in 18, over 40 per cent of local government officials are women. Seventy countries fall in the 10 to 29.99 per cent bracket, and 15 have women’s representation of less than 10 per cent at the local level, which is similar to the distribution observed for women in parliament (see figure IV).

Figure IV

Percentage distribution of women’s representation in local deliberative bodies and parliaments, 2020



Source: IPU, Parline database. Available at <https://data.ipu.org/>; and United Nations, “indicator 5.5.1b”, Global SDG Indicators Database. Available at <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/indicators/database/> (both accessed on 21 December 2020).

Note: The distributions are based on data on women’s representation in local government for 133 countries and areas and data on parliament for 191 countries.

Women are underrepresented among local public executives, such as mayors and quivalent executive heads. In Europe, for instance, the share of women municipal mayors in 2019 was half that of municipal councillors, 15 per cent compared with

30 per cent.<sup>8</sup> Data on the Goals show similar patterns in countries in other regions.

As with parliaments, legislated gender quotas for local government are effective in increasing women's representation but are often unambitious. Just 77 States (43 per cent) have adopted gender quota legislation on the number of candidates or reserved seats in local deliberative bodies but only one quarter require a 50 per cent distribution between women and men. Most legislation aims for between 30 and 40 per cent. Globally, women's representation in local government is 7 percentage points higher in countries with legislated quotas than in those without such quotas. In sub-Saharan Africa, North Africa and Western Asia, and the remaining regions of Asia, the use of quotas increases a country's representation of women by 16, 13 and 7 percentage points, respectively.

### **Women's participation in the public sector**

Having more women in the public sector and civil service brings more women's perspectives to policy and public service delivery, but women rarely hold leadership positions. Data from 2018 show that women accounted for 45 per cent of the public administration workforce but only 34 per cent of decision-making positions. The region with the highest share of women in public administration decision-making positions is Latin America and the Caribbean (42 per cent) and the lowest share was in the Arab States (17 per cent). Data for Europe show that men are better represented than women in the top two tiers of public administration, and that the gender gap increases from 14 percentage points in the lower tier of administration to 38 percentage points in the top tier. There is no global baseline for women's representation in civil service, but the compilation of the first set of data available for indicator 16.7.1 of the Goals, expected in 2021, will fill that important gap.

Women's representation in the judiciary is key to ensuring that courts represent their citizens, address their concerns and hand down sound judgments. Forty per cent of judges were women in 2017, which is 35 per cent more than in 2008. In most European countries, there are more women than men professional judges or magistrates, however, women represent 41 per cent of the judges in national supreme courts and only 25 per cent of court presidents, while they are underrepresented as heads of prosecution offices.<sup>13</sup> In Latin America, only 32 per cent of judges in the highest court or supreme courts are women.

The lack of women in public sector decision-making positions leaves Governments ill-equipped to respond to crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Women, who constitute 70 per cent of health sector workers, are on the front lines. An analysis of COVID-19 task forces from 87 countries found that only 3.5 per cent had gender parity. Effective COVID-19 response and recovery efforts require women to be represented in all their diversity in specialized groups or task forces, as well as in legislative, policy and budgetary decision-making processes, even if that requires the introduction of special measures, such as quotas. Women play a critical role in COVID-19 responses and concrete actions are necessary to ensure their equal participation (see General Assembly resolution 74/306).

When women are not consulted or included in decision-making on issues that have a direct impact on their lives, such as education, health, economic development and conflict resolution, policy outcomes are likely to be harmful and ineffective and to lead to the violation of women's rights. Women's full participation in public life

depends on their full access to social protection, sustainable infrastructure and public services, in particular health and education. That is especially the case for women and girls who face multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, such as women who are indigenous, have disabilities, are poor, belong to ethnic or racial minorities and migrant women. For women to participate and take decisions on an equal footing with men, more efforts are needed to ensure that universal health coverage reforms prioritize the sexual and reproductive health and rights of women and girls across the life course.

### **Quotas at all levels need to be strengthened**

Adoption of, and compliance with, gender quota legislation is the main policy intervention that has improved women's participation in national and local decision-making. However, of the 67 countries with legislation on candidate quotas at the national level, only 15 have targets of 50 per cent representation for either sex and 10 have targets of over 40 per cent. No country using reserved seats has a 50 per cent target for women's representation and the proportion of seats reserved for women ranges from 5 to 30 per cent. Increasing quota legislation targets to 50 per cent for each gender would fast track gender parity and the equal representation of women.

Even with high targets, the design of quotas is a key factor in their successful application to elected positions. Just 36 countries have achieved the gender targets established in their quota laws. Only 35 States require ranking or have alternate placement requirements for women on candidate lists (such as zipper lists) at the parliamentary level, and 30 States at the local level. Without such measures, women are at risk of being placed too low on candidate lists to have a chance of being elected.

Only 34 States have "hard" laws for parliamentary elections and 28 for local elections, in accordance with which the registration of candidate lists that do not meet quota targets is rejected. Some States use financial penalties and/or public funding allocations to increase the proportion of women elected, although some political parties opt to pay fines rather than nominate more women. There is an urgent need to reform Constitutions, adopt laws with parity targets that set clear time frames for all levels of decision-making and in areas of public life beyond political decision-making and to take sanction measures to ensure compliance with quotas.

More than half of all States have no legislative measures to achieve equal representation of women and men, while in several of them, fewer than 10 per cent of members of parliament are women. Some countries have reached gender balance without quota legislation, but results depend on political parties' voluntary adoption and implementation of those measures. Voluntary party measures have become more widespread, largely as a result of feminist activism within and outside political parties.

In accordance with article 7 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, States parties are required to take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in political and public life, and in accordance with article 4, States parties are allowed to adopt temporary special measures to accelerate de facto equality between men and women. A wide variety of proven instruments, policies and practices are available, including quotas,

resource allocations, preferential treatment, targeted recruitment, hiring and promotion, outreach and support programmes. Discrimination can be addressed on the basis of gender, but also age, race, disability and other personal characteristics. Temporary special measures are a key element of the Secretary-General's call to action for human rights, aimed at strengthening system-wide application and promotion of women's leadership across all sectors.

Solutions that have increased women's participation and decision-making in the public sector have also been applied successfully in other sectors. For example, 10 countries have legislated quotas for women on corporate boards of publicly listed companies, and the United Nations system updated its own temporary special measures in 2020 to achieve parity at all levels, as reflected in the system-wide strategy on gender parity. Applying such approaches more systematically across sectors would allow women leaders to help shape public attitudes and also contribute to the expansion of the pool of women candidates ready to take up decision-making positions in political and public life.

### **III. Women's civil society activism supports change but is challenged by shrinking civic spaces**

Women play an influential role in public life outside formal public institutions through their involvement in women's organizations and feminist movements, as well as in other civic engagement, including the media, labour unions and academia. Through those channels, women and gender equality advocates successfully promote legislation and mechanisms to advance gender equality and to eliminate laws that are discriminatory against women. They play a critical role in requiring decision makers to be accountable for upholding the human rights of women and girls.

Women's and feminist mobilization has grown considerably since 1975, catalysed by transnational feminist movements and conferences, and reaching a peak after the Fourth World Conference on Women: Action for Equality, Development and Peace in 1995. By 2015, there was an active women's and/or autonomous feminist movement in nearly every country, with regional variations. Increasingly, local and national movements have found unprecedented global solidarity and resonance on feminist issues.

Young women and girls are leading movements calling for broader economic, social and environmental justice and systemic transformation. They tend to be more disenchanted with party politics and less attached to formal institutions than previous generations. They also bring feminist principles of inclusion and systemic change to global and national causes on specific justice and rights issues, as seen in the global Black Lives Matter and the climate strike movements. Moreover, they see that unequal power relations and systems are exacerbating poverty and inequalities and constraining the voice and agency of marginalized groups.

Women's rights and social justice organizations drive collective action for gender equality through strategies and alliances with political actors, in order to influence normative change, transform institutions and increase women's inclusion in public life. They hold leaders accountable for addressing issues such as gender-based violence, access to sexual and reproductive health and rights, workplace rights, financial inclusion, the repeal of discriminatory legislation and compliance with national laws and international agreements. Pressure applied by women's rights

organizations has been instrumental in the adoption of quota laws in many countries. Participation in protest and social movements can help women acquire political experience and connections, and prompt them to run for office.

In conflict and fragile contexts, women's organizations and feminist movements often take the lead in aid provision, social cohesion and conflict prevention. The number of women participating in formal peace processes as negotiators and mediators is still low but has increased because of concerted advocacy by women's organizations.

Online activism is an increasingly critical tool for feminists, as digital platforms become public spaces in which new strategies to influence policy and politics are forged. Online social campaigns have influenced transnational and global politics, such as the "MeToo" movement (#metoo), which had consequences for perpetrators and led to tangible policy reform in multiple countries, and the Ni Una Menos (not one woman less) movement (#niunamenos). Expanding digital access is essential so that women with fewer resources are not left behind.

In some contexts, shrinking civic space is hampering women's effective participation in civil society. Space for participation is being limited by laws that have restricted the freedoms of assembly, association and expression in some countries. Legal and administrative measures are creating obstacles for women's organizations to register, engage in advocacy, receive external funding and report on rights issues in some contexts. Since 2008, civil society repression has deepened in 26 countries, while conditions have improved in only 17 (E/CN.6/2020/3, para. 194).

Women's organizations are active in COVID-19 responses, supporting those most affected economically, ensuring that shelters remain open for domestic violence survivors and disseminating public health messages to communities. At the same time, consultations and rapid assessments conducted by the United Nations show that the pandemic has created new challenges for women's rights organizations and exacerbated pre-existing ones. For many women's organizations, COVID-19 has led to mobility restrictions, while increased surveillance has further reduced organizing space, exacerbated poor working conditions and led to a decrease in resources at a time when demands have increased.

Underinvestment is also a persistent challenge. Direct funding of women's organizations accounts for less than 1 per cent of the global official development assistance provided for gender equality and women's empowerment (\$198 million), most of which flows through larger organizations which may not meet local needs. Where funding does reach women's organizations, it is typically small-scale and short-term and does not enable vital expansion, or the scaling up and strengthening of organizational and operational capacity. Increased access to direct, flexible and sustainable funding is necessary to sustain women's full participation in public life.

Intensified efforts are needed to reform legal provisions that prevent women from engaging in public life or in women's organizations and movements, and that limit their enjoyment of their political and civil rights to exercise the freedoms of assembly, association and expression, as well as the right to vote and to be elected.

#### **IV. Violence against women in public life threatens women's participation**

Violence and harassment against women in public life is a human rights violation. It has seemingly increased as more women have gained access to power. Perpetrators intend to stop women from accessing power and silence them so as to limit their perspectives in policy formulation. Women politicians have been killed in office, left their positions after receiving death threats or withdrawn from elections citing abuse. Women voters, candidates and election administrators have faced targeted, gender-based violence in elections. Human rights defenders, women's organizations and feminist groups have been targeted, and women of colour have experienced disproportionate levels of violence. Online, gender-based abuse, cyberbullying and sexual harassment is increasingly common against women active in public life.

The Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences has indicated that this particular form of violence consists of any act of gender-based violence, or threat of such acts, that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering and is directed against a woman in politics because she is a woman, or affects women disproportionately (A/73/301). More than 80 per cent of women parliamentarians interviewed in 2016 had experienced on-the-job psychological violence; one third of them had experienced economic violence; one quarter had experienced physical violence; and one fifth had experienced sexual violence.

Despite those alarming levels of violence, fewer than one quarter of parliaments have a sexual harassment policy for parliamentarians, and fewer than half have a policy for parliamentary staff. Women parliamentarians recently reported being exposed to torture, ill-treatment and acts of violence nearly twice as much as men, and the COVID-19 pandemic has potentially exacerbated the number of violent threats. In its resolution 73/148, the General Assembly called upon national legislative authorities and political parties to adopt codes of conduct and reporting mechanisms, or revise existing ones, stating zero tolerance for sexual harassment, intimidation and any other form of violence against women in politics.

Ultimately, States are responsible for preventing, investigating and punishing acts of violence against women in public life. Only one country has a stand-alone law criminalizing violence against women in politics, while a few have advanced legal reforms to address acts of political violence in existing laws. One country has adopted judicial protocols to prosecute cases based on national case law and international commitments. National gender observatories and/or civil society monitoring mechanisms in some countries track data on violence against women in public life, and some also coordinate essential services for survivors (see A/73/301).

States, international organizations, security forces, the media and other stakeholders now have greater awareness and means available to prevent and respond to violence, largely through the advocacy of women in office and women's rights organizations. International and regional human rights mechanisms and special procedure mandate holders have also helped to build awareness, including by providing mechanisms for reporting violence.

Prevention and response efforts urgently need to be intensified, in particular to reform legislation, strengthen access to justice and monitoring, and enhance coordination among stakeholders. Necessary steps include criminalizing violence against women in politics, improving the protection of victims, building the

capacity of State institutions and law enforcement bodies to apply laws and respond to incidents, strengthening judicial and complaints mechanisms, collecting and monitoring data on incidence and prevalence, and setting standards on what constitutes online violence against women in public life so that the media and companies running social media platforms can be held accountable for such content.

## **V. Social norms constrain women's participation in public life**

Discriminatory social norms about gender roles exacerbate unequal access to political participation. Attitudes about women in public life have shifted only modestly in the past 25 years, even as more women have gained leadership positions. In many countries, social norms and cultural values continue to reinforce perceptions that men make better leaders than women. Thirty-six per cent of people surveyed between 2017 and 2020 still considered that men make better politicians than women. Expressions of aggression, competitiveness, dominance and decisiveness are perceived positively for men but negatively for women.

Where laws and policies designed to promote women's role in public life do exist, negative social norms and gender stereotypes can hinder their implementation and impact. Gender norms and legal rights influence women's ability to exercise their rights to education and health, specifically sexual and reproductive health, which in turn constrains their possibilities to participate and lead. Countering social norms that threaten women's rights and participation in public life requires raising awareness and sensitizing community and religious leaders, the media, men and boys and different generations of women, so that the norms can be adjusted through deliberate action, including the prevention of sexual and gender-based violence and harmful practices. Increased community and civic understanding of gender equality and women's rights to participate in public life and decision-making through advocacy and social mobilization are critical to bringing about changes to negative stereotypes and discriminatory attitudes so that women are perceived as equally legitimate and effective leaders as men.

The media and the advertising and film industries tend to reinforce gender stereotypes and cover women's roles or public pronouncements to a lesser extent than those of men. The media, for example, often focus more on women leaders' appearance, personality and family than the merits of their candidacies or policies.

There is substantial male bias in global news coverage of COVID-19: men are quoted three to five times more than women and 19 per cent of expert sources consulted are women, whereas 77 per cent are men. To reverse this requires a range of measures, including raising awareness among those working in the media and the advertising and film industries, and developing codes of conduct to define and redress gender discrimination. State institutions and private donors can support public information campaigns with positive messages and images of women's roles in public life to help change perceptions.

A gradual change in norms is also being reflected in the private sector, supporting greater women's participation and decision-making. The International Labour Organization (ILO) Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 (No. 190) represents a recent advance in the protection of workers' rights, providing an

inclusive and gender-responsive approach for the prevention and elimination of violence and harassment in the world of work. States should ratify and enforce that Convention.

The support and political will of male leaders who publicly promote gender equality and women's equal participation in public life is vital for accelerating changes to social norms. People are particularly responsive to gender equality messaging conveyed by traditional leaders, political party leaders, Heads of State and Government, celebrities and other public figures.<sup>36</sup> Global initiatives encouraging men in executive leadership to champion gender equality, such as the HeForShe movement, have produced positive results, including male leaders cooperating to change social norms about gender-based violence and child marriage.

## **VI. Building towards a better future**

### **Need for strengthening institutional arrangements to promote gender equality**

Achieving gender equality is a collective responsibility for which men and women need to work together to transform institutions and systems. Systematic scrutiny of institutions and their operations, facilities, policies, procedures, written and unwritten rules, norms and cultures to reveal and remedy “unseen” barriers to women's participation is required. Institutions, historically designed by men, have inherent biases that constrain women's decision-making opportunities.

If more women are in parliament, they can create stronger alliances with each other to advocate gender-responsive laws, policies and budgets. When more women are elected to office, policymaking tends to reflect the priorities of families and women. Women have worked across party lines to address gender-based violence, promote sexual and reproductive health and rights, secure more funding for health care, education and socioeconomic issues, and support gender-responsive policies across sectors. Their work is facilitated when they have institutionalized meeting spaces and expertise, as is the case of 93 parliaments that have women's caucuses and 107 parliaments with gender equality specialized committees. Legislatures could benefit from putting more resources into gender equality committees or commissions, networking forums, women's caucuses and capacity-building with regard to gender equality.

A lack of care facilities deters women with families and care responsibilities from pursuing leadership in public life and other spheres of leadership. Women's care responsibilities have increased during the COVID-19 pandemic and, according to an assessment of 144 civil society organization grantees of the United Nations trust fund in support of actions to eliminate violence against women, staff members in numerous organizations report feeling “overwhelmed and burned out” by an unprecedented high demand for services. To reduce the burden on women, who often take on most care duties in the family, more family-friendly working conditions are urgently needed in order to recruit and retain women of all ages in public life, including by setting up support systems, such as aligning legislative chamber sittings with school calendars, providing childcare facilities and financial assistance, and adopting other measures to support the work-life balance. Institutions, political parties and civil society organizations must also adopt

inclusive practices and a zero-tolerance policy to gender-based discrimination and harassment.

Collaboration between politicians and women's rights organizations and feminist movements is critical in driving transformative change and responding to the needs of women's constituencies. Networks bringing together women politicians and women's organizations from different sectors have advanced gender equality policies and laws and promoted the inclusion of marginalized voices in decision-making. Alliances around specific issues, such as ending violence against women or protecting the labour rights of domestic workers, have led to changes in policies and laws.

Opening parliamentary or governmental hearings to women's organizations when adjudicating on key issues related to the COVID-19 pandemic and reporting on policy implementation would be beneficial. Gender-sensitive approaches to the pandemic response and recovery efforts are needed. It is an opportunity to rebuild better by institutionalizing gender-sensitive working arrangements in public institutions to support equal decision-making for women.

### **Need for increased funding for women in political and public life**

Funding to support women in public life is limited and needs to increase if women are to have equal opportunities to participate and engage in decision-making. Research shows that a lack of funding is one of the primary barriers to women's participation in politics. Women struggle to raise funds for building their name and recognition, winning party nominations, campaigns and party contributions, and for voter contact, especially in rural or remote areas. Many women lack economic independence, and social norms contribute to perceptions that fundraising is "improper" for women. Political parties tend to financially support incumbents, who are more often men. Political campaigns that depend on large private donations often linked to personal wealth, moneyed networks and individual fundraising capacities disadvantage women. States in which political parties receive direct public funding tend to create a more level playing field. Public funding allocations conditional on political parties apportioning funds to women candidates (i.e. 50 per cent) or which earmark public funds for gender equality initiatives offer examples for replication.

National gender equality mechanisms frequently lack the financing, capacity and decision-making clout to ensure that national planning and policymaking contribute to gender equality. While the COVID-19 pandemic has caused an increase in the need for the services that women's organizations provide, such as support to survivors of violence against women, many organizations are seeing cuts to their budgets and are forced to lay off staff and reduce activities, especially advocacy and policy work.

New funding and financing mechanism models to promote women's participation in public life are needed. For women in politics, these include establishing political party funds to assist women candidates with campaigns, promoting partisan fundraising networks to bundle small public contributions to women, providing subsidies, including for childcare costs, and increasing non-partisan fundraising, including through crowdfunding platforms and endowments.

For women's organizations, dedicated funds that apply feminist funding principles can help. Several countries, United Nations agencies and philanthropic foundations

have recently set up mechanisms to attract direct funding for women's organizations and specialized gender equality funds in different areas, including women and peace and security, democracy and ending violence against women (see S/2020/946, paras. 91–102).

### **Leaving no one behind in public life and decision-making**

Gender equality cannot be achieved unless public life and decision-making includes women and girls in all their diversity. That is also a matter of good governance. Women in rural areas, women with disabilities, indigenous women, lesbian, bisexual and intersex women and transgender persons, women migrants, girls, women of African descent and women of colour continue to face discrimination and exclusion from public life. For instance, women in rural areas are underrepresented in local decision-making and are inadequately consulted on national policies and programmes on agriculture, extractive industries, food security, climate change and disaster response and risk reduction. Indigenous women are excluded from decision-making related to communal and traditional indigenous lands and are not consulted equally on the use of their natural resources and lands. Women of colour are ineffectively represented in and consulted on policy and legislative measures. The rights and access of women with disabilities to justice and decision-making are not fully protected.

Across all groups of women facing discrimination, common gaps exist and need to be addressed as part of States' commitments and obligations under human rights instruments. Temporary special measures for those groups could accelerate progress. In addition, more specific data on the participation and decision-making of women who face multiple forms of discrimination are needed. Most available data focus on the number of women in politics but are not disaggregated according to women's race, ethnicity, age and other factors. Lack of data disaggregation by subcategories, for both women and men, impedes full analysis.

Young women face double discrimination from persisting social norms and age roles in public life. Young women are particularly underrepresented in politics. Women under 30 years of age make up less than 1 per cent of parliamentarians globally. There are more young people between the ages of 10 and 24 today than at any other time in history, and yet millions of adolescent girls and young women are disproportionately excluded from consultation on issues that affect them. Measures are needed to facilitate young women's increased leadership, such as access to education, sexual and reproductive health and rights, technology and skills development, leadership and mentorship programmes, and protection from violence and discriminatory legislation.

Good governance requires leadership renewal and succession, enabled through mentorship and intergenerational dialogue, and by building a pipeline between future leaders and young women who are interested in public life and office. The entry of diverse women into the political pipeline requires encouragement, and it is of particular importance that women and girls are protected from violence and discrimination. Early exposure to women leaders, as well as to legislative and policymaking spaces, gives young women and girls invaluable experience, broadens their networks, and strengthens their opportunities to have their voices heard in present and future decision-making and become fully engaged citizens. Young women and girls are more receptive to different forms of activism, to cooperation with people with diverse identities and perspectives, and to

collaborative and consensus-building approaches. They are also at the forefront of movements calling for systemic change across all dimensions of sustainable development. The future belongs to their generation but requires their joint commitment and action.

## **VII. Conclusions and recommendations**

Transforming the balance of power is essential for promoting and protecting women's human rights and solving the urgent challenges of the current age, from deepening inequalities and polarization, to the climate crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic. Progress with regard to achieving parity between men and women in all areas of public life and decision-making has been too slow. Women have played influential roles in political decision-making and civil society, but increasingly face violence, both online and offline. Transformative change to advance gender equality and women's empowerment depends on political will, close cooperation between women and men, networking among women in different decision-making positions, gender-responsive institutions, and the provision of greater financing for women in public life. To achieve the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030, gender equality in decision-making needs to be fast tracked. It is critical to apply effective and ambitious quotas, appoint an equal number of women and men to all public positions, eliminate violence against women and enable the participation of all groups of women, especially young women, to strengthen women's voices for the achievement of gender equality for women and girls.

To achieve gender equality and the full and effective participation of women in decision-making and public life, the Commission on the Status of Women may wish to urge Governments and other stakeholders to take the action set out below.

Strengthen normative, legal and regulatory frameworks

- (a) Fully implement existing commitments and obligations with respect to the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls, and the full and equal enjoyment of their human rights and fundamental freedoms;
- (b) Undertake comprehensive reforms to eliminate laws, policies and regulations that discriminate against women;
- (c) Establish targets, action plans and timelines to achieve gender parity for all executive, legislative and administrative positions, as well as in public commissions, task forces and negotiation teams;
- (d) Appoint women to executive positions to ensure gender parity in local and national governments;
- (e) Adopt electoral and quota laws with 50 per cent targets and ensure implementation through rank order rules and sanctions for non-compliance;
- (f) Adopt and effectively implement a range of regulations and temporary special measures for the public and private sectors to accelerate equal participation of women in decision-making and leadership, including for women facing multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination;

(g) Repeal or amend legal provisions that contribute to the shrinking of civic space or reduce women's organizations' abilities to register, engage in advocacy, receive external funding and report on rights issues;

(h) Improve the collection and use of globally comparable data, disaggregated by sex, age and other factors, on women's participation and decision-making in public administration, the judiciary, political parties and other areas of political and public life;

Prevent and eliminate violence against women in public life

(i) Reform legal frameworks to criminalize violence against women in political and public life, both online and offline, and to end impunity;

(j) Build the capacity of law enforcement personnel, prosecutors and judges to apply laws on violence against women, respond to incidents and hold perpetrators accountable;

(k) Establish and ensure access to complaints and reporting mechanisms for survivors of violence;

(l) Allocate resources for training, prevention and essential services to eliminate violence against women in political and public life;

(m) Ensure that women human rights defenders and members of women's organizations and feminist movements are protected from violence for engaging in public life; (n) Continue to fund international and regional human rights mechanisms and special procedures to monitor, report and provide recommendations on violence against women in public and political life;

(o) Set standards on what constitutes online violence against women in public life so that the media and companies running social media platforms can be held accountable for such content;

(p) Increase the capacity of national statistical systems to collect data regularly and systematically (both online and offline) on violence against women in public life;

Strengthen gender-responsive institutional reforms

(q) Ensure gender-sensitive approaches to the COVID-19 pandemic response and recovery by appointing women and gender equality advocates to leadership positions through gender parity targets for relevant task forces, standing committees and other decision-making bodies;

(r) Fund specialized gender equality committees or commissions and women's caucuses, and networking forums, and build institutional capacity on gender equality in parliaments, ministries and public administration;

(s) Ensure that all public institutions have in place, and comply with, codes of conduct that establish zero tolerance for violence, discrimination and abuse, and internal reporting and complaints mechanisms;

(t) Ratify and put in force the ILO Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 (No. 190);

(u) Increase transparency in institutions and allow members of women's organizations and feminist movements access to debates and decision-making processes, to voice their opinions and share their expertise;

Increase the availability of high-quality financing in support of women's participation in public life

(v) Create conditions and incentives for women candidates' campaigns to be financially supported from public and private funds, including through gender-sensitive political financing, subsidies for childcare, fundraising networks and non-partisan crowdfunding and endowments;

(w) Incentivize political parties to finance women's campaigns and promote their leadership;

(x) Raise the percentage of official development assistance funds that go to stand-alone gender equality targets and women's organizations;

(y) Increase the quality and quantity of funding available to support women in public life through the creation and financing of specific funds that prioritize direct funding to women's organizations and feminist movements;

Strengthen women's voice and leave no one behind in public life

(z) Facilitate the entry of women into the political pipeline through capacity-building, training and awareness-raising, and provide targeted support to women facing multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination to participate in public life and politics;

(aa) Implement awareness-raising measures and sensitize community and religious leaders, the media, men and boys and different generations of women to counter social norms that restrict women's rights and participation in public life and decision-making and to take deliberate action to adjust those norms;

(bb) Strengthen an enabling environment for women's participation in public life and decision-making by addressing women's poverty, unpaid care burden, unequal access to sexual and reproductive health and rights, education and technology, and fostering skills development;

(cc) Increase young women's representation and participation in public life through community outreach, mentoring, capacity development programmes and early exposure to legislative and policymaking spaces;

(dd) Incentivize the media and the advertising and film industries to reverse gender discrimination in the portrayal of women leaders in public life and decision-making;

(ee) Fund and support public information campaigns with positive messages and images of women's role in public life to help change stereotypes.

The Commission may wish to call upon the United Nations system and other international organizations to work collaboratively to support Member States in implementing, measuring and monitoring the foregoing recommendations at all levels.

## **E/CN.6./2021/4 Women's empowerment and the link to sustainable development. Report of the Secretary-General**

### **Summary**

The present report provides a review of the implementation by Member States of the agreed conclusions of the sixtieth session of the Commission on the Status of Women on women's empowerment and the link to sustainable development, five years after the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The review was conducted in highly volatile and uncertain global and national contexts, as the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic deepens inequalities, pushes health and care systems to the brink, exacerbates violence against women and girls and changes the strategic priorities of Governments and the international community, posing huge challenges for the achievement of gender equality and women's empowerment in the context of sustainable development.

### **I. Introduction**

This report provides a review of the implementation by Member States of the agreed conclusions on "Women's empowerment and the link to sustainable development", covering the two years' period since the previous review. It considers the impacts of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic on women's empowerment and sustainable development and actions by Member States in the following areas: strengthening normative, legal and policy frameworks; enhancing national institutional arrangements; financing gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls; strengthening women's leadership and their full and equal participation in decision-making; and improving gender-responsive data collection in the context of follow-up to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and to track and monitor the gender-specific impacts of and responses to the pandemic. The report is informed by the review and appraisal of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action on the twenty-fifth anniversary of its adoption (see E/CN.6./2020/3). It also draws on information received from Member States and other sources, including the reports of the Secretary-General on progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (see E/2019/68 and E/2020/57) and the voluntary national reviews of the high-level political forum on sustainable development in 2019 and 2020. The present report will be accompanied by presentations by Member States, on a voluntary basis, of lessons learned, challenges and best practices, at the sixty-fifth session of the Commission.

### **II. Importance of the agreed conclusions**

The agreed conclusions of the sixtieth session of the Commission highlight the alignment between the 2030 Agenda and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and serve as a road map for

the gender-responsive implementation and monitoring of progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals, while leaving no women and girls behind.

The agreed conclusions emphasize that the gender-responsive implementation of the 2030 Agenda requires accelerated action on previous commitments, including the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, to realize gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls and the equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms. The gender-responsive implementation of the 2030 Agenda is universal, integrated and indivisible, applying to developing and developed countries alike.

The agreed conclusions reaffirm that realizing gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls is a precondition for sustainable development and crucial to making progress towards all the Sustainable Development Goals and targets, and thereby call for actions reflecting the mutually reinforcing links between the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls (Goal 5) and each of the other Goals.

The agreed conclusions recognize the major contributions made by civil society, including women's and community-based organizations, feminist groups and women human rights defenders in placing the interests, priorities and aspirations of women and girls at the forefront of the gender-responsive implementation of the 2030 Agenda, and call for participatory and inclusive engagement, increased resources and support and safe and enabling environments so that women's and civil society organizations can fully contribute to the gender-responsive implementation, followup and review of the Sustainable Development Goals.

The agreed conclusions give prominence to the gender-responsive follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda, for which improved international and national standards and methodologies and national statistical capacities are needed to produce and disseminate high-quality, reliable and timely data disaggregated by sex, age, income and other characteristics and gender statistics in key areas for measuring progress on the Sustainable Development Goals for women and girls. These areas are reflected in the global indicator framework adopted by the General Assembly.

### **III. Context for the implementation of the agreed conclusions**

The implementation of the agreed conclusions took place in increasingly complex and volatile economic, political and environmental conditions. The global economy, after more than a decade of crisis, recession, fiscal austerity and deepening inequality, has faced unprecedented challenges and uncertainties with the economic, social and health repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has compounded the ongoing impacts of the climate and environmental crises, pushing people further behind. Governments have taken wide-ranging measures to contain the transmission of the virus and its economic and social fallout. However, these interventions have left developing countries facing the imminent scenario of crippling debt crises and debilitating fiscal consolidation that would cut public investment and spending on health, education and social protection, jeopardizing the likelihood of attaining the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030 and adding further urgency to the decade of action for the Goals.<sup>4 11</sup> The 25-year review and appraisal of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action revealed that, despite important steps to reduce gender gaps and inequalities, progress has not matched the commitments that Member States made in 1995 and that, in some areas, the situation is worse now than before. Income and wealth inequalities have increased in developed and developing countries to levels higher than 25 years ago, disproportionately affecting women and girls (see E/CN.6/2020/3). In particular,

women between 25 and 34 years of age are 25 per cent more likely than men to live in extreme poverty, an age span that coincides with childbearing and child-rearing when families face increased expenses, and women's childcare responsibilities constrain involvement in paid work (see A/74/111). The gender gap in accessing sufficient food increased from 2018 to 2019, and the likelihood of severe food insecurity is about 27 per cent higher for women than men. Global poverty was expected to increase in 2020 for the first time since 1998, with 71 million people falling into extreme poverty in the wake of the pandemic. The ratio of 118 poor women for every 100 poor men estimated for 2021 could increase to 121 poor women for every 100 poor men by 2030.

At the global level, the gender gap in labour force participation stagnated at 31 per cent between 1998 and 2018, and the gender pay gap remains on average at 20 per cent. Women do on average three times more unpaid care and domestic work than men and continue to be concentrated in vulnerable employment in the informal economy with little or no labour and social protections (see E/CN.6/2020/3). Violence against women and girls remains pervasive, with lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex women around the world at heightened risk of violence and harassment (ibid.). Women and girls who face multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, based on age, class, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation and gender identity, disability or migration status, among other factors, have made the least progress (ibid.), and this constellation of factors would make them disproportionately affected by the pandemic (see E/2020/57).

The COVID-19 crisis has deepened gender inequalities, afflicted economic sectors that have an overrepresentation of women workers, dramatically increased the care burdens of women and girls and caused a shadow pandemic of violence against them. At the global level, 40 per cent of all employed women work in hard-hit sectors, including accommodation and food services; wholesale and retail trade; real estate, business and administrative activities; and manufacturing. More women than men have lost their sources of livelihood as a result of COVID-19. Women in the informal economy, including essential workers and domestic workers, with limited or no access to social security and paid sick leave and few protections against dismissal, have been particularly affected. It is estimated that, at the global level, informal workers lost on average 60 per cent of their income in the first month of the pandemic. Women represent 70 per cent of the world's health workforce and are at increased risk of exposure to the virus (available data indicate that 72 per cent of infected health workers are women). As a result of COVID-19-related containment, lockdowns and school and care centre closures, the increasing volume of unpaid care and domestic work continues to be carried out by women and girls, exacerbating the prevailing and entrenched gender division of labour.

Women's economic and political participation and decision-making power at all levels, from the household to parliament, are key to their empowerment, but they remain largely excluded. Slightly more than 55 per cent of women of 15 to 49 years of age make their own decisions about sexual and reproductive health and rights, which has direct implications for their economic and political empowerment; women make up 39 per cent of the world's workers but hold only 28 per cent of managerial positions; and less than 7 per cent of Heads of State are women, while women hold only a quarter of the seats in national parliaments and a little over 36 per cent in local deliberative bodies. More progress can be seen at the ministerial level, with women holding 54 per cent of positions related to the environment, natural resources and energy (compared with 20.7 per cent overall).

The economic, political and social impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic have exposed the enduring unequal relations of power between men and women and the constraints on women's empowerment,

security and decision-making capacity in private and public life. Yet, in countries led by women, confirmed deaths from COVID-19 are six times lower than in others. While this may be attributable to a variety of factors, including rapid response by women leaders with a focus on social and environmental well-being, it is critical that women be equitably represented in leadership and decision-making related to the pandemic and that socioeconomic recovery packages and budgets be gender-responsive to build a more equal and sustainable future for all. In this challenging context, the agreed conclusions and their recommended actions for the gender-responsive implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals are highly relevant.

#### **IV. National implementation efforts**

The 25-year review and appraisal demonstrated the synergies and linkages between the Beijing Platform for Action and the 2030 Agenda (see E/CN.6/2020/3) and, therefore, the importance of the Commission's agreed conclusions of 2016 and their implementation. Recent efforts by Member States have encompassed targeted responses to the challenges to women's empowerment and sustainable development posed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

##### **A. Strengthening normative, legal and policy frameworks**

The agreed conclusions emphasized the importance of strengthening normative, legal and policy frameworks to advance gender equality and realize women's human rights and the empowerment of all women and girls. The accelerated implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the gender-responsive implementation of all Sustainable Development Goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda in a manner that reflects its universal, integrated and indivisible nature and the full implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, nearly 40 years after it entered into force, are critical in this regard.

##### **B. Responding to the COVID-19 crisis 22.**

While women have demonstrated exceptional leadership and contributed disproportionately to the response of the health workforce, the COVID-19 pandemic has posed unprecedented challenges for women's empowerment and sustainable development; its economic and social fallout could reverse progress made on achieving the 2030 Agenda across the Sustainable Development Goals, and specifically Goal 5. Aggravating the health crisis, lockdowns and containment measures have had pernicious effects on women's employment and income, safety and security and disproportionate share of care responsibilities. Virtually all countries have undertaken emergency response measures to contain the virus, to cope with collapsing health and social security systems and to mitigate impacts with socioeconomic recovery and fiscal stimulus packages intended to keep the economy, institutions and households afloat. However, the vast majority of those packages are not designed with a gender lens and most measures contained therein are genderblind. The COVID-19 Global Gender Response Tracker has analysed 2,517 of those measures across 206 countries and territories and determined that 992 are gendersensitive.

Member State submissions reflect that pattern. Many reported measures are not gender-specific, although they may indirectly benefit women and girls.

Measures that provide for employment and income security, in line with Sustainable Development Goal 8, among other Goals, are intended to alleviate the impact of layoffs and job losses.

The COVID-19 health crisis has further constrained the delivery of sexual and reproductive health-care services to women and girls (Sustainable Development Goals 3 and 5).

### **C. Enhancing national institutional arrangements**

The agreed conclusions call for strengthening the authority, capacity and visibility of and funding for national gender equality mechanisms at all levels and supporting coherence and coordination by mainstreaming gender perspectives across all policies, programmes and sectors of government. Not only do these mechanisms serve as the gender focal points for Governments, undertaking the coordination and monitoring of the gender-responsive implementation of the 2030 Agenda, but they are also typically responsible for ensuring that national planning, policymaking and budgeting effectively advance gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. Such institutional arrangements have taken on renewed necessity in the COVID19 response and recovery period.

In 2018, 192 countries had one or more national gender equality mechanisms or focal points, with varying status and authority and often inadequate financial resources, capacity and decision-making power to undertake gender mainstreaming effectively (see E/CN.6/2020/3).

### **D. Financing gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls**

The agreed conclusions reaffirm the commitments made in the Addis Ababa Action Agenda of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development with reference to gender-responsive public financial management, gender-responsive budgeting and tracking of public expenditure, and call for significantly increased investment in gender equality and women's empowerment through the mobilization of financial resources from all sources and the fulfilment of official development assistance obligations. Member States have made progress on gender-responsive budgeting, but many countries do not yet have systems to track allocations for gender equality. An analysis of 69 countries showed that only 13 countries met the criteria of a viable tracking system that measures and publicizes such budgets and that 41 countries approached the requirements. Although 90 per cent had policies and programmes to address gender gaps, only 43 per cent had the resources to implement them, 21 which underscores the persistent inadequacy of financing to meet longstanding commitments to gender equality, to the detriment of the well-being and empowerment of women and girls.

At the same time, international financing for gender equality also remains far less than what is required to close gender gaps (see E/CN.6/2020/3). The percentage of bilateral overseas development assistance from countries members of the Development Assistance Committee of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development destined principally for gender equality has remained the same for over a decade, at roughly 4 per cent, reaching an average of \$4.6 billion per year. In addition, an estimated 10 per cent of blended finance and 5 per cent of philanthropic contributions are dedicated primarily to gender equality and women's empowerment.<sup>22</sup>

### **E. Strengthening women's leadership and their full and equal participation in decision-making**

The agreed conclusions call for women's full, equal and effective participation, leadership and decision-making in all areas of sustainable development and at all levels and in public, social, economic and political life, including through temporary special measures, education and training and by removing barriers, such as poverty, violence, disproportionate care responsibilities and discriminatory social norms (see also E/CN.6/2021/3). Although some progress has been made, only 13 per cent of countries have reached gender balance (i.e., 40 per cent of women or more) in national

parliaments and 15 per cent in local government, largely through legislated gender quotas. Even as the need for peacekeeping processes burgeons and women's participation has been key for their durability, between 1992 and 2019, women represented, on average, 13 per cent of negotiators in major peace processes worldwide. Between 2015 and 2019, 225 women human rights defenders, journalists and trade unionists were reported killed, according to available data across 81 countries.

In 2019, some 80 countries had legislated gender quotas in place (see E/CN.6/2020/3). The Latin American and Caribbean region, which has a longstanding practice of applying quotas, reached 31.6 per cent of women in parliament, the highest percentage in the world.

## **F. Improving gender-responsive data collection, follow-up and review processes**

The agreed conclusions call for a gender-responsive approach in the national follow-up to and review of the 2030 Agenda, taking into account the agreed global indicator framework, to produce high-quality, reliable and timely data disaggregated by sex, age and income and other characteristics, for the collection, analysis and dissemination of gender statistics on, inter alia, poverty, income, unpaid care work, access to, control and ownership of assets and productive resources, participation at all levels of decision-making and violence in order to measure progress for women and girls towards the Sustainable Development Goals. However, the global indicator framework is gender-sensitive in only six Goals (1, 3, 4, 5, 8 and 16) and genderblind in seven (6, 7, 9, 12, 14, 15 and 17), while the four remaining Goals (2, 10, 11 and 13) contain few gender-specific indicators. General progress has been made towards internationally comparable data for monitoring, but less than half of 194 countries have such data for four of the 17 Goals and, for Goal 5, only four in 10 countries have the data, impeding assessment of trends and gaps in progress for women and girls. This lack of basic health, social and economic data has compromised the monitoring of the impacts of the pandemic, and the COVID-19 crisis has in turn interrupted statistical operations at the global level.

## **V. Conclusions**

Since the previous review of the agreed conclusions on women's empowerment and the link to sustainable development, Member States have continued their implementation, even as the COVID-19 pandemic disrupts development efforts at the global level. The assessment of the submissions and other sources for the present report indicates that implementation has been uneven and fragmented across the agreed conclusions. Crucial gender gaps and inequalities remain and, in some cases, have shown alarming increases, as in the rates of extreme poverty and violence against women and girls. Women farmers and others dependent on natural resources are at particular risk, as the combined health, climate and environmental crises jeopardize their livelihoods. Persistently inadequate financing for gender equality and limited availability of robust data and statistics to monitor and report progress for women and girls are of great concern.

Member States have demonstrated commitment to strengthening normative, legal and policy frameworks, national gender equality mechanisms, institutional gender mainstreaming and women's political participation at the local level. However, five years after the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, the gender-responsive implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals has not been fully incorporated into national sustainable development and statistical frameworks, and the potential of gender-responsive budgeting remains unrealized. Gender balance has yet to be achieved in terms of women's participation in national public life, and constraints on women's decision-making power remain in force. Decreasing support for women's civil society organizations has weakened the mobilization and active participation of women worldwide and may put women human rights

defenders further at risk. Despite concerted Member State action in response to the COVID-19 crisis, insufficient strategic and financial investment in gender equality and women's empowerment, made more acute in the context of the pandemic, has impeded progress towards the Goals. The crisis has revealed critical weaknesses in economic, social and health systems, highlighting the continued relevance and urgent need for accelerated implementation of the agreed conclusions. To regain lost ground, build the resilience of women and girls and make decisive progress towards attaining the Goals, significantly augmented action and funding will be required.

**E/CN.6./2020/15**

**Discussion guide for the ministerial round tables to be held by the Commission on the Status of Women under the priority theme “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”**

**Note by the Secretariat**

## **I. Introduction**

The session of the Commission includes a ministerial segment to reaffirm and strengthen political commitment to the realization of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, as well as their human rights, and to ensure high-level engagement and the visibility of the deliberations of the Commission, and that the segment would include ministerial round tables or other high-level interactive dialogues.

## **II. Organizational matters**

### **A. Theme and topics**

Under the priority theme “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”, the Commission will hold four ministerial round tables on the following topics:

- (a) Getting to parity: good practices towards achieving women’s full and effective participation and decision-making in public life;
- (b) Creating an enabling environment for women’s full and effective participation and decision-making in public life.

The ministerial round tables will be focused on the exchange of experiences, lessons learned and good practices in relation to the proposed topics. Ministers will be encouraged to look ahead towards realizing gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, as well as their human rights. Ministers will be invited to highlight the steps and measures that are necessary and planned to ensure that national responses contribute effectively to the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls through the full, effective and accelerated implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

### **B. Participants**

Through the round tables, ministers will be provided with the opportunity to engage virtually in dialogue and discussion. The round tables will be open to all Member States and observers.

Approximately 15 to 17 ministers are expected to participate in each round table. The Chairs of the ministerial round tables will have a list of ministers who have signed up for each round table, but no list of speakers will be prepared in advance.

The Chairs of the ministerial round tables will guide the discussion with a view to promoting interaction. Interventions are not to exceed three minutes, and an emphasis will be placed on dialogue. Ministers will be encouraged to ask questions and comment on interventions made during the dialogue.

### **C. Times**

The ministerial round tables will be held through informal virtual meetings on Monday, 15 March 2021, from 4 to 6 p.m., and on Tuesday, 16 March 2021, from 9 to 11 a.m., at the times set out in the table below.

<i>Round table</i>	<i>Time</i>	<i>Location</i>
Getting to parity: good practices towards achieving women's full and effective participation and decision-making in public life	4–5 p.m.	Virtual platform
Creating an enabling environment for women's full and effective participation and decision-making in public life	5–6 p.m.	Virtual platform
Getting to parity: good practices towards achieving women's full and effective participation and decision-making in public life	9–10 a.m.	Virtual platform
Creating an enabling environment for women's full and effective participation and decision-making in public life	10–11 a.m.	Virtual platform

## **D. Outcome**

The outcomes of the ministerial round tables will be in the form of Chairs' summaries, prepared in consultation with the regional groups through the members of the Bureau.

## **III. Items for discussion in the ministerial round tables**

### **A. Background**

The discussion of the priority theme “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” will provide the Commission with an opportunity to consider the topic in terms of how gender-responsive action across these areas can accelerate the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the decade of action through the setting of more ambitious targets, an increase in political will and financing and institutional arrangements that are more responsive to the needs and abilities of women and girls.

Power-sharing between men and women, through which women have equal access to, and participate effectively in, decision-making in executive, legislative, judicial and public administrative institutions is critical for achieving equality for women and girls. The leadership of women in civil society, such as in women’s groups, networks and community-based organizations, is also critical. Progress has been made in increasing the number of women in executive and legislative positions, but fifty-fifty gender parity is far from having been achieved. Women remain underrepresented in all aspects of decision-making. Violence against women in public life is widespread. Men with power often resist leadership by women, even within political parties. The higher levels of poverty, more limited access to finance, greater care duties, challenges to realizing sexual and reproductive health and rights and exclusionary institutional rules and procedures that women experience limit their full participation. Enduring social norms and expectations regarding women’s roles, as well as discrimination in law, compound the challenges and devalue the contributions of women to decision-making, threatening sustainable development. Organized opposition to women in public life is sometimes strong and violent, worsened by democratic backsliding, increasing social and political polarization and deepening inequality. Closing those gaps will require political will to change power relations, the use of temporary special measures, the creation of more enabling environments and institutional systems, the reduction of violence against women in public life, the strengthening of women’s voices and the elimination of discrimination.

During the round tables, ministers will be invited to consider the questions in the discussion guide below and to focus on what needs to be done to accelerate the full and effective implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the 2030 Agenda to realize the human rights and empowerment of all women and girls. Ministers are encouraged to highlight legislation, policies, regulations and strategies, including temporary special measures, that have proved successful in boosting the number of women in decision-making. Ministers may also address the feminization of poverty, as well as the availability of public services such as childcare, institutional mechanisms, the availability of financing, tackling social norms and stereotypes, infrastructure and educational and other measures that contribute to creating an enabling environment for the participation of women. Ministers are encouraged to use the discussion guide and consult the report of the Secretary-General on the priority theme of the sixty-fifth session (E/CN.6/2021/3).

### **B. Discussion guide**

## **Getting to parity: good practices towards achieving women's full and effective participation and decision-making in public life**

Ensuring women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making (Sustainable Development Goal 5.5) is connected to achieving responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels (Goal 16.7). Women serve as heads of State or Government in only 21 countries; 119 have never had a woman leader. Globally, women hold 21 per cent of ministerial positions, 25 per cent of national parliamentary seats and 36 per cent of local deliberative seats. Failure to accelerate women's participation will make it impossible to achieve the Goals by 2030; at the current rate, it will take another 130 years to reach gender parity among heads of State and Government, 56 years among cabinet ministers and 42 years among national parliamentarians.

Although having more women in the public sector and civil service would bring more perspectives of women to policy and public service delivery, women rarely hold leadership posts. Women are estimated to make up fewer than half the number of judges worldwide. A lack of women in public sector decision-making leaves governments ill-equipped to respond to conflict and crises. When women are not consulted or included in decision-making on issues that have a direct impact on their lives, including education, health, economic development and conflict resolution, policy outcomes are likely to be harmful and ineffective and lead to a violation of their rights.

The adoption of, and compliance with, gender quota legislation is the main policy intervention that has improved the participation of women in national and local decision-making. Only 15 countries using legislated candidate quotas at the national level require a target of 50 per cent women, and 10 require a target of more than 40 per cent women or either sex. Quota design is key to successful implementation in elected positions. Only 36 countries have achieved the gender targets established in their quota laws, and 35 require ranking and/or alternate placement requirements for women on candidate lists (such as zipper lists) at the parliamentary level. Without such measures, women risk being placed in unelectable positions.

Good practices include establishing targets, action plans and timelines to achieve gender parity with regard to all executive, legislative and administrative positions at the national and local levels. Gender parity and greater diversity in executive cabinets have been achieved through appointments where there is political will. Solutions for increasing the participation and decision-making of women in the public sector should be applied more systematically to the private sector where women leaders can help to shape public attitudes and expand the pool of women ready to take up decision-making positions in public life.

Ministers are invited to consider the following questions to help to focus the dialogue:

- (a) What steps are Governments taking to achieve the equal participation and representation of women in public life and decision-making?
- (b) What are good-practice examples of temporary special measures, including ambitious gender quotas, that have been designed and implemented to accelerate progress towards the participation of women in executive and legislative decision-making?
- (c) What measures are Governments taking to increase and track the representation of women in public sector leadership positions in institutions such as public administration and the judiciary?

## **Creating an enabling environment for women's full and effective participation and decision-making in public life**

Achieving gender equality is a collective responsibility requiring men and women to transform institutions and systems together to create an enabling environment for equal participation. The

higher levels of poverty, more limited access to finance, greater care duties and challenges to realizing sexual and reproductive health and rights of women, combined with exclusionary institutional rules and procedures, limit their full participation. A lack of care facilities deters women with families and caring responsibilities from pursuing leadership in public life. To reduce the burden on women, more flexible and family-friendly working conditions, including the establishment of support systems, are urgently needed to recruit and retain women of all ages in public institutions.

To ensure an enabling environment for the participation and decision-making of women, measures are needed to make institutions more gender-responsive. Institutions, historically designed by men, have inherent biases and exclusionary practices, including in their structures, policies, procedures, rules and culture, that require scrutiny and reform. Legislatures should put more resources into gender equality committees or commissions, networking forums, women's caucuses and capacity-building with regard to gender equality. Expanding opportunities for collaboration between politicians and women's rights organizations and feminist movements is also critical for driving transformative change.

Enduring negative social norms regarding gender roles, as well as the underrepresentation of women facing multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, shape public perceptions that women should not play an equal role in public life. Young women face double discrimination; women under 30 years of age make up less than one per cent of parliamentarians globally. Such social norms must be countered by raising awareness among community and religious leaders, the media, men and boys and various generations of women, as well as through deliberate action. The support of male leaders who publicly promote gender equality and the empowerment of women is vital for accelerating social norm change. The entry of diverse women into the political pipeline should be encouraged, and the protection of women and girls who experience multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination from violence and discrimination should be ensured.

Violence against women in public life threatens their participation and decision-making. Although there is growing awareness of the problem, it remains global as women in public life face targeted, gender-based psychological, physical and sexual threats and acts of violence, including that of being killed while in office. Online, gender-based abuse, cyberbullying and sexual harassment are increasingly common. Prevention and response require more urgent action at the national level. Good practices include reforming legislation, strengthening access to justice and monitoring and enhancing coordination among various stakeholders. Public institutions should have in place codes of conduct that establish zero tolerance for violence, discrimination and abuse.

A lack of finances is a primary barrier to the participation of women in public life. Women struggle to raise funds to run for elected office. Underinvestment in women's organizations is a persistent challenge. National gender equality mechanisms frequently lack financing to ensure the national planning and budgeting that contribute to gender equality. The creation of conditions and incentives for the campaigns of women candidates to be financially supported by public and private funds, including through gender-sensitive political financing, subsidies for childcare, fundraising networks and non-partisan crowdfunding and endowments, would help. The creation and financing of specific funds that prioritize direct funding to women's organizations and feminist movements would also support the participation of women in public life.

Ministers are invited to consider the following questions to help to focus the dialogue:

- (a) What measures are Governments taking to create an enabling environment for the full and effective participation and decision-making of women that is free from all forms of violence?
- (b) What are examples of good practices through which negative stereotypes and discriminatory attitudes have been addressed successfully to ensure that women are perceived as equally legitimate and effective leaders as men?
- (c) What are examples of effective gender-responsive institutional reforms that have facilitated the equal participation of women and men in public life and decision-making?
- (d) What steps are Governments taking to increase the availability of high-quality financing in support of the participation of women in public life?