

CSW68 UN Women Corporate Side Event

Financing social protection and care systems for the fulfilment of human rights, gender equality and poverty reduction.

DRAFT Concept Note

Monday, 18 March 2024 | 3.00 – 4:15 PM

United Nations Headquarters Conference Room 6

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[Live broadcast link!](#)

Background

Social protection has become prominent on the global development agenda over recent decades. Within the framework of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, national social protection systems feature as a key policy tool to end poverty (SDG 1) and to provide universal health coverage (SDG 3). Provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection together play a key role in promoting human rights and achieving gender equality including through recognizing the value of unpaid care and domestic work that falls predominantly on the shoulders of women and girls and redistributing this burden (SDG 5). Such provision is an essential component of efforts to reduce wage inequalities between women and men (SDG 8) and reduce inequality (SDG 10).

In recent years, the world has experienced cascading, overlapping crises – from the COVID-19 pandemic, the environment and climate emergencies, to escalating conflicts resulting in devastating humanitarian crises, with broader ramifications on global food and energy markets and the global financial system and triggering a cost-of-living crisis. These shocks are intensified by underlying structural crises in jobs, livelihoods, and care. The impact of these crises has reversed progress on poverty eradication and gender equality. Today, 1 in every 10 women is living in extreme poverty (10.3%). If current trends continue, by 2030, an estimated 8% of the world's female population – 342.4 million women and girls – will still be living on less than \$2.15 a day. Most (220.9 million) will reside in sub-Saharan Africa.¹ In this world of sky-rocketing risks and vulnerabilities, the need for universal, gender-responsive social protection systems has never been greater to achieve gender equality, realize human rights and eradicate poverty. As the midpoint in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is fast approaching, such systems could play an important role in putting the SDGs back on track and averting further reversals.

Furthermore, recent evidence shows an alarming trend of debt distress. Developing countries have struggled to secure enough financial resources to respond to and recover from the impacts of cascading crises and have grappled with the quandary of whether to service their debts or their people. Despite these challenges, many developing countries have not fully adopted gender-responsive budgeting (GRB) as a strategic policy approach in addressing

¹ UN Women and UN-DESA. 2023. [Progress on the Sustainable Development Goals: The Gender Snapshot 2023.](#)

inequalities and discrimination. Today, 3.3 billion people live in countries that spend more on interest payments than on education or health.² In 2021, low- and middle-income countries spent 27.5% of their budgets on debt service, which was nearly 12 times that spent on social protection.³

During the past decade, interest payments by developing countries have quadrupled to an all-time high of \$23.6 billion in 2022. This debt crisis with rising borrowing costs is shifting scarce resources away from critical needs such as social protection, poverty eradication, health, education, and the environment.⁴ Moreover, debt-related austerity measures and budget cuts in public services have strongly gendered impacts, foremost among them women's and girls' increasing poverty, exclusion and unpaid care and domestic work.⁵ Given the economic challenges on donor countries, development aid to low-income countries has been drastically cut, as governments prioritize their own recovery efforts, and this is having a significant impact on global initiatives to address gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls.

The multiple crises of the last two decades have exposed the large gaps in coverage, and inadequacy of social protection. Although many countries have made progress in extending social protection coverage and strengthening social protection systems since 2000, including the establishment of effective social protection floors, only 46.9% of the global population is effectively covered by at least one social protection benefit that include the full range of benefits, from child and family benefits to old-age pensions, with coverage of women lagging behind men's by 8 percentage points (34.3% and 26.5% respectively). This left as many as 4.14 billion people unprotected, a coverage gap that limited governments' capacity to reduce poverty, inequality, and vulnerability and to foster social inclusion.⁶

The 25-year review of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995) found that reducing women's poverty and ensuring their right to an adequate standard of living depends on targeting persistent inequalities in access to social protection. Women and girls who face multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination are particularly subject to exclusion and poverty. Mounting evidence⁷ has shown that countries with stronger social protection systems show lower rates of poverty and vulnerability and are more resilient in the face of economic and social transformation. Social protection systems that are well-designed can have powerful impacts of the long-term, by reducing inequalities, building resilience, and ending the inter-generational cycle of poverty. Realizing human right to social security⁸ and to deliver on the 2030 Agenda's promise of leaving no one behind requires particular attention to extending social protection coverage women and girls in all their diversity. This means accelerating progress in implementing integrated and gender-responsive social protection systems, backed by adequate financing with strong political commitment from decision-makers and where social partners, producer organizations and civil society groups are actively involved in the design and implementation of social protection systems that are responsive to people's needs.

² United Nations, [A world of debt. A growing burden to global prosperity](#) (New York, 2023).

³ Oxfam and Development Finance International, [The Commitment to Reducing Inequality Index 2022](#) (Oxford, 2022).

⁴ World Bank. 2023. "[International Debt Report 2023](#)".

⁵ ActionAid, [The Vicious Cycle: Connections Between the Debt Crisis and Climate Crisis](#), Policy Brief, April 2023.

⁶ ILO. 2022. [World Social Protection Report 2020-2022](#).

⁷ OECD. 2018. "[Social Protection System Review: A Toolkit](#)".

⁸ Articles 22 and 25 of the [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#).

While productive employment and decent work remains the basic route out of poverty for individuals, communities and societies, women continue to face multiple forms of discrimination in labour markets. In this context, the Global Accelerator for Jobs and Social Protection, which was launched in September 2021 by the UN Secretary-General in direct response to the multiple crises triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic, is very relevant as a practical solution to address women's poverty, and lack of access to social protection and decent work. The Global Accelerator provides us with a tremendous opportunity to leverage our partnerships with other lead agencies, including ILO, UNICEF, UNDP, FAO and WFP, to position access to decent work and social protection for women and investments in the care economy as priorities for country implementation. In doing so, it could also become an important vehicle for advancing our system-wide strategy on poverty eradication.

Objectives

Against this backdrop, UN Women is convening a high-level panel of diverse leaders to discuss how social protection can be harnessed to realize human rights, promote gender equality and eradicate poverty, especially in the context of multiple crises and repeated shocks. As the global community prepares for the 30th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (B+30) in 2025, the event will bring together speakers to highlight good practices, lessons learned and country examples on how we can accelerate progress to expand social protection over the life course towards realizing rights, strengthening resilience in the face of shocks, and alleviating poverty through links with employment and livelihoods. The corporate side event presents a unique opportunity to bridge the thematic linkages between the priority theme of CSW68 focused on 'Accelerating the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls by addressing poverty and strengthening institutions and financing with a gender perspective' and the review theme of the session on 'Social protection systems, access to public services and sustainable infrastructure for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls.'

Logistics: The side event will be an in-person 1 hour 15 minutes side event on the premises of the United Nations Headquarters held in Conference Room 6.

Format: Moderated panel discussion with selected panellists, using guiding questions to facilitate an interactive dialogue.

Guiding questions:

- How can social services (including care systems and services) and social protection systems and policies be better designed to be gender responsive and lead to eradicating women's income and time poverty? What is working to deliver these social services and social protection in crisis contexts (incl climate crisis) while ensuring an intersectional lens?

- How can we scale-up financing for comprehensive, gender-responsive social protection and care systems in the context of a dramatic deterioration of public finances and an increasing debt crisis across the world? What roles are diverse stakeholder constituencies, including donors, multilateral organizations, and the private sector, playing to facilitate this?
- What are the key proven successes and lessons for harnessing digital and data innovations to increase women’s access to social protection and social services, while ensuring data protection and the rights to privacy?

Agenda

Time	Agenda Item	Speaker
3.00 – 3.15 p.m. EST	Opening Segment	<p>Moderator: Sarah Hendriks, UN Women Director of Policy, Programme and Intergovernmental Division</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sima Bahous, UN Women Executive Director (5 minutes) • Achim Steiner, UNDP Administrator (5 minutes) (TBC) • Catherine Russell, UNICEF Executive Director (5 minutes) (TBC)
3.15 – 3.50 p.m. EST	High-level Panel	<p>Moderator: Sarah Hendriks, UN Women Director of Policy Division (Policy, Programme and Intergovernmental Division)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Her Excellency, Hon. Aisha Jumwa, Cabinet Secretary, Ministry of Gender, Culture, the Arts and Heritage, Government of the Republic of Kenya • Her Excellency Thórdís Kolbrún Reykfjörð Gylfadóttir, Minister of Finance and Economic Affairs, Iceland • Ms. Ana Gallego Torres, Directorate-General for Justice and Consumers, European Commission • Mr. Ernest Rwamucyo, Permanent Representative of Rwanda to the United Nations (TBC) • Dr. Beth Dunford, Vice President of Agriculture, Human and Social Development, African Development Bank • Ms. Erika Ione Gay Geronimo, Executive Director of Oxfam Philipinas

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ms. Greta Bull, Director, Women’s Economic Empowerment, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (TBC)
3.50 – 4.05 p.m. EST	Q&A	Moderator: Sarah Hendriks, UN Women Director of Policy, Programme and Intergovernmental Division
4.05 – 4.10 p.m. EST	Launch of UN Women’s new Economic Empowerment Strategy	Sarah Hendriks, UN Women Director of Policy, Programme and Intergovernmental Division
4.10 – 4.15 p.m. EST	Closing Remarks	Sarah Hendriks, UN Women Director of Policy, Programme and Intergovernmental Division