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United Nations Inter-Agency Network on
Women and Gender Equality



**63RD SESSION OF THE COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN
(CSW-63)**

**Priority theme: “Social Protection Systems, Access to Public Services and Sustainable
Infrastructure for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and Girls”**

Inter-Agency Network on Women and Gender Equality (IANWGE)

Side Event:

***“Ensuring Women and Girls’ Access to Quality and Affordable Social
Protection Services: Innovative Approaches to achieving Empowerment and
Equity”***

Date: 13 March 2019

Time: 4.45 p.m. – 6 p.m.

Venue: Conference Room 12, UN Secretariat

*The side event is organised under the leadership of ECA, in coordination with FAO, ILO,
PAHO, UNAIDS, UNESCO, UNICEF and UN Women.*

1. Context and justification

Over the last decades, social protection has been at the center of the policy debate on poverty reduction, inclusive growth and development, as well as social justice.

Social protection or security is defined as “the set of policies and programmes designed to reduce and prevent poverty and vulnerability throughout the life cycle”. Social protection includes benefits for children and families, maternity, unemployment, employment injury, sickness, old age, disability, survivors, as well as health protection. Thus, social protection systems address all these policy areas by a mix of contributory schemes (social insurance), non-contributory benefits, including social assistance¹ and labor market policies.

¹ ILO Social Protection Report, 2017-2019



Access to social protection (as defined above), is a basic human right, enshrined in major global and regional human rights frameworks including the Human Rights Declaration, CEDAW, and the Beijing Platform for Action. In addition, the ILO Social Protection Floors Recommendation, 2012, (No 202) guarantees at least a basic level of security to all within the framework of a nationally defined social protection floor, and ensures a progressively wider scope and higher level of protection². Furthermore, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) articulated in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development have defined the importance of access to social protection for the achievement of all other goals. World leaders committed themselves to “achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men, including for young people and persons with disabilities, and equal pay for work of value” (SDG 8, target 8.5). Yet SDG 1 (target 1.3) calls upon countries to implement nationally appropriate social protection systems for all, including floors, for reducing and preventing poverty. Furthermore, the interconnection between gender equality, women’s empowerment and the achievement of the SDGs are well established.

All regions have made important improvements in terms of health, education, and employment conditions, among others. Life expectancy has increased and key development indicators such as maternal and under-1 mortality rates and HIV have fallen, and strides have been made to advance gender equality and women’s empowerment.

However, despite such progress, daunting challenges remain. While maternal mortality rates dropped by about 44% between 1990 and 2015, 830 women die worldwide from preventable causes related to pregnancy and childbirth every day, and 99% of such deaths occur in developing countries³.

In Sub-Saharan Africa, adolescent girls and young women (aged 15–24 years) bear the brunt of HIV, accounting for one in four HIV infections in 2017 despite being just 10% of the population. Increased vulnerability to HIV infection has been linked to intimate partner violence, which is more common among younger women and women who are economically dependent on their male partners.⁴ Lack of or limited access to quality and affordable reproductive health services is among the causal factors of such challenges. A lack of services and infrastructure may be especially acute in rural and remote areas.

² ILO World Social Protection Report, 2017-2019

³ Global, regional, and national levels and trends in maternal mortality between 1990 and 2015, with scenario-based projections to 2030: a systematic analysis by the UN Maternal Mortality Estimation Inter-Agency Group.

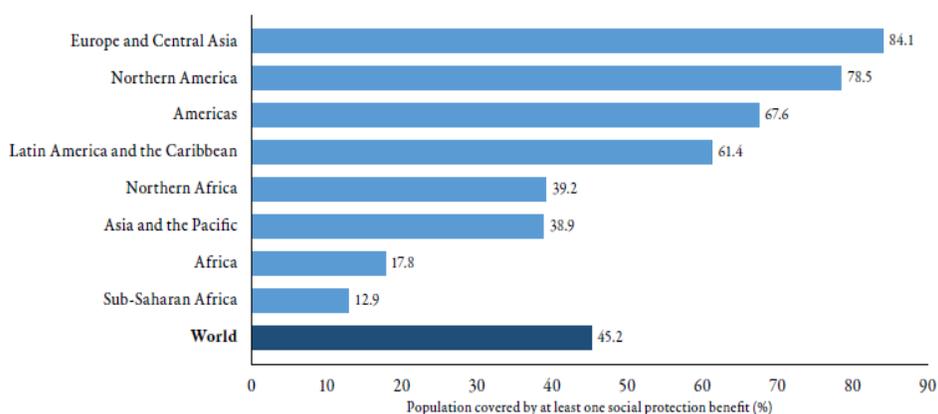
Alkema L, Chou D, Hogan D, Zhang S, Moller AB, Gemmill A, et al. *Lancet*. 2016; 387 (10017): 462-74.

⁴ Miles to Go: Closing gaps, righting injustices, Global AIDS Update. UNAIDS 2018



With regards to social protection coverage, the ILO's 2017-2018 World Social Protection Report suggests that 4 billion people worldwide are left without social protection. Only 29% of the global population enjoys access to comprehensive social security suggesting a small increase compared to 27% coverage in 2014-2015. The proportion of the population that is covered by at least one form of social protection is estimated at 45,2 %, as shown in figure 1 below⁵.

Figure 1: SDG indicator 1.3.1 Percentage of the Total of population covered by at least one social protection benefit (effective coverage), 2015



Note: Coverage corresponds to the sum of persons protected by contributory schemes and recipients of contributory and non-contributory benefits expressed as a percentage of the total population. Regional and global estimates weighted by the number of people. Health protection is not included under SDG indicator 1.3.1. Data for other regions are not sufficient to allow for regional estimates. See also Annex II.

Sources: ILO, World Social Protection Database, based on SSI; ILOSTAT; national sources. See also Annex IV, table B.3.

Link: <http://www.social-protection.org/gimi/gess/RessourceDownload.action?ressource.ressourceId=54618>

Source: ILO, World Social Protection Report 2017-2019

Access to affordable, sustainable and quality public services and social protection to groups living in situations of vulnerability is one of the daunting challenges facing many countries and disproportionately affects women and girls. Far too often, adolescent girls and women face more challenges than boys and men in accessing affordable public services that would help ensure crucial aspects of their wellbeing and dignity, including education, sexual, reproductive and HIV health services. Gender inequality, combined with disability, ethnic, racial discrimination along with HIV infection, tend to exacerbate the exclusion of women and girls from social protection coverage especially in poor and rural communities. For rural women and girls, gender-related

⁵ ILO, World Social Protection Report 2017-2019



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Women and Gender Equality



norms and practices can create barriers to equally participating in and benefitting from social protection. Consequently, rural women face greater challenges than their male counterparts in overcoming poverty and building resilient livelihoods.⁶

Few women have access to social protection, compared to men. Insights into some of the causal factors

Gender gaps in access to social protection are pervasive with women still being excluded from many social security systems. Worldwide, as low as 26.4% of working-age women are covered by contributory old-age protection, compared to 31.5% of the total working-age population⁷. While women in developing countries are the most affected, sub-regional variations should also be taken into account. For instance, only 8% of women in North Africa receive an old-age pension compared to 63.6% of elderly men.

Women's very limited access to social protection services is the result of many combined structural and socio-cultural factors, including gender gaps in the labor markets, gender occupational segregations, and the related low pay for women. All of these factors are also linked to social and cultural norms which in some countries restrict women's mobility, agency, education and employment opportunities.

Recent data points to the pervasive low proportion of women in the labor market worldwide. Women's global labor force participation is estimated at 48.5%, which is 26.6 percentage points below that of men⁸. In addition, women are concentrated in the informal sector and in vulnerable employment where they represent about 72%. In addition, as table 1 below shows, 42.3% of female employees in developing countries are contributing to family work rather than own-account, which is often associated with lack of access to social protection services. Rural women generally have irregular, informal and interrupted employment histories. In particular, women working in agriculture often contribute unpaid work to family farms in addition to performing care and domestic responsibilities. Furthermore, many face statutory and/or customary barriers to land tenure and inheritance. As a result, they are less able than men to contribute to social security schemes, including pensions and maternity protection.

⁶ FAO (2018), FAO Technical Guide 1. Introduction to gender-sensitive social protection programming to combat rural poverty: Why is it important and what does it mean? Rome.

ILO (2014), World Social Protection Report 2014-2015

⁸ ILO, "The World Social Protection Report, 2017-2019. Universal Social Protection to Achieve SDGs



Table 1: Share and trends in own-account and contributing family work, 2009-21

Country/region	Share of own-account workers in total employment (percentages) and gender gap (percentage points)					Share of contributing family workers in total employment (percentages) and gender gap (percentage points)				
	Men	Women	Gap (Women – Men)			Men	Women	Gap (Women – Men)		
	2018	2018	2009–18	2018	2018–21	2018	2018	2009–18	2018	2018–21
World	36.2	26.1	▼	-10.1	▼	6.4	16.6	▼	10.2	▶
Developing countries	51.7	39.4	▲	-12.3	▲	20.2	42.3	▲	22.1	▶
Emerging countries	39.9	29.5	▼	-10.5	▼	6.2	17.0	▼	10.8	▶
Developed countries	10.6	6.9	▼	-3.6	▲	0.5	1.6	▼	1.1	▶
Northern Africa	22.1	15.4	▲	-6.7	▲	5.7	24.5	▼	18.8	▼
Sub-Saharan Africa	50.1	47.1	▲	-3.0	▲	16.2	31.7	▲	15.5	▲
Latin America and the Caribbean	29.3	25.6	▲	-3.7	▼	2.9	6.5	▼	3.7	▶
Northern America	7.6	5.5	▼	-2.1	▲	0.1	0.1	▶	0.0	▶
Arab States	14.5	6.9	▲	-7.6	▲	3.3	10.6	▼	7.3	▲
Eastern Asia	26.4	19.2	▼	-7.2	▲	3.7	13.1	▼	9.4	▼
South-Eastern Asia and the Pacific	34.0	29.8	▼	-4.2	▼	7.8	22.2	▼	14.4	▼
Southern Asia	60.8	46.5	▼	-14.2	▲	9.1	31.9	▼	22.8	▶
Northern, Southern and Western Europe	12.4	7.7	▼	-4.7	▼	0.7	1.3	▼	0.6	▶
Eastern Europe	11.1	7.6	▲	-3.4	▲	0.9	1.6	▼	0.7	▶
Central and Western Asia	23.3	16.6	▲	-6.6	▼	5.0	15.4	▼	10.4	▼

Note: Throughout this report, figures for 2018 and beyond are projections. Developments for the periods 2009–18 and 2018–21 are marked with a red upward arrow if the gender gap in the share of own-account workers or contributing family workers is projected to widen by more than 0.1 percentage points, a green downward arrow if it is projected to narrow by more than 0.1 percentage points and a blue horizontal arrow for projections between those values. Numbers in the “Gap” column refer to the percentage point difference between the female and male shares of employment in own-account or contributing family work but may not correspond precisely due to rounding. For a detailed list of regional and country income groupings, see online Appendix A.

Source: ILO’s Trends Econometric Models, November 2017 (see online Appendix B for details).

Moreover, the gender pay gap remains a critical issue in all regions. The 2018 ILO Global Wage Report shows that there is not a single country where women are paid as much as men. The gender pay gap is pervasive worldwide, with women earning 80% of men’s pay⁹. Consequently, women’s contribution to and benefit from social protection schemes tend to be lower than men’s. Women who are also members of marginalized communities due to race, religion, sexuality, disability status and more, often face even more significant gaps in pay.

Despite evidence on the important gender differentials in access to and benefit from social protection services due to structural norms and values, and gender bias in the economic, social and political spheres, mainstream social protection policies, schemes and strategies are designed based on the male breadwinner approach.

However, if designed in a comprehensive manner, informed by an analysis and full understanding of women’s and men’s differential constraints, options, incentives and needs (COINs), using a life

⁹ ILO 2018, Global Wage Report



cycle approach, social protection can constitute a pathway to women's empowerment, breaking the vicious cycle of gender inequality, discrimination against women (women's poverty feminization) thereby, reversing the current inequality trap. Such a strategic approach is essential to achievement of SDGs leaving no one behind.

It is against this backdrop that a side event will be organized by the United Nations Inter-Agency Network on Women and Gender Equality (IANWGE) on 13 March 2019, on the theme ***“Ensuring Women and Girls’ Access to Quality and Affordable Social Protection Services: Innovative Approaches to achieving Empowerment and Equity***, on the margins of the 63rd Session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW-63). The theme is aligned with the CSW-63 priority theme, ***“Social protection systems, Access to Public Service and Sustainable Infrastructure for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and Girls”***. The IANWGE event will be organized under the leadership of ECA, in coordination with UNICEF, UNAIDS, PAHO, UN Women, FAO, ILO and UNESCO.

2) Objective of the Side event

Drawing from recent research and cross-country experiences, the main objective of the side event is to discuss and showcase innovative approaches to address women's and girl's unmet social protection needs.

Specific objectives of the side event are to:

- Stimulate policy debate on the structural and emerging barriers to women's and girls' access to social protection infrastructures and services;
- Share country success stories on the provision of successful, innovative social protection schemes that reach all women, irrespective of their locations and socio-economic status;
- Define action-oriented policy recommendations to support countries, the UN and partners to address the pervasive trends of low social protection access and benefit by women and girls, using a life cycle approach. Attention will be placed on the specific needs of women and girls, including women with disabilities and people living in situations of vulnerability, in order to encourage momentum to scale up comprehensive and inclusive social protection schemes, so as to achieve the empowerment of women and girls through gender equitable access to and benefit from social infrastructures and services.

Expected achievements from the side event

- Cross regional and country best practices (empirical evidences, policies, solutions), success stories shared;



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Women and Gender Equality



- Inter-sectoral and inter-agency experiences promoting quality, sustainable and affordable social protection public services including universal health care for all women and girls unpacked and lessons learnt discussed;
- Greater understanding achieved of structural and emerging challenges, and inhibiting factors to the provision of gender transformative social protection services to all groups of women and girls to ensure no one is left behind;
- Political engagement of stakeholders harnessed for the development of synergies between social protection systems and other strategies for ending poverty and inequality including HIV, health and disability, human rights and the advancing gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls.