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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”: social protection systems, access to public services and sustainable infrastructure for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls

Ministerial round tables: good practices in the provision of social protection, public services and sustainable infrastructure, including for recognizing and valuing unpaid care and domestic work

Chairs’ summary

1. On 11 March 2019, the Commission on the Status of Women held two ministerial round tables on the topic “Good practices in the provision of social protection, public services and sustainable infrastructure, including for recognizing and valuing unpaid care and domestic work” under the priority theme “Social protection systems, access to public services and sustainable infrastructure for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls”. Participants exchanged experiences, challenges and good practices in relation to the topic, with an emphasis on existing national legislative and policy frameworks and on measures that have delivered concrete results for women and girls.

2. The Cabinet Secretary for Public Service, Youth and Gender Affairs of Kenya, Margaret Kobia, chaired the first round table and made introductory remarks. Ministers and high-level officials from 21 Member States and one observer participated in the first round table. The Deputy Executive Director of the International Trade Centre, Dorothy Tembo, summarized key messages and made closing remarks. The Vice-President of Colombia, Marta Lucía Ramírez, chaired the second round table and made introductory remarks. She was followed by the Presidential Adviser for Women’s Equality of Colombia, Ana María Tribín Uribe, in chairing the second round table. Ministers and high-level officials from 16 Member States participated. The Deputy Executive Director of the United Nations Entity for



Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), Åsa Regnér, summarized key messages and made closing remarks.

Coordinated and integrated approaches

3. Participants discussed the need for an integrated approach to improve the design and delivery of social protection systems, public services and sustainable infrastructure for women and girls. They stressed that, in order to accelerate poverty reduction and enhance crisis prevention with a view to achieving sustainable development as envisioned in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, gender equality and women's empowerment needed to be fully leveraged in, and central to, policy approaches.

4. Participants reported on progress in removing discriminatory provisions from laws and policies to enhance women's access to social protection systems, public services and sustainable infrastructure. They called for gender-responsive legal and policy frameworks, enforced by strong institutions that involved the meaningful participation of all women and girls. They also called for increased budgetary allocations and government accountability frameworks to realize gender equality and the empowerment of women in those areas. In that regard, they stressed the importance of robust and timely gender statistics, including by conducting regular time-use surveys.

Recognizing and valuing unpaid care and domestic work in national social protection systems and through public services

5. Participants drew attention to the value and contribution of unpaid care and domestic work to the well-being of societies and economies. At the same time, they highlighted the implications for women and girls, who shoulder most of that work. They discussed how investments in social protection systems, public services and sustainable infrastructure could lead to the recognition, valuing and redistribution of unpaid care and domestic work. Speakers called for social protection programmes that place a value on the time spent on unpaid care and domestic work, for example, through universal non-contributory pensions and the inclusion of "care credits" in contributory schemes. Examples were provided of various income transfers (e.g., conditional and unconditional cash transfers, social pensions, disability allowances), social insurance mechanisms and other measures to enhance the income security of low-income families. In that regard, the importance of women's access to income transfers as a way to enhance their voice in household decision-making was stressed.

6. Participants acknowledged the role of labour markets in addressing the unequal division of unpaid care and domestic work between women and men. Speakers described existing efforts to create an enabling environment for women's participation in the labour market and their economic empowerment, as well as efforts to support women in those endeavours. Legal and policy reforms that aim to facilitate the reconciliation of work and family responsibilities and to encourage equal sharing of such responsibilities between women and men were discussed, including paid maternity and parental leave schemes and the provision of accessible, affordable and quality childcare and elderly care services.

7. The precarious status of women and girls who work as contributing family workers was also raised, as was their exclusion from social protection coverage. Speakers pointed out that women's role as unpaid care providers combined with the absence of comprehensive services and infrastructure to support them remained the largest contributor to income inequality between women and men. Several participants also expressed concern about the economic and social conditions of

domestic workers, who often work without a contract, for low wages and with little or no social protection.

8. Participants emphasized the need for universal national care systems that included care services for preschool children, persons with disabilities and frail and older persons as contributions towards gender equality and the empowerment of women. Formal education and vocational training were critical in changing expectations regarding women's and girls' traditional gender roles and responsibilities and in support of women's pursuit of paid work. Free, universal and compulsory education, school and afterschool meal programmes that enhanced girls' school attendance and education subsidies for girls in low-income and marginalized households and for girls with disabilities were among the measures taken towards that end.

9. The availability of universal health-care services was critical for reducing some of the unpaid care responsibilities of women and girls within their households. Examples of strengthened universal health coverage, especially for women and girls, and including coverage of reproductive health services, were provided. Participants also described the availability of preventive health measures, free health-care services for children under 5 and universal health insurance as examples of public services to accelerate gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls.

Mainstreaming gender perspectives into the design and implementation of sustainable infrastructure

10. Participants highlighted the importance of gender-responsive sustainable infrastructure in alleviating women's unpaid care and domestic work responsibilities. Investments in renewable energy, water and sanitation, public transport and information and communications technology, for example, could reduce the drudgery of unpaid domestic work. Improvements in household energy supply could also reduce the incidence of deaths from indoor air pollution due to the use of biofuels. Similar benefits could be harnessed through improvements in water supply and management, for example, by protecting water ecosystems to improve water quality in order to sustain human health and by providing water on tap in order to reduce the drudgery involved in fetching it.

11. Participants noted that integrating gender considerations in, for example, infrastructure design in rural and urban transport systems could also contribute to the prevention of gender-based violence. Women's employment, including at the decision-making level, in the infrastructure sector was a means to address labour market segregation and thus the gender pay gap. Investments in information and communications technology infrastructure, especially in underserved rural areas, could enhance access to information and create decent work opportunities through women's entrepreneurship.