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## Commission on the Status of Women

### Sixty-third session

11–22 March 2019

Agenda item 3 (a) (i)

**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**

## **High-level interactive dialogue among ministers on building alliances for social protection systems, access to public services and sustainable infrastructure for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls**

### **Chair’s summary**

1. On 12 March 2019, the Commission on the Status of Women held a high-level ministerial dialogue on “Building alliances for social protection systems, access to public services and sustainable infrastructure for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls” 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, lessons learned and good practices in relation to the topic.
2. The Minister for Equality, Immigration and Integration of Ireland, David Stanton, chaired and moderated the high-level dialogue. The meeting opened with an introduction by the Chair, followed by his question-and-answer session with the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, the Chair of The Elders, Mary Robinson, and the Chief Executive Officer of Plan International, Anne-Birgitte Albrechtsen. Subsequently, ministers and high-level officials from 38 Member States exchanged good practices, modalities and ongoing and planned initiatives and efforts to build alliances and partnerships in regard to the priority theme. Four representatives from non-governmental organizations contributed their perspectives.



**Experiences, good practices and strategies for addressing challenges and advancing social protection, public services and sustainable infrastructure**

3. Participants recognized that social protection systems, including social protection floors, access to public services and sustainable infrastructure play a key role in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. They should be geared towards the elimination of discrimination on all grounds and support women's and girls' enjoyment of their human rights. Attention was drawn to the needs of women and girls facing multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, including women and girls with disabilities, who continued to experience added challenges in accessing social protection and public and infrastructure services.

4. Participants noted challenges in fully utilizing the potential of social protection, public services and infrastructure, including the lack or limited availability and low quality thereof and gaps in terms of accessibility, as well as the lack of attention given to the specific needs and roles of women and girls in that regard. Policies and programmes thus needed to be more coherent and place the rights, needs and opportunities of women, adolescent girls and young women at their centre. Examples of enhanced coordination between gender equality mechanisms and other government agencies were highlighted.

5. Participants provided examples of legal and policy reforms, plans and programmes to ensure women's and girls' access to social protection and public services. Social protection systems should also contribute to systematically addressing negative social norms and stereotypes. Opportunities for making the infrastructure sector more gender-responsive were put forward, including in areas such as energy and renewable energy, transport, water and sanitation. In that regard, the importance of addressing climate change was highlighted, together with the need to build women's resilience.

6. While emphasizing the need for gender-responsive approaches to social protection, public services and sustainable infrastructure, speakers were concerned about the lack of awareness and technical capacity at different levels of government, including at the local level, and inadequate coordination and cross-cutting approaches within government. Participants provided examples of how such capacity gaps had been addressed, including through gender-responsive national sustainable development policies, national gender equality policies and strategies and the monitoring of progress. Inter-agency bodies contributed to effective gender-responsive implementation in all stages of the implementation of such policies and strategies. Capacity-building in the areas of gender equality and gender mainstreaming had been used extensively to strengthen implementation.

7. Participants stressed the need for funding and investing in gender-responsive social protection systems and public and infrastructure services and provided examples of political will in that regard resulting in increased resources. Gender-responsive budgeting, dedicated public funds and cash transfer programmes, in particular for women engaged in unpaid care work and the informal economy, had resulted in better social protection. Alternative funding sources, including from philanthropic organizations and foundations, could be tapped. International financial institutions and global funds also had a role to play in mainstreaming gender perspectives into public projects and programmes. In addition, it was necessary to focus more attention on civil society organizations and those delivering social services, many of which were chronically underfunded.

8. Speakers acknowledged that the participation of women and women's organizations in policy development and service delivery contributed to greater gender responsiveness. They gave examples of enhancing women's participation in

decision-making processes at all levels, which sometimes had been achieved through quotas and securing adequate funding.

**Building alliances for gender-responsive social protection systems, public services and sustainable infrastructure**

9. Participants underscored that alliances among stakeholders could contribute to greater coherence in policy approaches regarding social protection systems, public services and sustainable infrastructure and help to deliver better results for women and girls. Such alliances should include enhanced coordination among government entities in all areas and at all levels, including municipal and local government institutions. Likewise, cooperation with civil society organizations, including women's organizations, could strengthen universal access to social protection systems, public services and sustainable infrastructure. Coordination with other partners, including the United Nations system, as well as cooperation in the field of international development, could also contribute to enhancing women's and girls' access.

10. Speakers recognized the critical role of civil society organizations as partners in delivering public services, expanding the reach of social protection systems and reducing the vulnerabilities of local communities. Strong partnerships between Governments and civil society have been effective in increasing access to services such as health care, education and microfinance and in developing sustainable and climate-resilient infrastructure. Partnerships in which civil society organizations deliver public services and social protection financed by Governments have been effective, for example, in providing integrated support, including shelters, for women victims and survivors of violence. The coordination of advocacy efforts between Governments and civil society organizations has contributed to greater outreach and expanded awareness-raising on gender equality and empowerment by reinforcing messages through different communication channels.

11. Participants highlighted the private sector as a key partner in reinforcing efforts by Governments and civil society, including by creating decent work and expanding job opportunities for women. Strengthened alliances and coordination between Governments and the private sector, including businesses and those sectors focusing on science, technology, engineering and mathematics, were seen as essential in ensuring that women and girls could take advantage of evolving and changing economic opportunities. Participants also reiterated the importance of investing in education and training as a catalytic factor in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls.

12. Participants stressed the need for alliances among government, private sector and civil society stakeholders in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, including in delivering social protection systems, public services and sustainable infrastructure to those who need them the most. The United Nations system would play an important role in the timely realization of the Sustainable Development Goals, in partnership with all relevant stakeholders.