



65th Session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women, 15 – 26 March 2021, The Netherlands' Civil Society Priorities for the Agreed Conclusions

Women's full and effective participation and decision-making in public life and ending violence against women are key for achieving gender equality. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic the CSW65 will for the first time in history take place online, which brings challenges and opportunities for equal participation of women and girls in all their diversity. In light of Covid-19, the Black Lives Matter protests, which stressed the need for intersection and transformational approaches, and the CSW65 priority themes, the Netherlands' civil society has identified a set of priorities for the Agreed Conclusions.

Where do we stand?

Women's representation in national parliaments was on average 24% globally in 2019. Gender balance in parliament has been achieved in 9% of States. This representation is higher at the local levels (36%)¹. The COVID-19 pandemic has affected women in a plethora of ways, including their participation in public life, gender equality efforts, and the elimination of gender-based violence. For example²:

- Women are overrepresented in essential jobs in healthcare and educational settings, putting them at higher risks of COVID-19 exposure, exhaustion, and additional COVID-19 related stress. At the same time, women are underrepresented in managerial positions in these sectors where many of the work conditions are determined; and in decision making positions related to the COVID-19 response.
- Women are overrepresented in jobs in the tourism, food, hospitality sectors and informal labour sectors which have been hard hit due to COVID-19 measures, resulting in a disproportionate loss of jobs for women.
- The pandemic and related measures (such as working from home, closure of schools and child care) lead to an increase in unpaid care work (home schooling, taking care of sick relatives) which disproportionately affects women.
- With the temporal school-closures children are at risk of educational delay. Girls are extra vulnerable for educational delays as they are often expected to perform domestic tasks and care for their siblings.
- Women and girls face higher risk of domestic violence, as lockdown measures result in being housebound with the abuser.
- A growing digital (gender) divide is taking place between those who can participate online and those who can not based on digital skills and resources available (such as laptops and internet connections). Women and girls, and women's organizations, are particularly affected.

Despite the urgency of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is vital that funding and activities in response to other crises such as **climate change, the shrinking space for civil society, the gender equality backlash, and ongoing conflicts** are expanded. In times of crises, leadership is put to the test and new leadership can emerge. It is critical that the role of all women and girls is recognized and that their participation in (online) decision making is ensured on all levels.

Recommendations

Encountering discrimination and violence prevents women and girls to play a full and effective role in decision-making and public life. Therefore, an integrated approach should be implemented. The following recommendations are key for the Agreed Conclusions³:

1) Ensure women's full and meaningful participation and decision making in public life

Women work fewer paid hours than men and are underrepresented in managerial positions, partly as a result of gender stereotypes and gender inequality in the labour market. Economic and political participation will aid in debunking stereotypes about traditional gender roles and will increase the financial independence and security of all women.

The Agreed Conclusions therefore must:

- Ensure Member States **collect standardized disaggregated data** - with respect for privacy and human rights - on participation of all women and girls in public life. This data should be publicly available whereby media and CSOs can play an important role in using the data for monitoring and advocacy purposes.
- Urge Member States to **ensure a gender balance in decision-making** at all institutions and all levels (local, national and international). States must adopt and implement effective measures, including gender quota and gender equality trainings, for the public and private sectors to accelerate equal participation of all women in decision-making and leadership, including for women facing multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination.
- Call upon Member States to **make democratic processes accessible for people with disabilities**, as currently in particular persons with a physical or mental disability or a visual impairment, do not have full access to polling stations.
- Call upon Member States to **ensure full and effective participation in peace processes** for all women and girls. Mediators for example should ensure real inclusive processes; cultural sensitivities cannot be an excuse for excluding women from formal decision making processes by giving them an advisory role.
- Call upon Member States to ensure **access to affordable and quality health-care services** for all women and girls through, among others, universal health coverage that includes access to sexual and reproductive health and rights across the life course and ensure that all women and girls can decide about their health and bodies.
- Call upon Member States to implement policies to **recognise, reduce and redistribute unpaid care work, facilitate the transition of informal work to formal work, and promote measures** such as flexible working hours, alternative workplaces, parental leave, and free (or affordable) child care that enable all women to participate in decision making in public life.

¹ https://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/csw/65/egm/csw65%20egm%20report_final.pdf?la=en&vs=253

² [policy-brief-the-impact-of-covid-19-on-women-en.pdf \(unwomen.org\)](#)

³ Apart from the recommendations given in this 2-pager, the Dutch civil society endorses the recommendations given in the Expert Group Meeting Report and wants to emphasize that the recommendations done by Dutch civil society in 2020 for Beijing+25 are also still relevant and applicable.

- Call upon Member States to **ensure the rights to freedom of expression, assembly and association** for all women's organizations (registered and unregistered) and Women Human Rights Defenders, without discrimination and ensure they have equal access to resources.

2) Eliminate gender-based violence

Gender-based violence (GBV) is one of the most wide-spread, persistent and devastating human rights violations in our world today, affecting women and girls in all their diversity.

The Agreed Conclusions therefore must:

- Call upon Member States to **work on prevention**, in partnership with CSOs and by engaging men and boys, by implementing gender-transformative campaigns, programs, comprehensive sexuality education and services that focus on the underlying institutional structures and internalized beliefs that fuel violence and harassment.
- Call upon Member States to **take measures to address violence and harassment**, including GBV, in the workplace and to ratify and fully implement ILO Convention 190 and its accompanying Recommendation 206.
- Urge Member States to **provide protection as well as access to justice, effective reparations and remedies for survivors**, including multidisciplinary and gender-sensitive preventive and protective health, legal and informative measures and services that prioritize SRHR and HIV.
- Ensure **the protection of all Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs)**, including girls and young women WHRDs, LGBTI activists, sex worker rights activists, migrant rights activists and environmental activists.

3) Challenge gender stereotypes

Gender stereotypes exist all around us and describe -and prescribe!- what is considered feminine and masculine behaviour. Challenging gender stereotypes contribute to more equal opportunities for all to design their own educational, working, and private lives.

The Agreed Conclusions therefore must:

- Stress that **gender stereotypes are socially constructed**, rooted in historical and structural inequalities and unequal power relations, impact people's personal and public life **and need to be transformed**. Harmful traditions, beliefs and social norms should not be reasons for countries to make reservations to international conventions and agreements which hinder women's and girls' participation and foster gender-based discrimination.
- Call upon Member states to **invest more in building the foundations for women's political participation and breaking down gender and societal norms** through civic education and showing role models.
- Call upon Member States to ensure that private and public sectors, including education departments, **take effective measures against gender bias and stereotypes** in teacher training and educational materials and by creating HR and remuneration policies that are free of harmful gender stereotypes.
- Call upon Member States to urge advertisers and entertainment providers to stop using harmful stereotypes and **start working with all girls and women to produce content that truly challenges harmful gender norms** in society, increase diversity in representation, and increase the use of affirmative language.

4) Take an intersectional approach

An intersectional approach is important to take into account the variety of backgrounds and positions of women, in particular on different intersections such as age, ethnicity, migration status, education, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity and socioeconomic status. This is necessary to do justice to the multiple experiences of discrimination and (in)equality amongst girls and women.

The Agreed Conclusions therefore must:

- Call upon Member States to **combat the manifestations and root causes of intersecting forms of discrimination** and to protect and promote the rights of all women and girls, ensuring their full and effective participation and inclusion in society. Recognise the global increase in polarisation and manifestations of racism, xenophobia and intolerance against marginalised groups and take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social, educational, employment and other measures.

5) Ensure a gender transformative COVID-19 response

The pandemic deepens the already existing gender inequalities. It is therefore important to ensure that women and girls are able to participate in formal decisions regarding the pandemic and related measures and that their specific needs and realities - such as the Gender-based violence Pandemic are taken into account.

The Agreed Conclusions therefore must:

- Call upon Member States to **monitor the impact of the pandemic on all girls and women's health and social and economic participation**, in close collaboration with CSOs (incl. trade unions and employers organisations), and ensure that programmes and policies are addressing gender inequalities.
- Call upon Member States to **appoint women and girls in all their diversity in leadership positions and decision making bodies in combating the pandemic** and its societal (health and social) and economic effects.