

CSW 63 – Side Event

Social protection, public services and sustainable infrastructure: Policy coherence for the empowerment of women in informal employment

Wednesday, 13 March 2019, 3:00-4:15pm

CR-11

Globally, 740 million women make their living in the informal economy, accounting for 58 per cent of total female employment. They are overrepresented in the least secure and lowest-paying jobs as domestic workers, home-based workers or contributing family workers who are employed without direct pay in family businesses. Without their economic empowerment, sustainable poverty eradication (SDG 1), gender equality (SDG 5), decent work (8), reduced inequalities (SDG 10), inclusive cities (SDG 11) will remain out of reach.

As urbanisation rates continue to rise in emerging and developing countries, women are increasingly finding informal work in urban and peri-urban areas. Most of these women have, by definition, no or very limited access to social protection and often lack basic infrastructure, such as electricity, water and sanitation, that could make their work more productive. Public services, such as transport, health or childcare, also often remain inaccessible and ill-conceived to respond to their realities.

While the need to extend social protection to women in informal employment is now widely recognized, the synergies and trade-offs between social protection, public services and sustainable infrastructure for informal workers remain underexplored. Urban policies and regulations, for example, often cast informal workers as undesirable and restrict their use of public spaces, such as roadsides or markets, potentially undermining the benefits of social protection programmes aimed at stabilising women's incomes.

Strengthening policy coherence—across sectors and levels of government—is hence critical to make social protection systems, public services and sustainable infrastructure work for women in informal employment. The panel will explore synergies, tensions and pathways to policy coherence for the empowerment of women in informal employment. It will engage member states, international organizations and civil society, including grassroots organizations of women informal workers, in an interactive discussion with the audience.

Key Questions

- How do social protection, public services and sustainable infrastructure interact in promoting or undermining the economic empowerment of women in informal employment?
- How do we think systematically about linkages, tensions and complementarities?
- What is the role of different actors – international organizations, national governments, donors in creating greater policy coherence?
- How are grassroots organizations of informal workers pushing the state to move beyond its bureaucratic divisions to one that is more suited to the realities of their working lives? What good practice examples exist?

Speakers (all confirmed)

Moderator

- Sarah Gammage, Director of Gender, Economic Empowerment and Livelihoods, International Center for Research on Women (ICRW)

Panelists

- H.E. Cynthia Mamle Morrison, Minister for Gender, Children and Social Protection, Ghana
- Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, Executive Director of UN Women
- Ms Ulrika Modéer, Director of the Bureau for External Relations and Advocacy, UN Development Programme, UNDP
- Grete Faremo, Executive Director, UNOPS
- Laura Alfes, Social Protection Programme Director, WIEGO, South Africa
- Susan Thomas, Head of Health & Childcare Team, Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA), India