



63rd Session of the Commission on the Status of Women
Multi-Stakeholders Forum
1 February 2019

**Panel 1: Social protection systems for gender equality and the
empowerment of women and girls**



Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me on the outset to express appreciation to UN-Women for convening this meeting and inviting me to contribute to this panel discussion in preparation of the 63rd Session of CSW.

The upcoming session will provide us with an important opportunity to tackle the correlation between gender equality and social protection. This is an important issue in connection with the effective implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action as well as the 2030 agenda for sustainable development while ensuring that no one is left behind.

Social and economic rights, including their social protection components, and gender equality have always been a priority in Tunisia. The democratic transition process gave us a unique and unprecedented opportunity to review both the social protection and gender equality issues within the comprehensive reform that is being conducted in the country since 2011.

The interlinkage between social protection and gender equality is clearly highlighted in the new Constitution of 2014 and particularly in article 12 which introduces the “principle of positive discrimination” as a mean to achieve social justice.

Social protection in Tunisia is organized around a relatively well-structured and wide-ranging system composed of two pillars:

- The first pillar is contributory and is composed of three schemes:
 - ✓ National Pension and Social Insurance Fund (CNRPS), for the public sector;
 - ✓ National Social Security Fund (CNSS), for the private sector;

both of which cover old-age, invalidity, death, and family benefits.



- ✓ And, third, the National Health Insurance Fund (CNAM) which covers for its part sickness, accident and occupational disease for both public and private sector contributors.

The contributory system in Tunisia identifies clear and transparent criteria to adequately establish levels of coverage that meet the adequacy principle since they are indexed on wages. The same applies to the retirement risk which uses the most recent reference salary to calculate pensions.

- The second pillar consists of a non-contributory system which is mainly based on a direct cash transfers scheme, known as Assistance Programme for needy families, elderly and persons with Disabilities, and on a health access programme providing access to public medical institutions either free of charge or at a reduced rate. This non-contributory system is of great importance as it allows the most vulnerable population to access healthcare and to receive a minimum income.

These two pillars enable an equal social protection of women and men. At the same time, they recognize that although women face the same risks as men such as unemployment, sickness and old age, they also face a number of gender-specific vulnerabilities such as pregnancy and child birth that require specific protection. For this reason, the social protection system ensures the provision of certain services that benefit to women and girls including paid maternity leave, creche allocations for mothers as well as access to sexual and reproductive health services such as free access to child birth and maternal care, contraceptives and family planning.

The legislative and institutional arsenal gradually expanded to include most of the active labor force including all public service workers, in addition to the introduction of other categories to the non-contributory system such as students and apprentices that do not enjoy the status of workers.

I shall point out here that the social protection of women cannot achieve the empowerment of women and girls, unless it is embedded within a holistic approach for gender equality. Therefore, Tunisia is conducting global reforms to ensure a rights-based approach to social protection. The most recent reform was the adoption of the first law on the elimination of violence against women, which defines and punish economic violence and economic discrimination against women.



The introduction of the gender parity in the first democratic municipal elections led to 47% of women representation. This will not only ensure the full participation of women but will also contribute to the establishment of a more gender-sensitive local policies in providing access to infrastructure and services to women based on their real needs. Furthermore, several dispositions in the development plan 2016 – 2020 and the launch of a dialogue regarding equality in inheritance are important steps to ensure that women and girls have access to land and ownership rights as well to all other resources that will boost their economic resilience and livelihood by stimulating job creation and improving human capital.

Finally, I would like to highlight the particular attention given by the Tunisian Government to rural women. Rural women are overrepresented in the agricultural informal labor. They face a particularly higher risk to be partially or completely excluded from the social protection system. The Ministry of Women recently conducted, in cooperation with UN-Women, a study in five highly rural Governorates. It shows that the average rural woman is 42 years old, married and is the secondary provider for her family. This means that, in average, rural women are more likely to continue working in the informal sector while benefiting from social protection that their husbands might be affiliated to. What this study showcases is that women are dependent on their male spouses in matters of social security and are less likely than men to access contributory social protection systems in their own right which hinders their full emancipation and their achievement of gender equality.

In this regard, the Tunisian Government adopted in 2017 the National Strategy for socio-economic empowerment of women and girls in rural areas 2017 – 2020. A multisectoral program has been signed between the Ministries of women, social affairs and agriculture allocating in 2018 19.5 Million USD to provide social protection coverage for half a million women in rural areas. Around 1.3 million rural women would benefit directly or indirectly from these funds.

However, despite the progress made, a gender sensitive social protection is still necessary not only to reach gender equality, but also to foster wider economic and social development and inclusion. Such strategies need to involve all relevant stakeholders through public private partnerships in order to galvanize a social and solidarity economy, in addition to the important roles of civil society actors and international partnerships to reduce disparities within and between countries.

I thank you