



Interactive dialogue

Poverty eradication, social protection, and social services

Monday, 17 March 2025, 4.30 – 6.00 p.m.

Concept note

Overview

Globally, women and girls are overrepresented among the poor at all stages of the life course. UN-Women’s projections for 2024 indicate that nearly 10 per cent of women and girls live in households in extreme poverty compared to just over 9 per cent of men and boys.¹ That translates into 22 million more poor women than men. Social protection policies are indispensable for reducing poverty, enhancing gender equality and realizing women’s rights. Yet in practice, many existing social protection systems have insufficiently addressed the gender-specific risks and structural constraints that women face, such as limited access to employment opportunities, occupational segregation, unpaid caregiving responsibilities and health vulnerabilities, thereby falling short of their potential to promote gender equality.

While women’s access to social protection has increased over the past decade, significant gender gaps persist globally. In 2023, 2 billion women and girls and 1.8 billion men and boys were still without any access to social protection. Gender gaps and biases exist at all stages of the life course and accumulate over time, leaving older women with less access to old age pensions, lower benefit levels and higher risk of experiencing poverty than men. Gender-based violence and discrimination also affect women’s access to public services, such as transportation, education and health care.

The neglect of gender-specific risks and vulnerabilities often worsens during emergencies, as recent assessments of social protection responses to COVID-19 and the cost-of-living crisis have shown. Yet, this is often when women are most at risk of poverty: Women and girls in extremely fragile contexts are 7.7 times more likely to live in households under the \$2.15 poverty line than women and girls in non-fragile contexts. Under a worst-case climate scenario, up to 158.3 million more women and girls could be pushed into poverty by mid-century, exceeding the number of men and boys by 16 million. While some countries are taking steps to strengthen ‘shock-responsive’ social protection systems and ensure support is in place for those who need it, much more work needs to be done.

The interactive dialogue will focus on how achieving the vision of Beijing will require a significant expansion of public investment in gender-responsive social protection and public services. The dialogue will bring together stakeholders including government officials, ECOSOC functional commissions,

¹ UN Women World Survey on the Role of Women in Development. 2024.
<https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2024-10/World-survey-on-the-role-of-women-in-development-2024-en.pdf>

representatives of non-governmental organizations in consultative status with ECOSOC and the United Nations system.

Format and participation

The interactive dialogue will be chaired by Ms. Nataliia Mudrenko (Ukraine), Vice-Chair of the Commission on the Status of Women. A moderator will support the Chair.

The interactive dialogue will start with presentations by a small number of experts on the important role of gender-responsive social protection and social services in today's world, and to identify the steps needed to advance comprehensive coverage, gender-responsive design and rights-based delivery. The floor will then be open for comments and questions from Member States and other stakeholders in an interactive dialogue. Panelists would respond to any questions posed and make short concluding comments, time permitting.

Member States will participate in the dialogue on a voluntary basis. No speakers' list will be kept. UN-Women will facilitate an online application process for representatives of NGOs in consultative status with ECOSOC. The list of NGOs proposed for participation in the event will be distributed to Member States through respective Bureau members.

Leading questions

Participating stakeholders in the interactive dialogue are invited to address the following questions:

1. On the occasion of the 30-year anniversary of the Beijing Declaration, how far have we come in realizing its transformative vision with regards to poverty, social protection and social services? What can we learn from the latest data on poverty prevalence and social protection coverage across different regions?
2. What are the barriers that women and girls may face in realising their right to social protection and social services, from inadequate financing, to lack of gender consideration at the design phase, to challenges arising in the implementation and delivery of programs and services?
3. In today's world of multiple, overlapping crises, from the climate emergency to armed conflict and pandemics, how can we best design social protection systems and social services that meet the needs of the most marginalised women and girls?
4. What are the key dimensions of gender-responsive social protection and social services, and what are some promising practices that promote long-term routes out of poverty in different contexts worldwide? What should key stakeholders across the UN system, government and civil society do to promote gender-responsive design and implementation? Can you please share a concrete example? What are the lessons learned?

Outcome

The outcome of the discussion will be in the form of a summary by the Chair of the Commission, prepared in consultation with the regional groups, through the members of the Bureau.



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Poverty Eradication, Social Protection and Social Services

March 17th 2025, 4.30-6.00pm

Speaker bios

Moderator: Ms. Ilze Brands Kehris, Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights: assumed her functions as Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights on 14 January 2020, heading the UN Human Rights Office in New York. She is a former member of the UN Human Rights Committee and has held leadership positions in national and regional level human rights organisations, including the EU Fundamental Rights Agency, the OSCE and the Council of Europe.

Prof. Naila Kabeer, London School of Economics: is Professor of Gender and Development at the London School of Economics, and has published widely on issues relating to gender, poverty, labour markets, social protection and collective action.

Ms. Niyanthini Kadirgamar, Feminist Collective for Economic Justice: is a scholar and activist, part of the Feminist Collective for Economic Justice in Sri Lanka. She is an expert in macroeconomic policy and social protection in Sri Lanka, including on the impacts of austerity.

Ms. Claudia Robles, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean: is Social Affairs Officer at the Social Development Division of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) in Chile. She has published research on non-contributory pensions and the future of social protection in the midst of protracted crisis in Latin America.

Mr. Ousmane Sow, Regional Development Agency: is Director of the Regional Development Agency, Senegal. In his role, he has made great efforts to promote gender-responsive social protection, including through the expansion of health insurance to women smallholder farmers.

Prof. Dorota Szelewa, University College Dublin: is Associate Professor at the School of Social Policy, Social Work and Social Justice, at University College Dublin. Her research interests include gender, welfare states, and comparative childcare and family policies in the context of rising conservatism.