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‘Social protection systems, access to public services and sustainable infrastructure for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls’

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## **Report of the Expert Group**

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## Introduction

This report is the outcome of an Expert Group Meeting on the priority theme of the 63<sup>rd</sup> Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), *Social protection systems, access to public services and sustainable infrastructure for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls*. The 63<sup>rd</sup> CSW brings together three thematic areas that are not always considered together, at least in the world of policymaking. A growing body of evidence produced by feminist researchers across the globe strongly indicates, however, that they cannot be viewed in isolation from one another. Coordinated and well-funded systems of social protection, public services, and sustainable infrastructure are imperative to achieving gender equality and women’s empowerment (SDG 5). In fact, they form the backbone of the entire 2030 Agenda: from health and wellbeing (SDG 3) to quality education for all (SDG 4), from poverty eradication (SDG 1) to the reduction of inequalities (SDG 10), and from decent work and inclusive growth (SDG 8) to combating climate change (SDG 13).

## Global context

In the nearly sixty-three years since the first Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) was convened at Lake Success, New York, women and girls have made significant progress towards the realization of their rights. Through the provision of social pensions, cash transfers and other child-related benefits, more women have access to social protection than ever before. More girls attend school, maternal mortality rates are falling as women in rural places gain access to obstetric care, and women’s increasing representation in the science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) fields means that the walls around these traditionally “masculine” fields are slowly crumbling.

At the same time, however, the current economic, social, and political climate gives much cause for concern. In the name of austerity, many advances in the provision of social protection and the extension of public services are under threat of cutbacks, even as economic inequality between and within countries is in fact growing: Following a decade of significant decline, poverty in Latin America is again on the rise,<sup>1</sup> and rural-urban stratification persists;<sup>2</sup> poverty is increasingly concentrated in fragile contexts in Sub-Saharan Africa where by 2050 86 percent of the world’s poor are projected to reside;<sup>3</sup> and Indigenous peoples in high-income countries such as Canada, the US, and Australia are reported to live in “third world conditions.”<sup>4</sup>

These trends and conditions are not inevitable, nor so costly that they cannot be addressed. Indeed, growing inequality occurs in the context of increasing corporate power and rampant tax evasion and

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<sup>1</sup> Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean. (2018). Segundo informe anual sobre el progreso y los desafíos regionales de la Agenda 2030 para el Desarrollo Sostenible en América Latina y el Caribe. (LC/FDS.2/3/Rev.1), Santiago.

<sup>2</sup> Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean. (2018). Social Panorama of Latin America, 2017 (LC/PUB.2018/1-P), Santiago.

<sup>3</sup> Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (2018). Goalkeepers 2018 Data Report.

<sup>4</sup> United Nations Special Rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples, James Anaya (2013). “Statement upon conclusion of the visit to Canada.”

avoidance by the global elite. Resources do exist to finance gender-responsive social protection systems, public services, and the infrastructure that connects women to them.

At the same time, in the global north and south, east and west, patriarchal, anti-liberal sentiments are gaining a steely grip on state governments that trend towards authoritarianism. The result is a crack-down on rights, democratic institutions and the civil society that is so vital to maintaining human freedom, dignity, progress, and social justice. Of particular concern is an anti-gender ideology that seeks to strip away the hard-earned progress that feminists have made in extending equal opportunities to women, and celebrating differences in human identity and expression.

In this context, policy discourses and practices are promoted that would have women relegated to the home, physically reproducing an isolated nation while a select group of elite men control the resources and decision-making processes that shape private and public life. Where they do exist, social protection—in particular social insurance programs—are implemented in such ways (for instance, privileging non-migrant, middle-class, married, formally employed women with children) as to widen inequalities between women across income, ethnic, racial and other dividing lines. Central to these exclusionary politics is a rejection of evidence that demonstrates that ensuring women's rights, wellbeing, and participation is key to healthy, peaceful and prosperous families, economies, and societies.

Major shifts are taking place in household structures, family dynamics, and the wider population, all of which have significant implications for women. In many places, single-mothers are increasingly responsible for covering the costs of raising healthy, productive children. A significant and growing challenge is that the population of many countries in the Global North is ageing, and the available caring workforce is insufficient to meet the rising care needs. This additional burden of care will fall on women, who continue to provide the majority of care, even as policy choices that assign little or no pay to this vital work perpetuate women's experiences of material and time poverty.

Women's informal work, in both rural and urban contexts (for instance, as family farm workers or as part of the labor force of the informal economy) is often "invisible," at least to policymakers. In these cases, women are rarely extended the same social protections that cover workers in formal labor markets, thus exposing them to poverty during their reproductive years and in old age. In some low-and middle-income countries, these gendered dynamics of poverty are at least partially ameliorated by the provision of non-contributory (tax-financed) child-related benefits and old-age pensions, but coverage remains uneven.

The effects of uncaring economic and social policy choices are indeed far-reaching, leading people to leave deprived rural regions in pursuit of economic opportunities and greater social freedoms in cities. Young women and mothers migrate in search of work to support their families back home and, in doing so, may lose access to their national social protection systems without gaining access to those in their country of work and destination. Moreover, men's migration, especially from rural areas, often exacerbates women's work burdens and may present further challenges if women's access to social

protection and public services is linked to finances, skills or social assets that are not available to them in the absence of those men. Millions of other women attempt to escape conflict, disaster, poverty, and the deleterious impacts of climate change on livelihoods by undertaking torturous journeys, some of which end in camps in which social protection, public services, and infrastructure are infrequently designed with women and girls' bodies, responsibilities, and security in mind.

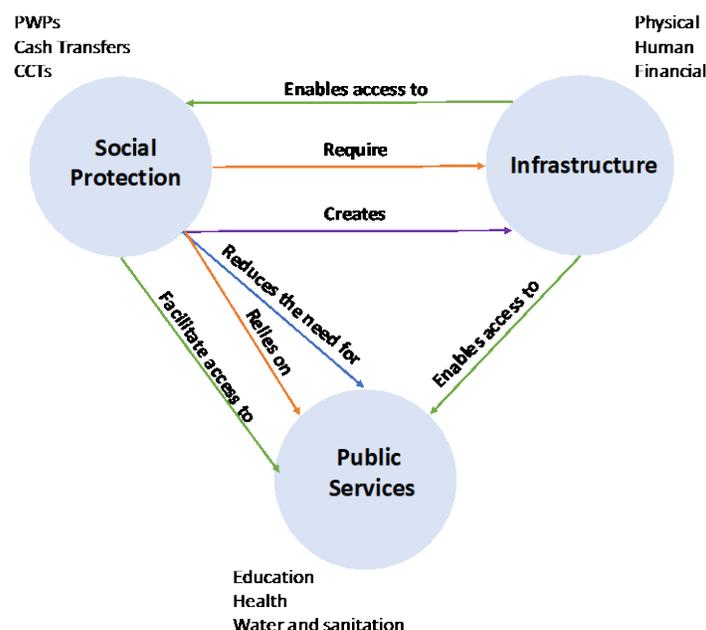
Despite these challenges, there is reason for hope and room for action. Feminist organizations, trade unions, and women's rights defenders are persistent in demanding that governments and private corporations respect the fundamental principles of human rights and democracy, notably the rights of women and all people to enjoy equal opportunities, irrespective of their gender, race, language, ability, religion, sexual orientation, national or ethnic origin, or any other status. Nonetheless, states must ultimately take responsibility for social protection, public services and sustainable infrastructure, by providing these themselves and by regulating and monitoring non-state providers to ensure their compliance with human rights principles and agreements.

Drawing on the lessons of women's rights organizing and the evidence base of feminist research, this CSW EGM report addresses three core areas where states must step up to ensure that we go forwards instead of backwards, and that progress on the Sustainable Development Goals is made and benefits both halves of the population. Social protection systems are key instruments that governments have to buffer people from poverty in the face of unexpected hardship and exogenous shocks, and to promote healthy, productive, egalitarian, and prosperous societies. However, feminist research has made clear that effective social protection is much more than stand-alone, narrowly-targeted programs; gender-responsive quality public services must be embedded within social protection systems in order for them to function at full capacity. Likewise, sustainable infrastructure is needed to connect women to services, markets and resources.

## **Strengthening linkages between social protection, public services, and infrastructure for gender equality**

There are many linkages between social protection systems, public services, and sustainable infrastructure (see Figure 1). For instance, the efficacy of social protection programs depends on quality and affordable healthcare services and the transport options required to arrive there; and girls' educational attainment requires an adequate supply of qualified teachers, a decent work environment, and sanitation facilities that enable menstrual hygiene management. Social protection, public services and infrastructure must thus be designed and implemented in ways that reflect the realities of where and how women live and work, and of their multiple roles. This requires coordination between sectors in order to address women's *whole* lives.

Figure 1: Interconnections between the three focus areas<sup>5</sup>



It is not only coordination that is required, however. In order for social protection systems, public services, and infrastructure to serve all people equally, Sustainable Development Goal 5 – gender equality, “the equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities of women and men, girls and boys”<sup>6</sup> – must be a guidepost to the other SDGs. Gender equality is not simply a matter of formal equality between women and men in the eyes of the law; in order to be substantive, gender equality requires a “fundamental transformation of economic and social institutions, including the beliefs, norms and attitudes that shape them, at every level of society, from households to labor markets and from communities to local, national and global governance institutions.”<sup>7</sup>

In anticipation of the 63<sup>rd</sup> CSW, we urge states to take action on SDG 5 in the interlinked fields of social protection, public services, and sustainable infrastructure. We urge them to do so by recognizing the multiplicity of women’s roles and their intersections; incorporating women’s needs, interests, and priorities in decision-making processes; and transforming social and economic structures.<sup>8</sup> These actions

<sup>5</sup> Chopra, D. and Campos Ugalde, A.C. (2018) Initiating women’s empowerment; achieving gender equality: Interlinkages amongst social protection, infrastructure, and public services. Background paper prepared for the Expert General Meeting of the 63<sup>rd</sup> Commission on the Status of Women.

<sup>6</sup> UN WOMEN. (2001), “OSAGI: Concepts and definitions”, UN WOMEN, available at: <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi/conceptsanddefinitions.htm> (accessed 24 August 2018).

<sup>7</sup> UN WOMEN. (2015), *Progress of the World’s Women 2015–2015: Transforming Economies, Realizing Rights*, UN Women, New York, NY.

<sup>8</sup> Chopra, D. and Campos Ugalde, A.C. (2018) Initiating women’s empowerment; achieving gender equality: Interlinkages amongst social protection, infrastructure, and public services. Background paper prepared for the Expert General Meeting of the 63<sup>rd</sup> Commission on the Status of Women.

promote a more equitable distribution of power, and ensure that social protection, public services, and sustainable infrastructure are gender-responsive, rather than gender-blind.

## Human rights principles

Human rights principles, including labor rights, guide our recommendations for social protection systems, public services, and sustainable infrastructure that benefit all women and men, including those who reside in countries where they are not citizens. This approach is based on the universality and indivisibility of rights and, as such, calls for strategies that recognize and strengthen the interlinkages between social protection, public services, and sustainable infrastructure.

We urge states to design, finance, implement, monitor and evaluate social protection systems, public services, and sustainable infrastructure according to established human rights norms and standards. These include the principles of substantive equality and non-discrimination advanced by the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), the ILO Declaration of Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work, and the recognition of multiple and intersecting inequalities articulated in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. In practice, this means attending to:

- *Accessibility*, which includes provision of information about available programs, services and infrastructure, as well as the physical accessibility of these;
- *Affordability*, which means that receipt of benefits and use of services and infrastructure is not prohibited by cost;
- *Adaptability*, which means that programs, services and infrastructure are suited to meet different cultural values and technological barriers (including literacy);
- *Gender-responsiveness*, which means that programs, services and infrastructure do not rely on discriminatory gender norms, but rather recognize and aim to change their discriminatory outcomes (e.g. the unequal division of unpaid care work between women and men);
- *Quality*, which means that governments strive to ensure that programs, services, and infrastructure are appropriate and safe, and not stratified according to gender, social class, or geographical location, among other factors;
- *Transparency*, which means that all relevant information is made public and potential and current beneficiaries and service users have the right to access it;
- *Participation*, which means that citizens are able to influence the outcomes of decision-making processes through democratic means;
- *Accountability*, which means that authorities have clearly defined responsibilities, provide justifications for decisions taken, and that these are enforced;
- *Progressive realization, non-retrogression, and utilization of maximum available resources*, which means that governments have an obligation to take steps, to the maximum of their available resources, to realize economic and social rights; and that, to the extent possible, social

protection, public services and sustainable infrastructure are publicly funded, publicly delivered and managed, and accountable to the public.

Bearing these principles in mind, we contend that it is the state's responsibility to ensure universal coverage and access to social protection, essential public services, and fundamental infrastructure, noting that universal coverage is not possible without having removed *all* barriers, be they economic or social, to *accessing* said protections, services and infrastructure. Universal coverage and access require the development of gender-responsive state capacities to provide, finance, and deliver these services as well as to ensure the rights of workers in these sectors, many of whom are women.

To be sure, states are imperfect actors. Yet, as duty bearers, governments are best placed to ensure universality and sustainability in protections, services and infrastructure. In contrast, non-state corporate actors are not mandated by human rights conventions in the same way, are rarely democratic, and largely are driven by profit. False expectations are often held out that public-private partnerships (PPPs) can overcome state shortcomings. However, experience in water and sanitation infrastructure shows that PPPs are rarely more efficient than state provisioning,<sup>9</sup> and in fact are highly likely to exclude poor populations,<sup>10</sup> especially those in rural and remote areas<sup>11</sup> (in which case states may be the only actors willing and able to deliver at sufficient scale). Similar dynamics are observed with care services; when these are privately provided in the absence of strong state regulation, service quality is highly variable and tends to leave rural and poor families behind.<sup>12</sup> As secondary players, non-state actors should adhere to the principles of human rights, under the oversight of the state. In all cases, women's rights groups, trade unions, and other human rights-based organizations are key to ensuring that services reach all communities.

Building on these human rights principles, we structure our recommendations around four themes: 1) creation of an enabling environment for gender equality in provision of social protection, public services, and infrastructure; 2) social protection systems; 3) public services; and 4) sustainable infrastructure.

## **An enabling environment for gender equality in social protection, public services, and infrastructure**

We urge states to recognize that gender-responsive spending on social protection, public services, and infrastructure are essential to achieving not only gender equality but also to promoting economic

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<sup>9</sup> IEG (Independent Evaluation Group). 2014. World Bank Group Support to Public-Private Partnerships: Lessons from Experience in Client Countries, FY02-12. Washington, DC: World Bank Group.

<sup>10</sup> UNCTAD (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development). 2015. Trade and Development Report 2015: Making the International Financial Architecture Work for Development. Geneva: UNCTAD.

<sup>11</sup> Gunatilake, H. and M. J. Carangal-San Jose. 2008. "Privatization Revisited: Lessons from Private Sector Privatization in Water Supply and Sanitation in Developing Countries." Economic and Research Department Working Paper 115. Asian Development Bank, Manila.

<sup>12</sup> UN Women. (2018). Turning Promises into Action: Gender Equality in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. New York.

dynamism and long-term fiscal sustainability. As such, we call on governments to protect and strengthen social protection systems, to invest in quality public services, and to move towards sustainable infrastructure – and to do so in a way that promotes the rights of women and girls.

### **Recommendations on institutional structures and social norms**

We recommend that states:

1. Use human rights and decent work principles to guide policy design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation across the social protection, public service, and infrastructure sectors.
2. Institutionalize linkages between decision-making and implementation bodies (e.g. inter-ministerial and executive committees) within the social protection, public services, and infrastructure sectors such that infrastructure development, social protection, and public service delivery are coordinated to promote gender equality.
3. Put in place adequate mechanisms for women’s rights organizations, community-based groups, workers’ and employers’ organizations, producer organizations, women beneficiaries, and women users of services and infrastructure to meaningfully and effectively participate in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of social protection programs and public services, and in the development and maintenance of infrastructure.
4. Consider daily mobilities and access to social protection and public services (including water, sanitation and energy) from the outset of reconstruction operations in disaster and conflict settings.
5. Ensure that governments are the primary actors responsible for the provision of social protection, public services and infrastructure, and that they partner with community-driven initiatives. Governments must regulate the activities of non-state actors (e.g. philanthropies, NGOs, private sector) to ensure adherence to human rights principles, including in regards to universal coverage, quality of services and infrastructure, and transparency and accountability.

### **Recommendations on financial sustainability**

We recommend that states:

1. Pursue strategies to mobilize additional resources (SDG 17) to realize gender-responsive universal social protection, improve the affordability and quality of gender-responsive public services, and improve the accessibility of gender-responsive sustainable infrastructure.
2. Apply the principles of human rights to global sources of financing including development assistance and new financial sources such as carbon taxes.
3. Establish and implement gender-responsive policy frameworks that include extending urban infrastructure and social protection coverage for informal workers to enable livelihoods of women in the informal economy.

## Recommendations on data and statistics

We recommend that states:

1. Ensure that data collection, planning, monitoring and evaluation is gender-responsive, includes the generation and use of qualitative and sex-disaggregated quantitative data, and recognizes women's positioning within diverse family forms and communities and the multiplicity of their roles across the life course, including as carers, workers and active decision makers.
2. Collect data on where and when gender-based violence occurs, and use these data to inform the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of social protection programs, public services, and infrastructure investments such that gender-based violence is addressed and prevented.
3. When collecting and processing beneficiary and service user data and information, ensure that internationally accepted standards of privacy and data protection are observed, and that data and information is not disseminated to other parties or used for other purposes without beneficiary or user consent.

## Social protection

Social protection systems are important mechanisms for sheltering people from the ills of free-market capitalism. They are more likely to be successful and gender-responsive when they are established and operated according to the principles and standards that human rights require and the obligations they impose.<sup>13</sup> To this end, any move toward increasing private social protection provisioning at the expense of public provisioning should be treated with great caution, as should the impulse to sacrifice social protection funding during periods of austerity. States must progressively implement universal social protection systems, taking deliberate, concrete and targeted steps towards this goal.

Some social protection benefits, such as contributory pensions and paid maternity leave, are generally attached to formal, paid employment; this means that many women, whose multiple roles include unpaid care work, have no access to them. Non-contributory benefits that are not attached to employment, such as cash-transfers, have increased in prominence over the past two decades, and as a result, more women have access to social protection than before. However, benefit levels remain modest, and there is considerable variability in the effect of cash transfers on gender equality, which ultimately rests on the social context, the details of the program (for instance, whether or not it includes behavioral conditions), and the extent to which the cash transfer program is accompanied by investments in public services and infrastructure.

Social protection systems must respond to gendered and other vulnerabilities, as well as their intersections, smoothing economic inequalities that accrue over women's life course, and contributing to gender equality and women's empowerment. For instance, during women's reproductive years, access to comprehensive, quality, and culturally appropriate sexual and reproductive health services,

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<sup>13</sup> Sepúlveda, M., and Nyst, C. (2011). *The Human Rights Approach to Social Protection*. Ministry for Foreign Affairs. Finland.

maternal and child health care, and maternity leave, have a significant positive effect on women's health and economic autonomy. Later in life, old-age pensions play a key role in preventing poverty and ensuring income security in old age.<sup>14</sup>

Feminist research on social protection programs has made clear that standard methods of evaluation (including the problematic "gold standard" of randomized controlled trials) all too often render women's experiences invisible. To ensure that a social protection system or program does not discriminate against women, attention should be paid to the outcome of an action, rule or requirement, rather than simply its intent, and this may require gender analysis and qualitative methods.

### **Recommendations for the extension of social protection systems**

We recommend that states:

1. Recognize and attach social protection rights to all care work, including unpaid care work, through both contributory and non-contributory benefits; provide the right to income support for carers; make pensions more equitable; provide access to quality public services, including health and care services, across the life course; and ensure portability of social protection for migrant workers.
2. Recognize invisible and undervalued work for pay or profit performed by women in rural and urban areas (e.g. contributing family workers), provide contributory and non-contributory social protection mechanisms for them, and actively promote the visibility of these workers through their registration with formal social protection systems.
3. Extend social protection systems to adequately protect workers in all forms of employment, including informal employment, part-time employment, precarious employment, self-employment, rural and domestic work, and work in the "gig" economy.<sup>15</sup>
4. Expand state-financed non-contributory (tax-financed) benefits (e.g. family benefits, maternity and parental leave) and ensure their adequacy, reliability and regular indexation.
5. Guarantee universal access to affordable, quality and public healthcare for all women and men, including the promotion of women's sexual and reproductive rights through provision of the full range of family planning methods and maternal and obstetric care.
6. Where social protection programs are linked to formal employment, ensure that adequate mechanisms are in place and enforced to protect women in cases of family dissolution and widowhood (e.g. child support, pension rights, property and inheritance rights).

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<sup>14</sup> *Protecting women's income security in old age. Toward gender-responsive pension systems.* UN WOMAN. Policy Brief No. 3: <http://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2015/unwomen-policybrief03-protectingwomensincomesecurityinoldage-en.pdf?la=en&vs=553>

<sup>15</sup> The "gig economy" is an environment in which temporary positions are common and individuals and organizations contract with independent workers for short-term, piecemeal work assignments, compensation for which typically does not include pensions, health coverage, paid sick leave other benefits typically associated with employment.

7. Ensure that protective social protection is gender-responsive in contexts of displacement, disasters and conflict.
8. Take concrete actions towards ensuring provision of decent work for all, according to the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work and international labor standards (including through gender-responsive public works programs) as a critical component in the realization of rights for both women and men, and a mechanism for increasing women's autonomy.

### **Recommendations for the design and implementation of social protection systems**

We recommend that states:

1. Design social protection systems to promote a more equal distribution of unpaid care work between women and men (for instance, through adequately paid paternity leaves and parental leaves that encourage men to share in reproductive work). Where conditionalities are used, these should take into account women's unequal care responsibilities.
2. Avoid the use of narrow targeting mechanisms, which are prone to exclusionary errors and which can disrupt social cohesion, lead to stigmatization, and contradict the principle of universality.
3. Base cash transfers and family benefits on human rights principles, avoiding behavioral conditions and combining benefits with the provision of essential services such as childcare and training.
4. Ensure women's income security during old age through contributory and non-contributory pension systems that provide adequate and rights-based benefits for all women, and reduce gender gaps in access and benefit levels.
5. Ensure that rights to benefits are clearly defined, transparent, and non-discretionary; address information barriers; and institutionalize mechanisms for grievance and complaint that are accessible for all women beneficiaries and feed into program adaptation and redesign.
6. Ensure substantive participation of women's machineries, women's rights groups, and trade unions in dialogue concerning the design and evaluation of social protection systems.
7. Collect, analyze and report on gender-responsive qualitative data and sex-disaggregated quantitative data (including time-use surveys) and use both of these forms of data to inform the design, evaluation, and adaptation of social protection systems.

### **Recommendations for the sustainability of social protection systems**

We recommend that states:

1. Embed gender-responsive social protection systems in national legal and institutional frameworks to ensure that they are rights-based and to protect them from political manipulation.
2. Strive to fully finance social protection systems from progressive national and international tax systems, and move towards progressive spending on social protection that is more likely to benefit women.

3. Expand fiscal space and generate resources toward gender-responsive social protection, even in times of austerity.
4. Ensure that social protection measures are complemented by high quality public services and linked to adequate infrastructure.

## **Public services**

Women typically interact with public services more than men in their gendered roles as caregivers. Given this, we urge states to adopt the principles of human rights and gender-responsiveness in designing and implementing public services, notably those related to health, education, child care, and elder care. The principle of independent living for persons with disabilities should also inform states' action in designing and implementing accessible public services. This means ensuring a comprehensive set of services that responds to the distinct but equally important needs of women and girls and men and boys, across the life course. Moreover, the availability of public services is not enough; services must be also be of high quality, acceptable, affordable and accessible.

Public services in the care sector has historically been the backbone of women's employment around the world, although work within it has become more precarious with the constriction of funding and limiting of public services hiring. A robustly funded public services sector can have an important impact on breaking down the unequal division of unpaid care work between women and men. At the same time, stark occupational divisions exist within public services; men are predominant in energy and transportation, and women tend to occupy care sector jobs, especially the least well-remunerated. Additionally, women who work in care sectors—in particular in health and social work, including long-term care—are prone to illnesses and injury and report some of the highest levels of violence compared to other industries and sectors due to lack of regulations to prioritize (mostly women) workers' physical and mental wellbeing. The well-being of and the realization of decent work for care workers is obviously important in and of itself, but also because of the link between conditions of work in the care sector and the quality of care delivered to recipients, many of whom are women. In this regard, special attention needs to be given to the numbers of transnational migrant care workers who fall through the gaps of legislation and policies, and some of whom are consequently subjected to horrific abuse.

With changing demographics that takes different forms across regions comes new needs for public services, especially for child and elder care. While we recognize that these needs may stretch the capacity of states, we caution that public-private partnerships and other forms of privatization should not be entered into in regards to primary and essential public services. In secondary areas they may be undertaken with caution and under regulation and oversight from the state. In particular, fee-for-service healthcare runs contrary to the principles of human rights and, as a result, entails frequently prohibitive costs in terms of access and quality for low- and middle-income families.

The recommendations in this section are based on the principle of gender-responsive quality public services that emphasizes both workers' rights to decent and quality work as well as communities' rights to access quality public services. It is further underpinned by the understanding that universalism should

be pursued across different dimensions, and thus gender inequality should be considered as much of an obstacle to accessibility as income inequality. Finally, the privatization of these services does not make them less 'public'; therefore, even while services may be privatized in different ways and to varying degrees, governments ultimately have responsibility for essential services and for ensuring adherence by private providers to the human rights principles.

### **Recommendations for gender-responsive public services**

We recommend that states:

1. Ensure that laws, policies and social norms do not prevent access to public services (e.g. permission for reproductive health, norms around education for girls, and cultural stigma that prevents people from utilizing services).
2. Put measures in place that prevent institutional violence and abuse, including discrimination, denial of services, and forced procedures (e.g. coerced sterilization), especially for women with disabilities or from minority ethnic groups.
3. Design and implement gender-responsive training programs for public service workers to ensure that human rights standards for respectful, high-quality, and ethical service delivery are met.
4. Overcome geographical barriers to ensure provision in rural and isolated areas of public services (including water, sanitation, energy with reliable transport systems to access those services on a regular and emergency basis) and implement improvements through cooperation with the infrastructure sector.
5. Take appropriate measures to prepare for and respond to conflicts and natural disasters.
6. Ensure access to comprehensive sexual and reproductive health services for married and unmarried adolescent girls and boys, women and men, without discrimination.
7. Ensure provision of quality child and elder care services that follow the principles of human-rights and non-discrimination.
8. Ensure that high-quality and accessible public services are linked to social protection measures, and are based on adequate physical and human infrastructure.
9. Ensure that labor inspection services are robust and prepared to address gender wage gaps.

### **Recommendations on public service workers' rights**

We recommend that states:

1. Invest in expanding quality public services and care jobs, including health care workers, long-term care workers, early childhood educators and teachers, and enforce human rights principles and decent work standards, in the context of public-private partnerships.
2. Expand social and legal protections to cover all paid care workers as well as unpaid volunteer workers in public sectors, including family workers.
3. Establish and enforce regulations regarding reasonable staffing ratios to prevent work intensification and overburdening of care workers.
4. Protect existing public funding and expand the fiscal space to ensure adequate financing of decent work and quality care within the public services sector.

5. Put mechanisms in place to ensure that work environments are free of discrimination, sexual harassment and violence, including appropriate grievance mechanisms and support systems for victims.
6. Take concrete actions to improve the quality and safety of care sector jobs, following the principles of human rights and decent work, including the right to equal pay for work of equal value and the rights to freedom of association and collective bargaining.
7. Recognize the specific vulnerabilities faced by domestic workers, and take concrete actions with regard to promoting rights at work, improving working conditions and social protection, and formalizing the sector.
8. Initiate intergovernmental action to prevent and prosecute the abuse of migrant care workers.
9. Provide leadership training to women and other avenues to women's upward mobility and career development.

### **Recommendations for the financing and cost of public services**

We recommend that states:

1. Ensure adequate financing structures for public services (either tax-financed or based on public social insurance contributions) so that access to public services is free of charge at point of delivery for all through the life cycle, including those with inadequate financial means and decision-making power.
2. Ensure gender-responsive accessibility to public services across the life cycle, including through elimination of complex eligibility requirements and reduction of bureaucratic procedures.
3. Guarantee that individual contributions in tax systems and public social insurance schemes are progressive, to ensure that the relatively well-off make relevant contributions towards universal programs for all.

### **Sustainable infrastructure**

While social protection and public services are more likely to be influenced by social considerations, the traditionally male-dominated spaces of infrastructure, and those public services that depend on infrastructure, tend to be much more technical and profit-oriented. Recognizing the social aspects of water and sanitation, energy, and transportation entails re-prioritizing infrastructure investments from those sectors deemed most economically profitable to the sectors that are critical for enabling women everyday welfare and livelihoods. This means providing space for and actively supporting women's income earning opportunities, notably in the informal sector in which women are overrepresented in the Global South.

Indeed, a unique and even historic opportunity exists today to engage with the infrastructure sector to integrate social, gender-responsive and environment-friendly approaches. This is a result of the low-carbon energy transition that is taking place towards renewable energy, driven by climate change considerations and governments committing to the Paris Accords and Agenda 2030, which is transforming the way infrastructure systems and services are being conceptualized, produced,

distributed and consumed. This engagement consists of proposing alternative pathways and models, and leapfrogging traditional forms of energy sector development, by simultaneously integrating innovative low-carbon technologies and gender-responsive processes and solutions.

Though the transport sector is still grappling with charting a clear pathway in developing economies, there is a wider acceptance of the need to shift from non-renewable sources of energy fueling the transport sector. Taxation policies frequently penalize public transport and reward private vehicle (car) ownership. In addition to the environmental costs, this policy choice has gendered costs: women are less likely to own a car than men, and are more likely to rely on public transport. Moreover, women have specific mobility needs: they are more likely to “trip-chain,” travel with young children or people with disabilities, and make trips in off-peak hours—characteristics that should be recognized in transit planning.

Opportunities to promote gender equality also exist in the management and use of water and sanitation infrastructure (SDG6). Women and girls bear a disproportionate responsibility as primary users, providers and managers of water and sanitation at the household level, yet they do not enjoy commensurate representation in related decision-making.<sup>16</sup> Globally, decisions on “big water” issues—such as large-scale infrastructure investments, water allocations or water trading—remain largely gender-blind. Sustainable water and sanitation public services and infrastructure must be designed with women’s participation and with women’s unique needs in mind, including that women usually carry water in the absence of pipes, must sit or squat to use a toilet, are responsible for small children’s toilet use, spend an average of forty years managing menstruation, and face gender-specific risks to their safety when using public sanitation facilities or when in search of water.<sup>17</sup>

### **Cross-sectoral recommendations for gender-responsive infrastructure**

We recommend that states:

1. Design towns and cities taking into consideration women’s engagement in retail trade in the urban informal economy in the Global South. Specifically, city planning must include designated and fairly allocated markets that make adequate provision for vehicular and pedestrian transport, storage, security, electricity, water, refuse collection, and toilets—facilities that should be developed in consultation with women informal workers as well as local governments workers, and affected communities for any large infrastructure, and are therefore adequate in coverage, quality, and affordability.
2. Integrate women’s needs and preferences (including those of women with disabilities) from the outset in Smart Cities and Smart Mobilities planning processes.

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<sup>16</sup> Gender Equality in the 2030 Agenda: Gender-responsive water and sanitation systems, UN Women. Available at: <http://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2018/issue-brief-gender-responsive-water-and-sanitation-systems-en.pdf?la=en&vs=3915>

<sup>17</sup> Investing in gender-equal sustainable development. Isha Ray for UN Women. Available at: <http://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2016/dps-investing-in-gender-equal-sustainable-development.pdf?la=en&vs=5507>

3. Collect and analyze data on access to and use of public space, energy, water and sanitation, and transportation that is disaggregated by sex, geographical location, ethnicity and other contextually relevant factors, and that includes social audits, and use such data in all planning, evaluation, and adaptation processes.
4. Protect and engage in social dialogue with workers' representatives, women's human rights defenders and indigenous groups, even and especially during confrontation over large-scale infrastructure projects.
5. Ensure that infrastructure systems (both human and physical) support social protection measures and public services in a way that prioritizes women's needs, interests and multiple roles.

### **Recommendations for gender-responsive, sustainable transportation systems**

We recommend that states:

1. Divert investments in infrastructure that benefits passenger cars (which do not cater to the travel needs of women and people living in poverty) towards designing and implementing gender-responsive public transit that is also responsive to people with disabilities, as well as walking and cycling infrastructures.
2. Recognize women's specific mobility needs and address these at all stages of the planning processes. This would include adaptations to existing transit systems, such as increasing focus on public transport supply during off-peak hours, and mainstreaming both motorized and non-motorized para-transit modes (e.g. auto-rickshaws and rickshaws).
3. Facilitate women's use of public transportation systems, through guarantee of minimum availability, accessibility, and affordability standards for public transport services.
4. Ensure that accessibility analyses inform the transportation plans, in order to connect women with public services such as schools, health centers, and places where benefits are disbursed; to employment/training centers; and to food and fuel sources.
5. Implement effective mechanisms to ensure women's personal security while using or working within public transport systems and public spaces through mapping unsafe areas and routes, developing systems to register grievances in cases of harassment or violence, and following up on the registered grievances.
6. Ease taxation policies on public transport in order to increase the supply of public transport in both urban and rural areas.
7. Develop an indicator-based system on different factors governing the daily travels of women (for example, an affordability indicator to estimate the share of household expenditure on transit that would lead to regulated transit fares according to gender-responsive assessments of passengers' price sensitivity).
8. Implement routinized collection and analyses of qualitative and quantitative travel behavior data that is disaggregated by sex, location, and ability (and, where possible, also by activity and time-use) as a mandatory step in transport planning decisions.

## **Recommendations for gender-responsive, sustainable energy<sup>18</sup> systems**

We recommend that states:

1. Make gender-responsive investments in adequate levels of clean energy, accounting for women's multiple roles and their specific livelihood needs (e.g. for pumped water and medium size electrical appliances, such as food grinders) to both address women's 'time poverty' due to household chores and to improve their opportunities to engage in livelihood activities.
2. Prioritize gender-responsive investments in developing and sustaining community energy systems (such as mini-grids to power households and communities where the grid is non-existent or weak) and as well conduct targeted user education and demand-side management programs for the safe use and efficient consumption of electricity.
3. Integrate gender and other social equity criteria in all smart grid planning tools.
4. Adapt tariffs mechanisms and regulations to be gender-responsive, including by better defining the lifeline block of tariffs to more effectively meet the needs of low-income and vulnerable groups.
5. Support women's participation and leadership in the energy sector, including by tracking emerging sustainable energy industries that have the potential to significantly or predominantly employ women, and supporting these with tariff reductions and subsidy assistance. Additionally, provide incentives to women-led small enterprises, including micro-small independent power producers.
6. Improve access to clean cook-stoves that are designed in consultation with intended women users, to ensure their appropriateness and sustainability.
7. Make gender-responsive investments in improving the sustainability and safety of household energy consumption and production (e.g. through clean energy infrastructure and appliances).

## **Recommendations for gender-responsive, sustainable water and sanitation systems**

We recommend that states:

1. Ensure continuous quality piped water at the household level or, until this is possible, ensure that placement of water sources is determined in consultation with intended women users. In rural settings, prioritize "multiple use" sources that provide water for drinking, small plots and small herds.
2. Implement effective mechanisms to manage women's safety in the use of public sanitation services and facilities in efforts to eliminate open defecation, including in schools and health clinics, at transportation hubs, in refugee camps, government offices, marketplaces, and work sites.
3. Integrate menstrual hygiene management (MHM) as a mandatory feature of all public sanitation interventions, and as a feature of public education curriculum, in order to break harmful social taboos.

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<sup>18</sup> The term energy is used in a generic sense to also encompass both energy sources (such as solar and electricity, for example) and power as the application of energy over time.

4. Ensure gender-responsive safe and healthy working conditions for workers in the “back end” of the sanitation sector, including protections against violence and health risks, and improve working conditions of this stigmatized labor sector in accordance with international labor standards.
5. Expand fiscal space and generate resources to invest in scaling up gender-responsive, decentralized water-augmenting technologies that have proven to be effective and efficient (e.g. rainwater harvesting), and in the development of new gender-responsive, scalable water-augmentation technologies.
6. Generate a fiscal base for gender-responsive public investments in sustainable sanitation where current investments are not commensurate with need.