



CSW 63 Common Minimum Standards

With one year remaining before the 25th anniversary of the Beijing Platform for Action, the first formal review of the Global Goals for Sustainable Development, the 20th anniversary of Security Council Resolution 1325 (Women, Peace and Security) and the tenth anniversary of UN Women, the landmark pillars of gender equality upon which we build our societies, focus our lobbying and base our activism, require urgent attention. Around the world, young women, girls, trans and non-binary youth, and all young people (referred to as youth in all their diversity) continue to be denied access to universal, rights-based social protection or public services. In addition, infrastructure that is not gender sensitive or does not recognise the inclusion of youth in all their diversity is not sustainable. In consultation with young women, youth-led and youth-serving networks and organisations, we call on governments to ensure that social protection, public services and sustainable infrastructure meet the needs of young people and advance gender equality through these common minimum standards.

Social Protection

Social protection systems form both the building blocks and the safety net of a healthy society and should not be viewed merely as a handout but as an investment in the future and a transformative tool for youth empowerment and gender equality where the agency of youth in all their diversity is not respected, their priorities, challenges and solutions are not integrated into national action plans. Consequently, they fall through the net and remain at the margins of wider society, and experience restricted access to social protection systems that might otherwise lift them up to join an equal playing field. However, youth often fall through the net and remain at the margins of wider society. Unequal power dynamics, gender-based violence and unequal division of unpaid care work disproportionately affect women and girls which can restrict their access to social protection services. As their empowerment cannot occur outside of formal social protection mechanisms, we call upon Member States to:

- Provide age-appropriate knowledge and improve dissemination of youth-friendly information on social protection schemes via innovative methods.

- Guarantee paid parental leave and invest in free or subsidized child care, in particular with a comprehensive array of support services offered to teenage mothers, homeless youth or wards of the State to support their economic empowerment.
- Invest in youth employment, entrepreneurship schemes and grants for further education, and expand microfinance, tax free loans and direct cash-transfer systems to the most marginalised, recognising that minorities are often over-represented in the informal labour sector and are more likely to be exploited or exposed to workplace discrimination.
- Mainstream a gendered analysis into the design, implementation and evaluation of all policies and programmes and invest in gender impact evaluation to track the long-term impact of social protection programmes across women's life cycles.

Public Services

Public services play a central role in reducing poverty, inequality and providing opportunities for young people to reach their full potential. Significant gaps persist in relation to quality public services and gender stereotypes remain ingrained in the provision of public services, acting as a barrier for young people in accessing their rights. Young people therefore call on governments to ensure the following minimum standards in the provision of public services:

- Invest in inclusive, free, accessible, youth-friendly, high quality healthcare systems including mental health services, nutrition services, and ensure young people's sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR).
- Provide free, quality, inclusive and non-discriminatory education for youth in all their diversity and invest in non-formal education, vocational training and skills building. Introduce education on human rights, gender equality and healthy relationships into school curricula from a young age, including comprehensive sexuality education and which seeks to transform harmful gender norms and stereotypes.
- Provide comprehensive support services and access to justice to survivors of gender-based violence. Ensure prevention and response services are well-funded, survivor-centred and delivered by trained police, social workers and judicial officers.
- Invest in public awareness campaigns that address unequal power relations and harmful stereotypes of masculinity and femininity. Ensure stricter regulation of media that features stereotypical gender roles and hold media accountable for the negative impacts that they have on the body image of women and girls.

Sustainable Infrastructure

Youth in all their diversity continue to lack access to adequate infrastructure, which limits their mobility, increases their burden of unpaid care work, results in poor health and limits education and job opportunities. Increasing investment in sustainable infrastructure, that takes into account young people's needs and rights, and is environmentally sustainable is therefore critical

to advance gender equality and empower young people in all their diversity. Young people call on governments to ensure the following minimum standards in the provision of infrastructure:

- Increase investment in public transport systems, particularly in rural areas, to improve young people's access to education and employment. Public transport should be affordable, accessible for young people with disabilities and safe for young people to use free from violence or harassment.
- Ensure access to clean water in the community and sanitation facilities in schools to promote menstrual hygiene and allow young women and girls to continue in education. Public health education and awareness efforts should be implemented to reduce stigma around menstruation.
- Provide access to banking and financial infrastructure for young people that is easily accessible and understandable.
- Ensure urban planning takes into account the needs of youth, including by provide recreational and civic spaces for young people.
- Ensure environmental sustainability in all infrastructure projects and provide young people with infrastructure to support them to manage the effects of climate change.

Technology and its link to social protection, public services and sustainable infrastructure

Information and communications technology can improve access to and quality of social protection and public services for young people, and open up invaluable opportunities for education and employment. However the internet can also expose youth to violence and harassment, which needs to be addressed urgently. Young people call on governments to ensure the following common minimum standards in information and communications technology:

- Invest in technology that expands access to and ensures efficient delivery of social protection and public services for youth in all their diversity, ensuring access to high quality and affordable internet services, including rural areas.
- Invest in ethical data collection to measure youth experiences and integrate youth voices in the monitoring and evaluation of mechanisms and services that relate to them.
- Equip young people with skills necessary to use modern technology, such as programming and coding, bridge the gender digital divide and review ICT regulations to ensure young people can use technology safely and free from bullying, harassment or violence.

Ensuring meaningful youth participation in policymaking

In order to advance gender equality and ensure no one is left behind we must recognise that young people and their knowledge and expertise need be included in the design, implementation and evaluation of all policy and strategy decisions. Young people therefore urge governments to ensure the following common minimum standards to ensure youth voices are heard in national and international policymaking processes:

- Equip youth with the skills to meaningfully participate in decision-making fora, including by providing civic education and leadership development and by funding youth-led organizations and networks.
- Implement measures to ensure young people in all their diversity are meaningfully consulted and represented in leadership and decision-making processes at all levels, including by reducing the minimum age to hold public office and fostering intergenerational dialogues and partnerships.
- Provide support, protection and resources to young advocates, human rights defenders, youth-led and youth-serving organisations and networks to participate fully and equally in international policymaking fora and address barriers to meaningful participation, including visa refusals.
- Formally initiate meaningful youth delegate programmes where delegates are selected through a transparent process to represent youth-led networks and organizations, as well as national youth interests, at United Nations fora including the Commission on the Status of Women.

Conclusion

As we move closer to the 2020 anniversaries of landmark women's rights and gender equality policies, it is critical for governments to implement these common minimum standards, and to substantially increase investment in social protection, public services and sustainable infrastructure. In addition, effective linkages and synergies must be ensured. States must take an integrated and holistic approach to social protection, as schemes are often short term and change with political administrations, threatening progress. Social protection systems, public services and sustainable infrastructure must be universal and rights based, and must be provided to all young people regardless of gender, race, ethnic or social origin, religion, disability, sexual orientation or gender identity. These systems need to address the complexity of the challenges young people face in today's society, and incorporate a gender transformative approach that actively seeks to transform unequal gender norms and power inequalities to ensure that no one is left behind.