



Focus area: Women and girls of African descent

**Thursday, 14 March 2019, 3.00pm – 6.00pm, United Nations Headquarters
Interactive dialogue**

Overview

In accordance with its working methods the Commission on the Status of Women, as necessary, discusses emerging issues, trends, focus areas and new approaches to issues affecting the situation of women, including equality between women and men, that require timely consideration, taking into account developments at the global and regional levels as well as planned activities within the United Nations, where increased attention to gender perspectives is required; and with attention to relevant issues on the agenda of the Economic and Social Council, in particular the annual main theme of the Council, as applicable.

Women of African descent contribute to global processes and are agents of change in their communities and societies. They are also victims of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance. They participated in the 4th World Conference on Women in Beijing (1995) and its follow-up, as well as in the sessions of the Commission and other global processes. The Commission has recognized the important contribution of women and girls of African descent to the development of societies and the promotion of mutual understanding and multiculturalism¹, and has put forward actions in this regard, in particular pertaining rural women and girls of African descent. The pledge in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development to leave no one behind provides additional momentum and impetus for addressing the situation of women and girls of African descent.

Consideration of this issue as a focus area can contribute to the implementation of the International Decade for People of African Descent (2015–2024)², which calls for concrete and practical steps to combat racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance faced by people of African descent, taking into account the particular situation of women and girls (para 10).

¹ Agreed conclusions on “Challenges and opportunities in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls”: <http://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/csw/62/csw-conclusions-62-en.pdf?la=en&vs=4713>.
Agreed conclusions on “Women’s economic empowerment in the changing world of work”: <http://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/csw/61/csw-conclusions-61-web.pdf?la=en&vs=5452>

² General Assembly resolution [69/16](#), annex.

Human rights treaty bodies such as the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women and the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination; and special procedures of the Human Rights Council such as the Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent, the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, and the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences have drawn attention to intersectional discrimination faced by women and girls of African descent and the need to address such multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination.

Objectives

Consideration of this focus area provides an opportunity to highlight the roles and contributions of women and girls of African descent to the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, and to sustainable development and human rights. It is an opportunity to discuss action-oriented policies and programmes as they pertain to women and girls of African descent, and other measures to ensure their dignity, provide justice and accountability, and close gaps in the realization of gender equality and empowerment of women and girls of African descent.

Consideration of the focus area of women and girls of African descent will aim to:

- Review gains and challenges that women and girls of African descent face
- Highlight opportunities, good practices and other measures for accelerating the empowerment and enjoyment of rights by women and girls of African descent.

The consideration of the focus area could give particular attention to issues such as: enhancing political participation and economic empowerment for women of African descent, including through enhanced access to social protection and public services and economic and social integration particularly with regards to education, health care and housing; and addressing inequalities, discrimination and violence faced by women and girls of African descent, including on intersecting grounds such as language, social origin, property, birth, disability or other status.

Issues and elements for discussion

a. Enhancing political participation and economic empowerment for women of African descent

People of African descent, particularly women, have historically experienced low levels of political participation and representation. Among the barriers to political participation are lower levels of education and social capital, poverty, language barriers, geographical marginalization and lack of access to public information. Capacity-building activities, awareness raising campaigns and similar activities can contribute to enhanced participation.

The economic empowerment of women of African descent is characterized by limited access to labour markets, higher unemployment rates, low wages and often precarious working conditions³. Providing women of African descent with a wide range of economic opportunities is an important pathway to poverty elimination, including equal access and control over productive resources;

³ A/72/323, Programme of activities for the implementation of the International Decade for People of African Descent. Report of the Secretary-General.

equal pay for equal work; and recognition and reduction of unpaid care and domestic work. Access to quality public services, such as health and education, are also critical to overcoming poverty, and central to enhancing the political and economic empowerment of women of African descent.

The following questions could be addressed in the discussion:

1. How have legal and policy measures, including temporary special measures, enhanced the political participation of women of African descent, and strengthened the representation of women of African descent at decision-making levels in the public and private sectors?
2. What steps have contributed to enhancing the realization of the right to work and rights at work of women of African descent? What policy measures have improved their participation in the labour market and facilitated the transition from the informal to the formal sector and into entrepreneurship?
3. What steps are necessary to ensure access to quality public services, in particular education, healthcare and housing?

b. Addressing inequalities, discrimination and violence faced by women and girls of African descent

Discrimination against women and girls is often compounded by other factors such as language, social origin, property, birth, disability or other status. Being of African descent is also a factor which, when compounded with other aspects, places women and girls of African descent into situations of further marginalization and disadvantage. Among the key concerns are racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance and negative social norms and gender stereotypes, which constitute a significant obstacle to the realization of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls of African descent. Such inequalities, discrimination and stereotypes are reflected in unequal outcomes in regards to education, health, political participation and economic opportunities, among other fields, as well as unequal access to justice.

Violence against women and girls which occurs in all spaces and spheres of human interaction, including public spaces, the workplace, areas dedicated to leisure and technology-mediated settings, in is inextricably linked to other factors that affect women's and girls' lives, including race or ethnicity. This calls for specific efforts of prevention, and protection and support for victims. Given limited data disaggregated by relevant factors, enhancing the evidence base for policy-making also requires attention.

The following questions could be addressed in the discussion:

1. What actions have States taken to address discrimination against women and girls of African descent, including those that experience multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination? What results have been achieved with such efforts?
2. What strategies have been effective in preventing and addressing violence against women and girls of African descent?
3. How can the availability of data be strengthened? What institutional arrangements, and what kinds of partnerships can contribute to coordinated action to eliminate inequalities, discrimination and violence against women and girls of African descent?

Format and participation

Consideration of the focus area will be through an interactive dialogue. A CSW Vice-Chair will chair and moderate the meeting. The two main topics will be introduced by three invited speakers

each. Following their introductions, the moderator will open the floor and support the dialogue and its interactive nature through follow-up questions. Initial comments will be strictly limited to three minutes, and any follow-up comment to one minute. 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.

Outcome

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