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## Commission on the Status of Women

Sixty-fourth session

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Item 3 (c) of the provisional agenda

**Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly entitled “Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century”: gender mainstreaming, situations and programmatic matters**

### **Proposals on the Commission’s priority and review themes for 2021 and beyond**

#### **Report of the Secretary-General**

##### *Summary*

The present report, prepared in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution [2018/8](#), contains suggestions for the future priority and review themes of the Commission on the Status of Women.



## I. Introduction

1. In its resolution [2018/8](#), the Economic and Social Council requested the Secretary-General to submit to the Commission on the Status of Women, at its sixty-fourth session, a report containing proposals on the Commission's priority and review themes for 2021 and beyond. The present report is submitted in response to that request.

2. Since 1987, the Commission has used multi-year programmes of work. Following the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in 1995, and in accordance with General Assembly resolution [50/203](#), multi-year programmes of work covered the periods 1997–2000, 2002–2006 and 2007–2009. In 2009, priority and review themes were determined for the period 2010–2014, and in 2013, for 2016. In 2016, priority and review themes were determined for the period 2017–2019.

3. The Commission plays a central role in monitoring, reviewing and appraising progress achieved and problems encountered in the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action at all levels. The Commission also contributes to the follow-up to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development so as to accelerate the realization of gender equality and the empowerment of women.

4. Pursuant to Economic and Social Council resolution [2015/6](#), on the future organization and methods of work of the Commission, the Commission continues to apply a thematic approach to its work and to adopt a multi-year programme of work to allow for predictability and adequate time for preparation. In selecting its priority theme, the Commission takes into consideration, in addition to the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcomes of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, the programme of work of the Council, as well as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. In this manner, the Commission builds synergies and contributes to the work of the Council system and the high-level political forum on sustainable development. The Commission's evaluation, at each session, of progress in the implementation of its agreed conclusions on a priority theme from a previous session as its review theme is also part of its methods of work.

5. Pursuant to General Assembly resolution [72/305](#), subsidiary bodies of the Council shall adopt their own respective themes, aligned with the main theme, while continuing to address issues or a theme necessary to discharge their other functions. Further, their work should reflect the need for an integrated and action-oriented approach to the Sustainable Development Goals.

6. The selection of priority themes that respond to current contexts, trends and developments enables the Commission to add impetus to the accelerated realization of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls. As the Commission approaches this task for the years following 2020, the findings of the 25-year review of progress in the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and the need for its full, effective and accelerated implementation should be an overarching consideration. Following the completion of the first review cycle of the high-level political forum on sustainable development and the launch of a decade of action and delivery for sustainable development in September 2019 (see General Assembly resolution [74/4](#), annex), the Commission's selection of its future priority themes should strengthen synergies between the implementation of the Platform for Action and the gender-responsive implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

7. The selection of priority themes can also be an effective means to strengthen the Commission's catalytic role in ensuring gender mainstreaming in the United Nations system, including through topical inputs to other intergovernmental processes from a gender perspective.

## II. Priority themes for the period 2021–2024

8. At its sixty-fourth session, the Commission may wish to adopt its multi-year programme of work for the years from 2021 to 2024. Proposals for priority themes for these years are outlined below.

9. In 2021, the Commission may wish to consider as its priority theme: “Women’s participation in public life and decision-making”. The Beijing Platform for Action prioritized women’s participation, power and decision-making in public life, and established the goal of gender balance in all governmental bodies and public institutions to achieve equal representation of women and men. The rights to participate in public affairs directly or indirectly through freely chosen representatives, vote and be elected in elections, and have equal access to public services are guaranteed under several international human rights instruments, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. In the agreed conclusions of its fiftieth session, the Commission expanded on actions to ensure the equal participation of women and men in decision-making processes at all levels. In recent agreed conclusions, the Commission regularly addressed the role of women’s participation in relation to the theme under consideration.

10. The importance of women’s participation in public life and decision-making is also recognized in the Sustainable Development Goals, with a specific target on ensuring women’s full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership in decision-making, including in national parliaments and local governments (Goal 5, target 5.5). The presence and contributions of women in local government, which directly affect the daily lives of communities in most countries, is only now becoming more fully recognized as data are being collected under Sustainable Development Goal indicator 5.5.1b.

11. Ensuring women’s participation in public life and civic spaces takes on particular urgency at a time of slow and inadequate progress and women’s persistent underrepresentation among decision makers worldwide. Violence and harassment against women in political and public life has seemingly increased as more women gain access to public office, especially as a result of the application of temporary special measures, such as electoral gender quotas, and the adoption of “parity laws”, notably in Latin America. Such violence deters women from exercising their rights to participate and serve in office, hampers the work of institutions, stifles women’s voices and weakens the policy outcomes of countries. Young, indigenous and/or lesbian, bisexual and transgender women have been especially targeted by violence and harassment, as have women human rights defenders, and the shrinking civic space, democratic erosions and backlash against gender equality appear to exacerbate these trends. The increased prevalence of online violence that accelerates violence and disinformation about women politicians and public policy are growing concerns (see [A/73/301](#)).

12. These trends and developments thus call for an examination of policies and programmes to strengthen the voice, agency, participation and leadership of women and girls, and to increase their participation and roles in public life to influence decision-making in all spheres, including with regard to financial decision-making. The Commission could examine the barriers to the full and equal participation of women in decision-making, including: the discriminatory culture of political institutions; threats of violence and intimidation; the backlash to the application of temporary special measures; opportunities for women’s participation in local-level decision-making; and responses of critical State and non-State actors to address violence against women in public life and decision-making.

13. In 2022, the Commission may wish to consider as its priority theme: “Innovation and technological change to achieve gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls in the digital age”. The Beijing Platform for Action addressed the role of technology across different critical areas of concern and recognized that women had to be able to participate in the process from design to application, monitoring and evaluation. In the agreed conclusions of its fifty-fifth session, the Commission recommended action related to women’s access to education and employment in technology. At its sixty-second session, the Commission raised the issue of women’s digital literacy and the opportunities created by mobile services. The linkages between access to and the use of technology and sustainable development is made across the Sustainable Development Goals, including with regard to Goal 1 (poverty), Goal 2 (agriculture), Goal 4 (education), Goal 5 (gender equality) and Goal 9 (infrastructure).

14. The digital revolution is one of the most rapid and far-reaching transformations since the Fourth World Conference on Women was held 25 years ago. Today, digital technologies touch on almost every aspect of economic, social and political life, even as important inequalities in access and use prevail within and across countries, and between women and men. Digital technology is changing the world of work and the way people communicate and inform themselves; expanding existing and new forms of activism and advocacy; affecting governance systems, including the way in which social protection and public services are delivered; and generating unprecedented amounts of data. More recently, artificial intelligence, powered by algorithms and machine learning, has become a defining feature and driving force of digital technology and innovation.

15. These trends create new opportunities for gender equality and women’s empowerment, as well as new risks. For example, mobile phone technologies have been found to benefit women in accessing information and facilitating their collective action. However, inequalities in access to digital technologies and men’s control over women’s use of information and communications technologies continue to persist. The proliferation of digital platforms, in both developed and developing countries, could create new employment opportunities for women. Without targeted action, however, they may also reproduce or exacerbate pre-existing inequalities. Currently, women represent only one out of every three crowdworkers, with the gender balance being particularly skewed in developing countries.<sup>1</sup> Women also remain underrepresented in sectors and occupations that are pioneering new technologies, and there is evidence that this lack of diversity leads to significant gender bias.<sup>2</sup> There are already examples of how artificial intelligence and machine learning can lead to unintended discrimination towards women and create greater risks that gender bias might be replicated and institutionalized. Furthermore, concerns about new risks related to fairness and inclusion, privacy and autonomy, accountability and transparency have arisen, including the heightened exposure of women and girls to violence and abuse committed, facilitated or aggravated by the use of information and communications technologies (see [A/HRC/35/9](#)).

16. These trends and current developments call for an examination of the impact of the digital revolution on gender equality and women’s empowerment. The Commission should consider and discuss gender-responsive approaches to harnessing the opportunities and managing the risks of digitalization and technological innovation for women and girls, including their economic empowerment; educational

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<sup>1</sup> International Labour Organization. *Digital Labour Platforms and the Future of Work: Toward Decent Work in the Online World* (Geneva, 2018), p. xvi.

<sup>2</sup> J. Wajcman, “The digital revolution: Implications for gender equality and women’s rights 25 years after Beijing”, background paper prepared for expert group meeting at the sixty-fourth session of the Commission on the Status of Women, New York, 2019.

advancement, access to health and social protection; freedom from violence (cyberbullying); participation in public life and the right to privacy, with particular attention paid to women and girls who face multiple and intersecting forms of inequalities and discrimination.

17. In 2023, the Commission may wish to consider as its priority theme: “Gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls in the context of environmental degradation and climate change”. The Beijing Platform for Action addressed women and the environment as one of its critical areas of concern, and the issue was further elaborated in priority themes of the Commission at its forty-first and forty-sixth sessions. In the agreed conclusions of its sixty-second and sixty-third sessions, the Commission also underscored the need for gender-responsive strategies to address environmental challenges and climate change and to support the resilience and adaptive capacities of women and girls. The Conferences of the Parties to the Rio Conventions and other multilateral environmental agreements have steadily increased their work towards gender equality and women’s empowerment. The Paris Agreement under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change recognized the intersection of climate change and gender equality, the empowerment of women and the realization of human rights.

18. The consequences of climate change (Goal 13) amplify existing gender inequalities, including in relation to poverty (Goal 1), food security and sustainable agricultural practices (Goal 2), health (Goal 3), access to sustainable water and energy provision (Goals 6 and 7), sustainable livelihoods and peaceful societies (Goals 5, 8 and 16), sustainable consumption and production patterns (Goal 12) and use of natural resources (Goal 15).

19. Land degradation, loss of biodiversity, global warming, extreme weather events and natural disasters have rapidly accelerated and intensified into widespread and interlinked environmental and climate crises. Environmental degradation and climate change impacts amplify existing gender inequalities. In its report, *Global Warming of 1.5°C*, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has found that climate change worsened existing poverty and exacerbated inequalities, especially those of gender, age, race, class, caste, indigeneity and (dis)ability, and its impacts are much greater on marginalized groups because of unequal relations of power, constraints on their voice and agency, and limited access to land and resources, public services, and sustainable infrastructure. Research has also shown that women are disproportionately affected by their dependence on and unequal access to land, water and other natural resources, as well as to public services and infrastructure – including energy, transport, water and sanitation – that do not take into account the specific needs of women and girls. Further, women’s unpaid care and domestic work intensify when women and their families are obliged to seek alternative livelihoods or migrate as a consequence of devastating environmental and climate change impacts on livelihoods and income security. Rural and indigenous women, women and girls in situations of conflict, and women and girls facing displacement are particularly subject to precarious situations, poverty and exclusion in the face of environmental degradation. The capacity of women and girls to withstand and recover from disasters is strongly affected by gender inequalities. In most disasters, mortality among women is significantly higher than that among men, and women’s poverty increases in disaster-prone areas.<sup>3</sup>

20. At the same time, women have demonstrated that they are key agents of change as consumers, producers, innovators and decision makers in climate and environment

<sup>3</sup> United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), *Leveraging Co-Benefits Between Gender Equality and Climate Action for Sustainable Development: Mainstreaming Gender Considerations in Climate Change Projects* (New York, 2016).

actions. Their full and meaningful participation increases the effectiveness of climate actions.

21. These trends and current developments call for an examination of the linkages between environmental degradation and climate change, and gender equality and women's empowerment, in an effort to ensure that all women and girls, especially those who are experiencing multiple forms of discrimination, benefit fully from gender-responsive environmental and climate policies and their implementation, as well as from adequate investments in financing. Issues that should be considered include: building and supporting the environmental and climate resilience of women, including in the context of disasters, through sustainable infrastructure, public services, awareness-raising and capacity-building; ensuring the full and equal participation and leadership of women in all decision-making processes related to climate and the environment, including mitigation and adaptation measures, biodiversity conservation, and sustainable land use and management; and supporting a just transition towards climate stabilization and biodiversity conservation that ensures decent work and social protection for all.

22. In 2024, the Commission may wish to consider as its priority theme: "Accelerating gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls through gender-responsive financing and institutions". In the Beijing Platform for Action, Member States highlighted the need for financial resources for its full and effective implementation. They emphasized that it was the primary responsibility of Member States to review the impact of budgets on women and girls and to direct resources towards achieving national gender equality commitments. They also underlined the critical role of national machineries for the advancement of women. A robust and well-financed gender mainstreaming strategy is thus critical to ensure that gender equality commitments translate into policies and programmes across all areas.

23. At its fifty-second session, the Commission expanded on the role of national machineries and, in particular, on financing for gender equality and the empowerment of women. In 2015, in the Addis Ababa Action Agenda of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development, Member States recognized the need for gender mainstreaming, including targeted actions and investments in the formulation and implementation of all financial, economic, environmental and social policies. In the 2030 Agenda, they emphasized that the systematic mainstreaming of a gender perspective in its implementation is critical, and the role of institutions and finance is cross-cutting and receives particular focus in Sustainable Development Goals 16 and 17.

24. In recent years, there have been significant advances, and new opportunities for financing for gender equality have emerged. More Governments have implemented gender-responsive budgeting to promote changes in budget laws, policies and systems of public finance management. At the institutional level, ministries of finance and economy have begun to drive gender budgeting, across sectors. National gender equality mechanisms have helped mainstream gender perspectives across the planning and budgeting cycle, bringing in critical actors, including parliaments and civil society. Yet chronic underinvestment in gender equality persists, as is evidenced in the report of the Secretary-General on the review and appraisal of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (E/CN.6/2020/3), in which only 40 per cent of countries with national action plans reported costing and allocating resources for their implementation. Countries continue to lack robust financial systems to track allocations for gender equality and to measure impact. Data from 69 countries reporting on Sustainable Development Goal indicator 5.c.1. indicated a lack of capacity to conduct gender analysis and effectively use gender budgeting tools.

25. While domestic public resources remain a critical source of financing for gender equality and are essential to meet national commitments, all sources of financing –

public, private, domestic and international – are required to meet the Sustainable Development Goals, including Goal 5. International financing for gender equality has steadily increased since 2009; however, aid targeting gender equality as a principal objective declined by 7 per cent in the period 2016–2017. Further, private financing, while large in scale, is often not aligned with national gender equality objectives.

26. The shifting development financing landscape, coupled with a lack of financial estimates for gender equality plans, requires an assessment, by the Commission, of the efforts of Governments to cost and mainstream gender perspectives in all national financing strategies. The role of national gender equality institutions in the design, monitoring and implementation of such strategies, and their collaboration with line ministries, parliaments and civil society also requires further examination. The best practices of States in accessing financing from a range of sources to meet Goal 5 goals can inform such a consideration.

### III. Review themes for the period 2021–2024

27. At its sixty-fourth session, the Commission may also wish to determine the review themes for the years from 2021 to 2024. Proposals for review themes for these years are outlined below.

28. According to its methods of work, at each session, the Commission will evaluate progress in the implementation of its agreed conclusions on a priority theme of a previous session as its review theme, through an interactive dialogue consisting of representatives of Member States of different regions, on a voluntary basis, presenting their lessons learned, challenges and best practices and ways to support and achieve accelerated implementation, including through addressing data gaps and challenges in the enhanced collection, reporting, use and analysis of data.

29. For the years from 2021 to 2024, the Commission would have the opportunity to evaluate the implementation of the following agreed conclusions from previous sessions: from its sixty-first session, on women’s economic empowerment in the changing world of work; from its sixty-second session, on challenges and opportunities in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls; and from its sixty-third session, on social protection systems, access to public services and sustainable infrastructure for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls.

30. In addition, and in order maximize the impact on the next cycle of the high-level political forum, the Commission could consider evaluating once again, in 2024, the implementation of its agreed conclusions from 2016, on women’s empowerment and the link to sustainable development, which made a major contribution to the gender-responsive implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

31. The format for the review would follow the methods of work of the Commission. The review would also be supported by a report by the Secretary-General on progress made on the theme of the review at the national level. The outcome of the discussion on the review theme would be in the form of a summary by the Chair of the Commission, as outlined in the Commission’s methods of work.

### IV. Methods of work of the Commission

32. With a focus on ways and means to further enhance the impact of its work (E/CN.6/2014/14), the Commission most recently reviewed its methods of work at its fifty-ninth session (see Council resolution 2015/6). The main aspects of the methods of work covered in the resolution included: responsibilities of the Commission;

format of the session, including a ministerial segment, a general discussion, a priority theme, an emerging issue or focus area, and a review theme, including their consideration and outcomes; participation of and contributions by stakeholders; composition of government delegations; role of the Bureau of the Commission; preparations for sessions; thematic approach to the Commission's work, multi-year programme of work and the need to build synergies in the selection of themes; and documentation for the session.

33. Since 2016, the Commission has considered four priority themes in accordance with the format outlined in the resolution, including through ministerial round tables and expert panels, and has adopted agreed conclusions thereon. It has considered four review themes in the new format outlined in the resolution, with a total of 46 voluntary presentations by Member States from different regions and with contributions by partner countries and/or organizations. It has considered three emerging issues or focus areas, which were selected during the intersessional period based on Bureau proposals following consultations with Member States through the regional groups. The Chair of the Commission, together with Bureau members, have held, on average, two briefings for Member States in preparation for each session. Participation in the sessions has remained at a high level with, on average, well over 70 ministers heading national delegations and around 4,000 participants from non-governmental organizations at each session. Other stakeholders, including Chairs or Vice-Chairs of functional commissions, parliamentarians, youth representatives, invited experts and representatives of national human rights institutions, human rights treaty bodies and the United Nations system have also regularly contributed to the sessions.

34. Through its methods of work, the Commission exercises its mandate and assumes its responsibility for advancing and accelerating the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcomes of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly at all levels, as well as for the gender-responsive implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The methods of work have increased opportunities for sharing and exchanging ideas, experiences, lessons learned and good practices from the national level through interactive dialogue and events, with the participation of high-level officials and experts. They have fostered engagement on issues and strengthened the Commission's contribution to the work of the Economic and Social Council and the high-level political forum. They have also supported the catalytic role of the Commission in promoting gender mainstreaming.

35. The experience gained since 2016 could be reviewed by the Commission, with a view to assessing lessons learned and identifying areas for further enhancement. Such a review could also take into consideration the forthcoming review by the General Assembly, at its seventy-fourth session, of the arrangements contained in resolution [72/305](#) and its annex in conjunction with the review process of the high-level political forum on sustainable development.

## **V. Summary: proposed priority and review themes for the period 2021–2024**

36. The proposed priority and review themes for the sixty-fifth, sixty-sixth, sixty-seventh and sixty-eighth sessions of the Commission are set out below:

- (a) Sixty-fifth session (2021):
  - Priority theme: Women's participation in public life and decision-making
  - Review theme: Women's economic empowerment in the changing world of work (agreed conclusions from the sixty-first session)



- (b) Sixty-sixth session (2022):
  - Priority theme: Innovation and technological change to achieve gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls in the digital age
  - Review theme: Challenges and opportunities in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls (agreed conclusions from the sixty-second session)
- (c) Sixty-seventh session (2023):
  - Priority theme: Gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls in the context of environmental degradation and climate change
  - Review theme: Women's empowerment and the link to sustainable development (agreed conclusions from the sixtieth session)
- (d) Sixty-eighth session (2024):
  - Priority theme: Accelerating gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls through gender-responsive financing and institutions
  - Review theme: Social protection systems, access to public services and sustainable infrastructure for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls (agreed conclusions from the sixty-third session)

## Annex

### **Priority and review themes considered by the Commission on the Status of Women: 2006–2020**

#### **Fiftieth session (2006)**

*(Two themes)*

- Enhanced participation of women in development: an enabling environment for achieving gender equality and the advancement of women, taking into account, inter alia, the fields of education, health and work
- Equal participation of women and men in decision-making processes at all levels

#### **Fifty-first session (2007)**

- Priority theme: Elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against the girl child
- Review theme: The role of men and boys in achieving gender equality

#### **Fifty-second session (2008)**

- Priority theme: Financing for gender equality and empowerment of women
- Review theme: Women's equal participation in conflict prevention, management and conflict resolution and in post-conflict peacebuilding

#### **Fifty-third session (2009)**

- Priority theme: The equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men, including caregiving in the context of HIV/AIDS
- Review theme: Equal participation of women and men in decision-making processes at all levels

#### **Fifty-fourth session (2010)**

- Fifteen-year review of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcomes of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly

#### **Fifty-fifth session (2011)**

- Priority theme: Access and participation of women and girls in education, training, science and technology, including for the promotion of women's equal access to full employment and decent work
- Review theme: The elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against the girl child

#### **Fifty-sixth session (2012)**

- Priority theme: The empowerment of rural women and their role in poverty and hunger eradication, development and current challenges
- Review theme: Financing for gender equality and the empowerment of women

**Fifty-seventh session (2013)**

- Priority theme: Elimination and prevention of all forms of violence against women and girls
- Review theme: The equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men, including caregiving in the context of HIV/AIDS

**Fifty-eighth session (2014)**

- Priority theme: Challenges and achievements in the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals for women and girls
- Review theme: Access and participation of women and girls to education, training, science and technology, including for the promotion of women's equal access to full employment and decent work

**Fifty-ninth session (2015)**

- Twenty-year review and appraisal of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcomes of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly

**Sixtieth session (2016)**

- Priority theme: Women's empowerment and the link to sustainable development
- Review theme: The elimination and prevention of all forms of violence against women and girls

**Sixty-first session (2017)**

- Priority theme: Women's economic empowerment in the changing world of work
- Review theme: Challenges and achievements in the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals for women and girls

**Sixty-second session (2018)**

- Priority theme: Challenges and opportunities in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls
- Review theme: Participation in and access of women to the media, and information and communications technologies and their impact on and use as an instrument for the advancement and empowerment of women

**Sixty-third session (2019)**

- Priority theme: Social protection systems, access to public services and sustainable infrastructure for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls
- Review theme: Women's empowerment and the link to sustainable development

**Sixty-fourth session (2020)**

- Twenty five-year review and appraisal of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcomes of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly