



# Economic and Social Council

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## Commission on the Status of Women

Sixty-fifth session

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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”

### Statement submitted by American Association of University Women, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council\*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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\* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



## Statement

The American Association of University Women submits this statement to the 65th Session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women for consideration of the Commission in its discussions on the Priority theme: Women's full and effective participation and decision-making in public life, as well as the elimination of violence; and Review theme: Women's empowerment and the link to sustainable development (agreed conclusions of the sixtieth session) for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls.

For nearly 140 years, the American Association of University Women, a nonpartisan, non-profit organization, has advanced gender equity for women and girls through research, education and advocacy. With more than 170,000 global members and supporters 1,000 local branches and 800 college and university partners, the Association promotes the economic, social, and physical well-being of all persons. Essential to that well-being are an economy that provides equitable employment opportunities; reduction of poverty; a living wage; quality, affordable dependent care; paid family and medical leave; safe, livable, and affordable housing; quality, affordable, and accessible health care for all, including reproductive health care; and a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment.

The Association believes that global interdependence requires national and international policies against human trafficking and that promote peace, justice, human rights, sustainable development and mutual security for all people. We support the civil and human rights of all immigrants, including a fair and just path to legal status. We support a strengthened United Nations and its affiliated agencies and affirm our active participation in the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women and our commitment to ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women.

The Association acknowledges the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Beijing Platform for Action from the 4th World Conference on Women and subsequent declarations as they work to advance equality for women around the world. Programs, advocacy and research, combined with awarding fellowships and grants to more than 13,000 women from the United States and 145 countries place the Association's efforts in the top tier of global women's organizations, but barriers still keep education, security, full participation and economic vitality out of reach for millions of women and girls. Support and access to resources, education, health care and employment opportunities are essential to give women and girls pathways to thrive.

The most significant issue facing gender equality in our world today is the long term effects of the COVID-19 crisis. Research from the Association and other highly respected equity organizations reveals that the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic is not gender neutral and will have long-term consequences on gender equality as women are disproportionately affected and existing gender disparities have been magnified.

U.N. Women Policy Brief Number 15, Addressing the Economic Fallout of Covid-19: Pathways and Policy Options for a Gender-Responsive Recovery, highlights the severity of COVID-19 on women and girls and the likelihood that inequalities are expected to increase for women and girls, particularly those who are racial and ethnic minorities. It also notes that the COVID-19 crisis may severely reverse decades of gains in women's economic security and social protection and increase violence due to the following:

- Women's access to income is less secure
- Occupational segregation keeps women in vulnerable, low wage jobs

- Women are the majority of health care workers worldwide
- Women's unemployment overall is higher than men's
- Majority of part-time and temporary workers are women
- An increase in unpaid family caregiving responsibilities and out of school children leading to more women dropping out of the workforce, and impacting family economic security
- Women-owned businesses lack access to financial institutions and financing
- Economic and social stress coupled with restricted movement and social isolation measures leave women forced to lockdown at home with their abusers as services are disrupted or inaccessible (according to UN Women's Policy Brief on COVID-19 and Ending Violence against Women and Girls).

It is vital that Member States and the United Nations implement a gendered response to COVID-19 to ensure that women and girls benefit not only during the crisis, but during recovery, to ensure women's full and effective participation and decision-making in public life and the elimination of violence against girls and women.

For current and future COVID-19 efforts, we urge Member States and the United Nations to prioritize support for women and girls as outlined in U.N. Women Policy Brief Number 15, including efforts to:

- Design economic response and recovery packages with a gender lens and assess their impact on women and men
- Strengthen social protection systems to cover all working women
- Support paid sick leave for all workers
- Support hard-hit sectors that employ a large share of women
- Support women-led enterprises and businesses
- Use gender-responsive procurement and public works programs
- Promote flexible work arrangements to cope with increased care burdens
- Decrease the financial burden on households and ensure continuity of basic services such as housing, water and electricity
- Use digital solutions to build inclusive crisis responses

Research is unequivocal that women and girls are suffering and will continue to experience the greatest impact of the pandemic. The Association encourages Member States and the United Nations to prioritize women's leadership in seeking solutions and focus resources and policy on mitigating the vulnerabilities in social, political and economic systems revealed by COVID-19 by partnering with civil society, women's rights organizations, businesses, nongovernmental organizations, educational and healthcare entities for a robust and effective gender response to the crisis.

As we collaborate to build a more equitable world post-pandemic and keep women and girls from losing hard-won gains led by the Association and our coalition partners, our advocacy, education and research efforts will continue to prioritize the ongoing needs of women and girls, support the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and Beijing Platform for Action, including:

- Public education that promotes gender fairness, equity, diversity and inclusivity and addresses the barriers and implicit biases that hinder the advancement of women and girls

- Increased support for and protection of programs that meet the needs of girls and women in elementary, secondary, and postsecondary education
- Pay equity and fairness in compensation and benefits
- Programs for allies (including men, hiring managers, etc.) that work to eliminate existing biases
- Equitable access and advancement in employment, free from systemic barriers and biases, including vigorous enforcement of employment discrimination statutes
- Closing the gender and race gaps in leadership opportunities for women of all backgrounds
- Greater availability of and access to a high standard of benefits and policies that promote work-life balance, including quality and affordable dependent care and paid family, medical, and sick leave
- Programs that provide women with education, training, and support for success in the workforce, including non-traditional occupations and women's entrepreneurship
- Strengthening retirement benefits and programs, including pension improvements and protecting Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid from privatization
- Access for all women to the full range of health care services to ensure economic security
- Increasing the number of quality jobs that pay a living wage
- Vigorous enforcement of and full access to civil and constitutional rights, including affirmative action and expanding voting rights
- Universal access to quality, affordable health care and comprehensive family planning services, including expansion of patients' rights
- Freedom from violence and fear of violence, including hate crimes, in homes, schools, workplaces, and communities

As nations continue to navigate through the devastating COVID-19 pandemic and the world's response and recovery, the American Association of University Women urges Member States and the United Nations to take action with a gender lens through policy and investment with time-driven metrics and quantitative measures to ensure equal opportunities, full participation and rights in all aspects of life – legal, environmental and social protections for all women and girls. We cannot afford additional reversal of the progress that propelled the advancement of women to date. We urge a commitment to the support, training, and human and civil rights needed to build a stronger and fairer world for girls, women, men and boys.

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