



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
16 December 2020

Original: English

Commission on the Status of Women

Sixty-fifth session

15–26 March 2021

Item 3 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”

Discussion guide for the ministerial round tables to be held by the Commission on the Status of Women under the priority theme “Women’s full and effective participation and decision-making in public life, as well as the elimination of violence, for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls”

Note by the Secretariat

I. Introduction

1. In its resolution [2015/6](#) on the future organization and methods of work of the Commission on the Status of Women, the Economic and Social Council decided that the session of the Commission would include a ministerial segment to reaffirm and strengthen political commitment to the realization of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, as well as their human rights, and to ensure high-level engagement and the visibility of the deliberations of the Commission, and that the segment would include ministerial round tables or other high-level interactive dialogues.

2. In accordance with the multi-year programme of work of the Commission, as contained in Economic and Social Council resolution [2020/15](#), the Commission will consider “Women’s full and effective participation and decision-making in public life, as well as the elimination of violence, for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls” as the priority theme for the sixty-fifth session, to be held from 15 to 26 March 2021. Further to that decision, it is proposed that the Commission hold ministerial round tables at that session to provide ministers with opportunities for high-level engagement on key issues arising under the priority theme.

* [E/CN.6/2021/1](#).



II. Organizational matters

A. Theme and topics

3. Under the priority theme “Women’s full and effective participation and decision-making in public life, as well as the elimination of violence, for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls”, the Commission will hold four ministerial round tables on the following topics:

(a) Getting to parity: good practices towards achieving women’s full and effective participation and decision-making in public life;

(b) Creating an enabling environment for women’s full and effective participation and decision-making in public life.

4. The ministerial round tables will be focused on the exchange of experiences, lessons learned and good practices in relation to the proposed topics. Ministers will be encouraged to look ahead towards realizing gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, as well as their human rights. Ministers will be invited to highlight the steps and measures that are necessary and planned to ensure that national responses contribute effectively to the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls through the full, effective and accelerated implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

B. Participants

5. Through the round tables, ministers will be provided with the opportunity to engage virtually in dialogue and discussion. The round tables will be open to all Member States and observers.

6. Ministers are invited to indicate, in advance and preferably no later than 26 February 2021, the ministerial round table in which they would prefer to participate, as well as their second preference. Approximately 15 to 17 ministers are expected to participate in each round table. The Chairs of the ministerial round tables will have a list of ministers who have signed up for each round table, but no list of speakers will be prepared in advance.

7. The Chairs of the ministerial round tables will guide the discussion with a view to promoting interaction. Interventions are not to exceed three minutes, and an emphasis will be placed on dialogue. Ministers will be encouraged to ask questions and comment on interventions made during the dialogue.

C. Times

8. The ministerial round tables will be held through informal virtual meetings on Monday, 15 March 2021, from 4 to 6 p.m., and on Tuesday, 16 March 2021, from 9 to 11 a.m., at the times set out in the table below.

<i>Round table</i>	<i>Time</i>	<i>Location</i>
Getting to parity: good practices towards achieving women's full and effective participation and decision-making in public life	4–5 p.m.	Virtual platform
Creating an enabling environment for women's full and effective participation and decision-making in public life	5–6 p.m.	Virtual platform
Getting to parity: good practices towards achieving women's full and effective participation and decision-making in public life	9–10 a.m.	Virtual platform
Creating an enabling environment for women's full and effective participation and decision-making in public life	10–11 a.m.	Virtual platform

D. Outcome

9. The outcomes of the ministerial round tables will be in the form of Chairs' summaries, prepared in consultation with the regional groups through the members of the Bureau.

III. Items for discussion in the ministerial round tables

A. Background

10. The discussion of the priority theme “women's full and effective participation and decision-making in public life, as well as the elimination of violence, for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls” will provide the Commission with an opportunity to consider the topic in terms of how gender-responsive action across these areas can accelerate the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the decade of action through the setting of more ambitious targets, an increase in political will and financing and institutional arrangements that are more responsive to the needs and abilities of women and girls.

11. Power-sharing between men and women, through which women have equal access to, and participate effectively in, decision-making in executive, legislative, judicial and public administrative institutions is critical for achieving equality for women and girls. The leadership of women in civil society, such as in women's groups, networks and community-based organizations, is also critical. Progress has been made in increasing the number of women in executive and legislative positions, but fifty-fifty gender parity is far from having been achieved. Women remain underrepresented in all aspects of decision-making. Violence against women in public life is widespread. Men with power often resist leadership by women, even within political parties. The higher levels of poverty, more limited access to finance, greater care duties, challenges to realizing sexual and reproductive health and rights and exclusionary institutional rules and procedures that women experience limit their full participation. Enduring social norms and expectations regarding women's roles, as well as discrimination in law, compound the challenges and devalue the contributions of women to decision-making, threatening sustainable development. Organized opposition to women in public life is sometimes strong and violent, worsened by

democratic backsliding, increasing social and political polarization and deepening inequality. Closing those gaps will require political will to change power relations, the use of temporary special measures, the creation of more enabling environments and institutional systems, the reduction of violence against women in public life, the strengthening of women's voices and the elimination of discrimination.

12. During the round tables, ministers will be invited to consider the questions in the discussion guide below and to focus on what needs to be done to accelerate the full and effective implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the 2030 Agenda to realize the human rights and empowerment of all women and girls. Ministers are encouraged to highlight legislation, policies, regulations and strategies, including temporary special measures, that have proved successful in boosting the number of women in decision-making. Ministers may also address the feminization of poverty, as well as the availability of public services such as childcare, institutional mechanisms, the availability of financing, tackling social norms and stereotypes, infrastructure and educational and other measures that contribute to creating an enabling environment for the participation of women. Ministers are encouraged to use the discussion guide and consult the report of the Secretary-General on the priority theme of the sixty-fifth session ([E/CN.6/2021/3](#)).

B. Discussion guide

Getting to parity: good practices towards achieving women's full and effective participation and decision-making in public life

13. Ensuring women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making (Sustainable Development Goal 5.5) is connected to achieving responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels (Goal 16.7). Women serve as heads of State or Government in only 21 countries; 119 have never had a woman leader. Globally, women hold 21 per cent of ministerial positions, 25 per cent of national parliamentary seats and 36 per cent of local deliberative seats. Failure to accelerate women's participation will make it impossible to achieve the Goals by 2030; at the current rate, it will take another 130 years to reach gender parity among heads of State and Government, 56 years among cabinet ministers and 42 years among national parliamentarians.

14. Although having more women in the public sector and civil service would bring more perspectives of women to policy and public service delivery, women rarely hold leadership posts. Women are estimated to make up fewer than half the number of judges worldwide. A lack of women in public sector decision-making leaves governments ill-equipped to respond to conflict and crises. When women are not consulted or included in decision-making on issues that have a direct impact on their lives, including education, health, economic development and conflict resolution, policy outcomes are likely to be harmful and ineffective and lead to a violation of their rights.

15. The adoption of, and compliance with, gender quota legislation is the main policy intervention that has improved the participation of women in national and local decision-making. Only 15 countries using legislated candidate quotas at the national level require a target of 50 per cent women, and 10 require a target of more than 40 per cent women or either sex. Quota design is key to successful implementation in elected positions. Only 36 countries have achieved the gender targets established in their quota laws, and 35 require ranking and/or alternate placement requirements for women on candidate lists (such as zipper lists) at the parliamentary level. Without such measures, women risk being placed in unelectable positions.

16. Good practices include establishing targets, action plans and timelines to achieve gender parity with regard to all executive, legislative and administrative positions at the national and local levels. Gender parity and greater diversity in executive cabinets have been achieved through appointments where there is political will. Solutions for increasing the participation and decision-making of women in the public sector should be applied more systematically to the private sector where women leaders can help to shape public attitudes and expand the pool of women ready to take up decision-making positions in public life.

17. Ministers are invited to consider the following questions to help to focus the dialogue:

(a) What steps are Governments taking to achieve the equal participation and representation of women in public life and decision-making?

(b) What are good-practice examples of temporary special measures, including ambitious gender quotas, that have been designed and implemented to accelerate progress towards the participation of women in executive and legislative decision-making?

(c) What measures are Governments taking to increase and track the representation of women in public sector leadership positions in institutions such as public administration and the judiciary?

Creating an enabling environment for women's full and effective participation and decision-making in public life

18. Achieving gender equality is a collective responsibility requiring men and women to transform institutions and systems together to create an enabling environment for equal participation. The higher levels of poverty, more limited access to finance, greater care duties and challenges to realizing sexual and reproductive health and rights of women, combined with exclusionary institutional rules and procedures, limit their full participation. A lack of care facilities deters women with families and caring responsibilities from pursuing leadership in public life. To reduce the burden on women, more flexible and family-friendly working conditions, including the establishment of support systems, are urgently needed to recruit and retain women of all ages in public institutions.

19. To ensure an enabling environment for the participation and decision-making of women, measures are needed to make institutions more gender-responsive. Institutions, historically designed by men, have inherent biases and exclusionary practices, including in their structures, policies, procedures, rules and culture, that require scrutiny and reform. Legislatures should put more resources into gender equality committees or commissions, networking forums, women's caucuses and capacity-building with regard to gender equality. Expanding opportunities for collaboration between politicians and women's rights organizations and feminist movements is also critical for driving transformative change.

20. Enduring negative social norms regarding gender roles, as well as the underrepresentation of women facing multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, shape public perceptions that women should not play an equal role in public life. Young women face double discrimination; women under 30 years of age make up less than one per cent of parliamentarians globally. Such social norms must be countered by raising awareness among community and religious leaders, the media, men and boys and various generations of women, as well as through deliberate action. The support of male leaders who publicly promote gender equality and the empowerment of women is vital for accelerating social norm change. The entry of diverse women into the political pipeline should be encouraged, and the protection of

women and girls who experience multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination from violence and discrimination should be ensured.

21. Violence against women in public life threatens their participation and decision-making. Although there is growing awareness of the problem, it remains global as women in public life face targeted, gender-based psychological, physical and sexual threats and acts of violence, including that of being killed while in office. Online, gender-based abuse, cyberbullying and sexual harassment are increasingly common. Prevention and response require more urgent action at the national level. Good practices include reforming legislation, strengthening access to justice and monitoring and enhancing coordination among various stakeholders. Public institutions should have in place codes of conduct that establish zero tolerance for violence, discrimination and abuse.

22. A lack of finances is a primary barrier to the participation of women in public life. Women struggle to raise funds to run for elected office. Underinvestment in women's organizations is a persistent challenge. National gender equality mechanisms frequently lack financing to ensure the national planning and budgeting that contribute to gender equality. The creation of conditions and incentives for the campaigns of women candidates to be financially supported by public and private funds, including through gender-sensitive political financing, subsidies for childcare, fundraising networks and non-partisan crowdfunding and endowments, would help. The creation and financing of specific funds that prioritize direct funding to women's organizations and feminist movements would also support the participation of women in public life.

23. Ministers are invited to consider the following questions to help to focus the dialogue:

(a) What measures are Governments taking to create an enabling environment for the full and effective participation and decision-making of women that is free from all forms of violence?

(b) What are examples of good practices through which negative stereotypes and discriminatory attitudes have been addressed successfully to ensure that women are perceived as equally legitimate and effective leaders as men?

(c) What are examples of effective gender-responsive institutional reforms that have facilitated the equal participation of women and men in public life and decision-making?

(d) What steps are Governments taking to increase the availability of high-quality financing in support of the participation of women in public life?
