

# SOCIAL PROTECTION TO PROMOTE GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN'S AND GIRLS' EMPOWERMENT

A joint statement to the 63<sup>rd</sup> session of the Commission on the Status of Women

We, representatives of governments, multilateral and bilateral development agencies, and civil society gathered within the Social Protection Inter-Agency Cooperation Board (SPIAC-B)<sup>1</sup> call for greater action to utilise and strengthen social protection systems<sup>2</sup> to promote gender equality and empower women and girls.

SPIAC-B members support national governments to address vulnerabilities to poverty, inequality and deprivation over the course of people's lifetimes, through more coordinated assistance for the development of adequate, sustainable and rights-based social protection systems. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development sets a clear vision for action to expand coverage of nationally appropriate social protection systems and measures for all, including floors. There has been

progress in extending social protection systems to date, however, significant gaps remain. The majority of the world's population are unprotected by any form of social protection, and women are over-represented in this group.<sup>3</sup>

Equitable access to gender-responsive social protection has a significant impact on women's and girls' empowerment and opportunities, with wider positive effects for men and boys, their families and communities. Social protection systems that do not address gender inequalities risk exacerbating the multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination women and girls face. We urgently need to increase our efforts to ensure social protection explicitly promotes gender equality. Failure to do so will hamper progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals – missing this vital opportunity to improve women's and girls' lives.

## WHAT CONTRIBUTION CAN SOCIAL PROTECTION SYSTEMS MAKE TOWARDS GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN'S AND GIRLS' EMPOWERMENT?

Social protection systems which address gendered risks over the lifecycle and provide support in situations of poverty, vulnerability or crisis, play a vital role in protecting women and men from poverty and insecurity, helping them to cope with risks, and recover from shocks and ultimately change to transform women's outcomes.

### ADDRESSING LIFECYCLE RISKS

Well-designed and implemented social protection recognises and addresses women's and girls' specific life-cycle transitions and risks and the diversity of women's experiences, which are often compounded by multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination. At a young age, girls face barriers to quality education, including through their involvement in domestic work. Adolescent girls are at risk of early pregnancy and school drop out. Women are more likely than men to work in precarious, informal jobs, shoulder a greater burden of unpaid care, and face interruptions and inequalities in paid work. These lifecycle vulnerabilities

accumulate, increasing vulnerability in old age and resulting in gaps in social protection coverage across women's lives.

Well-designed social protection systems can reduce these risks by:

- Providing regular adequate transfers and services to households with young children and adolescents to tackle the intergenerational transmission of poverty.
- Providing access to adequate protections for girls and women of reproductive age, including pregnant women and girls and new mothers.
- Providing paid parental leave and promoting shared responsibility for care.
- Extending coverage of social protection benefits and quality public services over women's working lives and into old age, including for those in informal, low-paid and precarious work.

## INCREASING ACCESS TO SERVICES AND SUSTAINABLE INFRASTRUCTURE

Social protection can increase access to services and facilitate linkages to other relevant programmes and interventions to improve women's and girls' outcomes in health and education, the labour market, and protection from violence and abuse. Social protection can:

- Increase demand for, and facilitate linkages to, education, health and nutrition (including sexual and reproductive health) and gender-based violence services, and health insurance.
- Strengthen women's livelihoods and economic advancement through the provision of quality care services, sustainable infrastructure, livelihood programmes and financial inclusion.

## PROMOTE WOMEN'S AND GIRLS' ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT, VOICE AND AGENCY

Gender-responsive social protection can improve women's access to and control over income and assets, strengthen social networks and improve women's public, economic, social and political status by:

- Addressing unequal economic and social roles assigned to women compared to men e.g. by ensuring decent working conditions, equal pay provisions and the provision of affordable, quality care services and access to flexible work arrangements.
- Ensuring women's independent access to assets including land, capital and credit, to adequate transfers and services, and expanding opportunities for productive employment and sustainable livelihoods.
- Facilitating linkages to other complementary services for men and women, boys and girls, including dialogue initiatives to address discriminatory gender norms.

## CONCRETE ACTIONS TO MOVE THE AGENDA FORWARD – THE SPIAC-B'S CALL FOR ACTION

To design and implement gender-responsive social protection systems, to strengthen the benefits of social protection for women and girls and their communities, and to ensure that no one is left behind in the 2030 agenda, the following actions are needed by governments and partners:

- **Commit** to tackling gender inequalities and promoting all women's and girls' empowerment through social protection programmes and systems.
- **Invest** in financing gender-responsive social protection systems, to extend their coverage and improve adequacy.
- **Build** the capacity of governments and partners to design and deliver gender-responsive social protection systems, and provide linkages to complementary services and programmes.
- **Invest** in (i) gendered poverty and vulnerability assessments; (ii) improved data disaggregation, collection, quality and analysis; and (iii) research and evidence on policy design features to improve social protection effectiveness.
- **Support** local, national and international women's rights organisations and movements to articulate demand for improved design and delivery of social protection for all women and girls, and to strengthen accountability.

1 SPIAC-B is composed of 25 intergovernmental agencies and 10 government bodies. 11 civil society organisations act as observers. For more information see: [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/@dgreports/@nylo/documents/genericdocument/wcms\\_644769.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/@dgreports/@nylo/documents/genericdocument/wcms_644769.pdf)

2 Social protection encompasses the set of policies and programmes designed to protect all people against poverty, vulnerability, and social exclusion throughout the lifecycle, with a particular emphasis on vulnerable groups. Social protection can be implemented in cash or in-kind, through non-contributory and contributory schemes, and by building human capital, productive assets, and access to jobs.

3 ILO (2017) World Social Protection Report 2017–19: Universal social protection to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. Geneva: ILO.