



# Economic and Social Council

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## Commission on the Status of Women

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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 International Federation of Social Workers, 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 International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) recognizes the importance of women's full involvement and leadership in public life for the mitigation of climate change and disaster risk reduction toward achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls, the priority theme for the 66th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women. The IFSW acknowledges that women's empowerment is imperative at the economic, social, and political levels for sustainable development attainment to be realized globally.

IFSW encompasses 146 social work associations, representing over 5 million social workers worldwide (IFSW, 2021, IFSW Statement on the Draft on the Right to Development). The mission of IFSW is to advocate for social justice, human rights, and social development through actions, programs, and the promotion of best practice models within a framework of international cooperation (IFSW, 2021, About IFSW). The IFSW member organizations work with, and on behalf of women and girls, with attention to intersecting social factors, such as race, ethnicity, national origin, culture, religion, caste, class, age, gender identity and sexual expression, and (dis)ability, that make women differentially vulnerable in their own national, social and cultural contexts (IFSW, 2012, Women Policy). IFSW is committed to preventing environmental deterioration and advocating for sustainable consumption and production, sustainable natural resource management, and urgent climate change action so that it can support current and future generations (IFSW, 2018, Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development: 3rd Report). Climate change and natural disasters have perpetuated the cycle of women's oppression, creating numerous barriers to gender empowerment and equality.

## Poverty

Of the 1.3 billion people globally, 70 per cent living in impoverished conditions are women (UN-Women, 2021, Women in the Shadow of Climate Change). Climate change has become a potential endangering cause as it will negatively impact economic development and increase women's poverty by threatening the natural resources on which livelihoods rely (UN-Women, 2014, Climate Change, Poverty, and Women's Economic Empowerment in the Pacific).

Women have historically maintained astute capabilities related to water harvesting and storage, food preservation, rationing, and natural resource management (UN-Women, 2021, Women in the Shadow of Climate Change). Women yield an abundance of knowledge pertaining to environmental and disaster risk reduction, yet levels of employment occupied by women in this sector are significantly lower than men. The eradication of inequality against women in employment must be prioritized to develop economic empowerment for women in all sectors of employment (IFSW, 2012, Women Policy).

Accomplishing climate justice objectives while enabling women to obtain greater livelihoods will be secured through eliminating women's poverty, which is crucial in realizing the Sustainable Development Goals. Policies and programs are designed to eliminate poverty and promote economic well-being, which is why the social work profession aims to holistically include communities throughout any process of transformation (IFSW, 2021, Social Work and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals).

## Health

Environments have a direct impact on people's ability to reach their potential. Nature continues to degrade, affecting current elements which contain tremendous

health benefits (WHO, 2015, New WHO-IUCN Expert Working Group on Biodiversity, Climate, One Health, and Nature-based Solutions). The environment is a key component of the social determinants of health and wellbeing (IFSW, 2018, Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development: 3rd Report). Within the indigenous population, women face protean biodiversity, disrupting the ecosystems they use to sustain their livelihoods. Environmental hazards caused by climate change have increased the mortality and morbidity of women. According to a 2019 study by the Global Gender and Climate Alliance, women's health was 79 per cent more affected by climate-driven food insecurity. The effects of high temperatures, heatwaves, and water scarcity generate inconsistent crop harvest, creating food insecurity and dehydration. These deficiencies can lead to renal and heart failure. To achieve greater climate resilience, social workers will advocate for women's health issues in relation to climate change as it is essential for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

Of the world's 1.3 billion vulnerable people, two-thirds are women living in water-scarce countries with no access to safe and reliable supplies of water for domestic uses. Water supply is rarely enough to meet the needs of a household and is often contaminated. During health emergencies, structural inequities create limitations for vulnerable populations to access needed healthcare. This inequity disproportionately impacts women, compounding health disparities (UN-Women, 2019, Spotlight on Gender, COVID-19 and the SDGs. Will the Pandemic Derail Hard-Won Progress on Gender Equality?).

### Education

In 2021, the United Nations established that women represent the majority of the world's impoverished population. Women are increasingly being seen as more vulnerable than men to the impacts of climate change as they are proportionally more dependent on threatened natural resources. The same year, the United Nations disclosed that during extreme weather, women tend to work more to secure household livelihoods. This leaves less time for women to access training and education or to earn income. Natural disaster risks caused by climate change hinder opportunities for women and girls to access their educational rights, as they are inclined to focus on maintaining housing and food for their families.

Globally, 129 million girls are out of school, including 32 million primary school age, 30 million lower-secondary school age, and 67 million upper-secondary school age (UNICEF, 2021, Girls' Education). The economic impacts of climate change create a larger barrier for women due to gender inequalities and persistent power imbalances within access to education, training, resources, and relevant information perpetuating the cycle of women's vulnerability (UN-Women, 2014, Climate Change, Poverty, and Women's Economic Empowerment in the Pacific). When women and girls are educated, more life opportunities present themselves to combat the threats of climate change.

### Violence

Women and girls often face the greatest impacts such as increased poverty and escalation in gender-based violence, from environmental degradation and natural disasters (IFSW, 2018, Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development: 3rd Report). Violence against women and girls manifests itself in physical, sexual, and psychological forms. Globally, approximately 243 million women and girls aged 15–49 have been subjected to sexual and/or physical violence perpetrated by an intimate partner (UN-Women, 2020, the Shadow Pandemic: Violence Against Women and Girls and COVID-19). Post-disaster, women are often at higher risk of being placed in unsafe, overcrowded shelters, due to lack of resources.

Constraints on women's empowerment towards equality will result in a crisis of conglomeration. A 2020 study by the International Union for Conservation of Nature found human trafficking, forced labor, and sexual abuse exploitation of women worsening as natural resources grow scarcer due to global disasters. Climate change is a sustainable development challenge with broad impacts on the environment as well as economic and social development. IFSW is determined to cultivate a world free from gender inequality, fear, and violence therefore, social workers persevere to advocate for all forms of human rights (IFSW, 2018, Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development: 3rd Report).

### **Recommendations**

IFSW supports the Commission on the Status of Women with the following recommendations on empowerment and gender equality as related to climate change and disaster relief. It is recommended that partnerships between the United Nations, civil society, and the social work profession are supported with commitment to the inclusive participation of women in all decision-making bodies.

- Adopt education and training strategies to change norms and practices, initiating women and girls affected by natural disasters into schools and workplace for the contribution of economic and climate empowerment;
- As part of a global violence prevention effort, the collaborative development of policies and programs among nations within the health, education, and labor sectors for gender-responsive social protections is imperative;
- Mitigation and adaptation efforts should systematically address gender-specific impacts of climate change in areas of food security, biodiversity, water, human rights, social welfare, peace, and security;
- Empower and support all women and girls, including indigenous, through facilitating their leadership in decision-making processes of managing water resources at national, regional, and grassroots levels with appropriate technologies and create sustainability for assuring potable water accessibility;
- IFSW urges all governments to unite and coordinate a global agenda for the protection of women and girls fleeing violence and develop gender-based post-disaster response efforts;
- Social workers, as agents of change, support the advancement of the Sustainable Development Goals and continues to partner with governments, non-government, and civil society to achieve social and climate justice.