UK NGO CSW ALLIANCE

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

A position paper from the UK NGO CSW Alliance for the 65th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women

GENERATION EQUALITY

THE GLOBAL GOALS
For Sustainable Development

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 UK Civil Society Women's Alliance was established in 2012 as a grass-roots mechanism for NGOs in the UK to engage with the Commission on the Status of Women and its processes. The Alliance has more than 450 members, working in all four nations of the United Kingdom and internationally. This paper reflects agreed positions, and represents the input of many organisations.

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CEDAW
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COVID-19
The Covid-19 Pandemic and associated lack of disaster preparedness by governments has left women and women's organisations without access to vital services. As organisations primarily concerned with providing service and support to the already-vulnerable, we are concerned by the increasing number of destitute and vulnerable women and organisations' ability to provide necessary support.

The impact of new working structures on women must not be overlooked. While digital working and support options are in some ways beneficial to women, agencies that support women and service users report limitations in technologies in addressing the issues faced by women fleeing violence and women made vulnerable through poverty or disability.

We are concerned that recovery schemes are heavily gendered in nature, prioritising recovery in sectors where there are established and acknowledged inequalities without consideration for gender mainstreaming. Unpaid care work must not be overlooked in Covid recovery plans and involving women in every stage of planning and facilitation of recovery plans can ensure due support and mitigation for the most vulnerable.

Climate Change
Leadership roles in climate action must reflect the communities who are, and will, suffer the worst impacts of climate change and disaster. Women, and in particular those in rural communities, must be facilitated in bringing their experience and input to those deciding on, and implementing, mitigation and relief strategies. This extends to developed countries, as well as developing countries and small island developing States.

Gender-based violence and sexual harassment
Experiences of violence and abuse – and access to support, safety and justice – are different for different groups of women. Whilst all women are affected by patriarchy, inequality and discrimination, some women will be affected disproportionately due to their race, ethnicity, sexuality, gender identity, disability, age, class, immigration status, marital status, caste, nationality, indigeneity, linguistic minority, and faith. Consequently, in order to achieve equal access to protection and support, the response needed must reflect the different experiences and needs of women and girls.

Violence against women in the UK is at epidemic levels, with 1.6 million women aged 16-74 experienced domestic abuse in 2018/2019, and an average of 2 women killed by a partner or ex-partner every week. The UK government signed the Istanbul Convention (Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence) in 2012 but has still not ratified it. The delay in ratification is harmful both to

women in the UK, and the country's national reputation. We call on the UK government to ratify the Istanbul Convention and fully harmonise national law and its violence against women strategy with the Convention.

Black Minority Ethnic women too often face discrimination as 'other', resulting in systematic and perpetual exclusion. They receive inadequate provision from statutory services and are unable to engage with services not designed to meet their needs. This perpetuates the feeling of judgement, disbelief, and discrimination. Institutional biases and structural inequalities increase the vulnerability of these women as they face further violence, abuse, trauma, and re-victimisation.

Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting is a form of violence that affects more than 200 million women from over 90 countries, but is often approached only in terms of protection and prosecution. There must be a global shift to eradicate FGM/C through grassroots prevention strategies that seek to replace harmful traditional practices.

Indigenous women and girls

It is important for international processes to acknowledge that indigenous women and girls often face violence, higher rates of poverty, limited access to health-care services, information and communications technology, public services, infrastructure, economic and natural resources, financial services, quality education and employment opportunities, and as well as discrimination and exclusion from public life and decision-making related to communal and traditional indigenous lands and use of their natural resources. It is further critical to recognise their cultural, social, economic, political and environmental contributions, including to climate change mitigation and adaptation and as agents of change in safeguarding the environment.

Women and girls in rural areas

The disproportionate obstacles and structural challenges facing rural women must be recognised as affecting both developed and developing states. Rural women in most nations face consistent barriers to access to essential health-care services, high quality education and information, communications technology and face significant disparities in health.

In many countries this includes higher rates of maternal and infant mortality and morbidity and obstetric fistula, as well as more limited options for family planning, than women in urban areas. Harmful traditional practices and customary marital regimes remain discriminatory towards women, and disproportionately affect rural women, especially regarding inheritance, as well as practices such as levirate and widowhood rites.

Peasants and other people working in rural areas have the right to contribute to the design and implementation of national and local climate change adaptation and mitigation policies, including through the use of practices and traditional knowledge.

Older Women

State Parties must recognise that older women are often subject to violence and abuse, and take appropriate steps to prevent this, as well as providing safety mechanisms and ensuring options for safe refuge. Discrimination against older women in terms of social protection systems is perpetuated by a lack of focused and properly disaggregated data.

Education

Access to education must be reframed as equal or free access to high quality education. The education systems in all countries must prepare young people to contribute to building peaceful, prosperous communities where everyone has equal access to opportunities and men and boys, women and girls respect and value the others contribution and work as partners. The education curriculum must be designed with this as its goal. Stereotyped assumptions limit career choices, 'jobs for boys and jobs for girls' cause serious long term harm such as low self-esteem and reinforce abusive systems. Governments must ensure good early years education practice to eradicate gender stereotyping.

Widows

Widows face multiple disadvantages associated with their widowhood, including poorly implemented social protection systems, exclusion from economic opportunities in many countries, discrimination, and the burden of both unpaid and paid work to support their families. Discriminatory inheritance regimes which deny widows any property are the leading cause of poverty and marginalization among widows. Conflict both creates and further victimises widows, and we are deeply concerned about the status of war widows and wives of the disappeared, and those who experience conflict-related forced marriage, and the increased risk of reprisal, including incarceration, honour killings, and banishment, and further recognise that war widows remain an especially vulnerable demographic in conflict and post-conflict environments.

It is important to note that the Covid-19 Pandemic has seen a significant increase in the number of women, of all ages, recently widowed leaving them in increasingly vulnerable situations.

Women, peace and security / armed conflict

UN Security Council Resolution 1325 and its ten supporting resolutions, along with SDGs 5 and 15, and the Compact for Women, Peace, and Security and Humanitarian Action address the important issue of women and girls' safety and security and women's participation and leadership in creating safe spaces and peaceful communities as an essential requirement for gender equality. Conflict prevention, conflict resolution and rehabilitation aimed at building enabling and peaceful environments will not succeed if half of the world's population is excluded.

Media

The development of technology offers many solutions for achieving gender equality but has also drastically increased the level of online abuse, harassment, and cyber bullying suffered by women and girls. Governments, employers, and the technology industry in all sectors have a responsibility to keep people safe and free from abusive online activity. Mass media presentation of women, the popularisation of politics, and insufficient educational action on online abuse all contribute to this present and increasing issue.

Data

There is an urgent need to strengthen national capacity to collect and systematically analyse disaggregated data including the representation of women in decision making and leadership roles across sectors public and private, and in all occupations. It is imperative that data is collected and disaggregated by sex, gender, age, race, ethnicity, income, marital status, migratory status, disability, geographic location and other characteristics relevant in national contexts.

States must ensure there is a strong focus on learning and implementation of actions responding to the data, and supported by time bound targets and measurable goals.

Establish gender impact assessment processes for the design and development of policy services to avoid disadvantage and disproportional impact and equality of opportunity.

Women must be at the forefront of the analysing and evaluation processes and identifying next steps for progressive actions and responses.

Access to Justice

Women must be represented at all levels in the justice chain to build a judicial system that reflects the needs of women and girls and which gives them the confidence to seek justice. Those working in the justice system must receive continuous development and support to build a fair and just system based on deep understanding and empathy. Community policing must be accountable to the local community and gender parity must be a priority for the forces. Policing is often the entry point for engagement with the judicial system.

Anti-Racism

Institutional and structural racism shapes how Black and minoritized women experience violence and abuse, and their access to safety, support and justice. Legal and policy frameworks were not designed for black and minoritized women and the services led 'by and for' them and, as a result, are often unjust and discriminatory. Societal structural inequality is replicated within multiple sectors both in direct and indirect ways through our practices and policies; this in turn stops us from creating a world where all women and girls live free from violence and abuse. A refreshed commitment to principles of equality and fairness offers us the chance to stand together in strength and to ensure our work truly challenges the multiple forms of oppression which survivors face.

For more information on the UK Civil Society Women's Alliance please visit: https://nawo.org.uk/csw-alliance/