



63rd Commission on the Status of Women

Social protection systems, access to public services and sustainable infrastructure for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls

Multi-Stakeholder Forum

**New York, 1 February 2019
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CR 1**

What are examples of national social protection systems that recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work?

How are gender- and age-specific risks and vulnerabilities being taken into account in the design and implementation of social protection systems, including pension systems?

First, let me thank UN Women for convening this important meeting and inviting me to this panel.

Social protection systems, access to public services and sustainable infrastructure for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls is a very important topic for Switzerland.

Please allow me to consider the first two questions together and give some insights regarding the Swiss pension system as an example.

- The Swiss basic pension system illustrates how a national pension system can recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work as well as take into account the specificities of women.
- First and perhaps most interesting, the Swiss basic pension scheme is universal; it protects every person in Switzerland, regardless of their professional status. Should for example a woman quit paid employment or reduce her paid activity, there will be no gap in her insurance career.
- Second, the basic pension system provides for a minimum pension, so the system is favorable to persons who have contributed little or not at all to the scheme, which can often be the case for women.
- Third, bonuses are granted as “fictitious” income to persons raising children or caring for dependent relatives. Since the pension is calculated on the basis of the total income of a person, including this fictitious income, the person concerned will get a higher pension.
- Finally, for the purpose of calculating the amount of the pensions of legally married couples, the spouses' income is divided in half between each of them; it is called the “splitting”; this favors the spouse who has earned the least, often the woman.

Now, what outcomes do we expect from the forthcoming CSW

- The CSW should mention the importance of the recognition of unpaid care and domestic work in the social protection systems, and encourage Member States to design their social systems, in particular the pension provisions, in such a way that the unpaid work, often carried out by women, is taken into account.
- Reference should be made in the agreed conclusions to ILO Recommendation 202 on Social Protection Floors, which lays down “gender equality and responsiveness to special needs” as basic principles that should guide the implementation of national social protection floors or the development of more comprehensive national social security schemes.

What efforts have been made to extend social protection coverage to workers in the informal sector, and how are women benefitting from this?

For the third question please let me now turn to our development cooperation, where affordable and accessible social protection schemes to the informal sector are a priority.

- We understand social protection as an approach to effectively addressing ‘Leave no one behind’. Evidence shows that effective social protection has positive effects on social-economic development and poverty alleviation, on access to health, education and work, and on food security. It also enables micro-investments leading to market stimulation.

- Switzerland provides support to national protection schemes as well as social assistance programs that directly target specific groups and women that are particularly vulnerable.
- In Tanzania for instance, our Health Promotion and System Strengthening Project improves access to and the quality of health services in the country. The program includes the setup of public finance management mechanisms to provide health insurance coverage through a community health fund. This innovation has allowed 6.5 million people living in rural areas to have free access to health services in 2018 and will be rolled out nationally. The health protection benefits greatly women and children, who are the main health service users and who bear the burden of diseases in their communities through caring for the sick either at home or in hospitals.
- Other programs focus on access to comprehensive financial services for poor and low income groups. These programs are generally developed in cooperation with international and local private financial sector actors. In Bangladesh, as an example, Switzerland supports a program with 340'000 small holder farmers, a majority of whom are women. The program provides risk-reducing advisory and veterinary services and crop and livestock insurance.
- In all these programs, women are the primary recipients of assistance.

What actions are Governments taking to expand parental leave provisions and incentivize men to take on more child care?

- Actually, there is no statutory parental leave or paternity leave in Switzerland. However, the right to parental or paternity leave may result from an individual employment contract or a collective labour agreement.
- On the one hand, the Swiss Government recognizes that family-related leave can be conducive to a fairer distribution of roles within the family, on the other hand, our Government gives priority to the provision of childcare services.
Indeed, these services allow a better reconciliation between family and professional life, and this not only immediately after birth or during the first year of the child's life, but also in pre-school age and afterwards.
- It is worth mentioning that a popular initiative requiring a paid paternity leave of 20 days will be submitted to the Swiss people's vote in the next years.

Finally, allow me to highlight the linkage between social protection systems and the efforts to close the gender pay gap with a view to achieving gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls.

- The Gender Pay Gap is both a cause for and an effect of the lack of social protection for women.
On the one hand, the Gender Pay Gap translates into lower pension benefits and makes it more difficult for women to make savings which could protect them against poverty in old age. On the other hand, the lack of social protection, such as paid maternity leave and child care

service, can be a barrier for women to enter the labor force or stay employed.

- For these reasons, the elimination of the gender pay gap is a policy priority for my Government. The Swiss Government follows a multi-pronged approach that involves both mandatory and voluntary measures. Our policy actions are focused on firstly the development of instruments enabling all companies to check their pay practice; secondly the obligation of private and public employers to regularly analyze their pay practice; and thirdly the implementation of wage equality in the public procurement market. We therefore feel very honored that our commitment to closing the gender pay gap and thereby to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals has been recognized by the UN by awarding Switzerland the prestigious 2018 United Nations Public Service Award. We deem it important to take part in international initiatives aimed at eliminating pay discrimination at the global and regional level. Consequently, Switzerland has joined the Equal Pay International Coalition EPIC in 2017.
- Closing the gender pay gap is essential to achieving full gender equality in the world of work and, moreover, to reducing gender specific risks in the social protection systems.