1. Introduction

Poverty remains one of the most pressing challenges facing humanity today, affecting millions of people worldwide. While gender equality (SDG5) is a key driver of sustainable development, women and girls are disproportionately affected by poverty and often face multiple and intersecting discriminations and barriers to accessing resources and opportunities. UN Women and UN DESA predict that if current trends continue, more than 340 million women and girls will still live in extreme poverty by 2030.¹

Social and economic policies can play a role in combatting women’s poverty. During the Covid-19 pandemic, governments relied heavily on social protection as a policy tool to protect their population. Social protection builds shock-resistance and resilience of entire societies against poverty. However, there are significant inequalities across and within regions, with social protection coverage rates in Europe and Central Asia being highest (above 80 %), the Americas (above 60 %), while Asia and the Pacific, the Arab States and Africa have far more coverage gaps. More than 4 billion people globally still lack any social protection².

Gender gaps in employment, pay and care, as well as the fact that women are more likely to be in informal, non-permanent and part time forms of work often contribute to women’s financial vulnerability over the life course. Time poverty, the fact that women take on the bulk of the unpaid care responsibilities, is an important element that prevents women from engaging in the labour market and thus escaping poverty. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), women and girls perform 12.5 billion hours of unpaid domestic and care work every day, leaving them with fewer opportunities to enter the labour market and often exposed to gender-based violence. But when they do have opportunities, they tend to invest more of their earnings in their children and families, improving outcomes for entire households.

Decent work and adequate social protection are the best safeguards against poverty and therefore crucial to reducing the risk to women’s poverty over the life course. While different forms of social protection systems, including social security and social assistance, have been developed in the world, social protection systems should be adaptable, allow for building up rights and take into account a life course perspective, in order to contribute to help address gender inequalities and women’s poverty. Reconciling work and care responsibilities is crucial, as are accessible, affordable and quality services, in particular care systems for children and other dependents.

¹ UN Women & UN DESA, 2023, ‘Progress on the Sustainable Development Goals: The gender snapshot 2023’
2. Objectives and sub-goals

This side event will focus on how employment and social protection systems should address the specific needs and vulnerabilities of women and girls. Laws, policies, social norms and practices that perpetuate gender-based discrimination and inequality need to be changed. It is essential to take intersectionality into account, considering the needs and situations of all women, including those facing multiple and intersecting discriminations.

The broad objectives of the side event are to:

a) Explore how systems, policies and organizations can strengthen gender-transformative, inclusive and shock responsive social protection and employment systems.

b) Tackle the root causes of gender inequality and ensure women’s empowerment, leading to a structural improvement in women’s access to resources, their social and economic agency and ultimately the reduction of their poverty risk.

In order to ensure a model is sustainable, it must also include a thorough reflection on the impact of climate change, digitalisation and conflicts crises on gender equality and women’s poverty.

At EU level, the twin green and digital transitions, including the principle of leaving no one behind, are key priorities that guide other actions. The European Pillar of Social Rights, with its Action Plan, as well as the Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025, are the framework for addressing the Sustainable Development Goals and include a number of measures that could prevent or combat women’s poverty. Apart from the headline target set by the EU through its Social Pillar Action Plan on reducing poverty by 15 million, a series of adopted measures will also contribute towards the headline target of halving the gender employment gap, such as the European Care Strategy, the Work-Life Balance Directive, the Pay Transparency Directive, the Recommendation on Access to social protection for workers and the self-employed, the Directive on minimum wages, the Recommendation on adequate minimum income ensuring active inclusion.

To gather concrete examples of actions by UN agencies and by UN Member States and by non-governmental organisations globally and to promote dialogue, innovation as well as exchange of best practices on this important topic, the European Union and the Belgian Presidency of the Council of the European Union, are convening this side event.

The subgoals of the side event are:

a) Emphasizing the linkages between poverty and gender equality, highlighting the specific challenges faced by women and girls in vulnerable situations and stressing the importance of social protection that considers their needs and situations.

b) Discussing the importance of transformative social protection as a tool for increasing gender equality and empowering women on the one hand and the measures that need to be undertaken to implement it on the other.

c) Presenting successful initiatives, policy innovation and best practices in the field of social protection systems that take the gender perspective into account.
**Target audience:**
The side event is aimed at, amongst others, government representatives and policymakers, international organisations, civil society organisations, social partners, academics and researchers, private sector representatives and grassroots organisations and community leaders, in particular those working in the field of gender equality and gender mainstreaming, poverty alleviation and social protection.

In order to have an overview of the possible number of attendees, the organisers ask those who intend to assist to signal this via the following link: [CSW68 Event Registration - Harnessing Social Protection to Tackle Poverty and Empower Women (office.com)](https://example.com). Please note that a registration does not constitute a guaranteed seat in the conference room.

Simultaneous interpretation English-French will be provided.

**3. Programme (tbc)**

- Introduction by the moderator, prof. dr. Radhika Balakrishnan
- High-level panel on good practices and challenges in the domain of social protection systems that take into account the gender perspective with:
  - Opening remarks by H.E. Ms. Marie-Colline Leroy, State Secretary for Gender Equality, Equal Opportunities and Diversity (Belgium as Presidency of the Council of the European Union) and H.E. Ms. Helena Dalli, European Commissioner for Equality (European Union)
  - Interventions by:
    - H.E. Ms. Sima Bahous, Executive Director of UN Women
    - H.E. Ms. Aawatif Hayar, Minister of Solidarity, Social Integration and the Family of the Kingdom of Morocco
    - Government representative (tbc)
    - Ms. Sukti Dasgupta, Director of the Conditions of Work and Equality Department (ILO)
    - Ms. Nada Nashat, Advocacy Coordinator of the Center for Egyptian Women’s Legal Assistance (CEWLA)
    - CSO Representative (tbc)
- Q&A
- Concluding remarks by the moderator, prof. dr. Radhika Balakrishnan