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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 is committed to the priority theme for the 68th Session on the Commission on the Status of Women: Accelerating the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls by addressing poverty and strengthening institutions and financing with a gender perspective. Our federation encompasses 141 country-members and is the global voice for the profession; we strive for social justice, human rights, and sustainable social development through the promotion of social work, best practice models and the facilitation of international cooperation. Our 2021 Policy Social Work and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals affirms our support for, and role in, achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development through sharing knowledge and continuing to co-create solutions that promote social change and social development while standing against exploitation of people and nature and against unjust structures that allow for wealth concentration in the hands of the few.

Our collaborative work with partners from trade unions, professional organizations and social movement groups resulted in the People's Charter for an Eco-social World in 2022. Collectively, we promote co-building a new eco-social world grounded in a holistic human rights framework inclusive of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, ecosystem rights and the broader rights of nature, leaving no one behind. The acceleration of gender equality and women's empowerment requires this holistic approach that is grounded in local and global expertise from working in communities and populations where transformative change has taken place.

### **Addressing Poverty in Co-building an Eco-social World**

Currently, one in every 10 women is living in extreme poverty (Gender Snapshot, 2023). Poverty is related to the global burden of unpaid care work on women who spend more than 2.5x as much time on unpaid care and domestic work as men as reported in the Social Institutions and Gender Index in 2023. The impact of unpaid care work and domestic work on women and economies includes reduced labor force participation and poverty, greater representation in the informal economy, time poverty and depletion, intensification of care work during crises, and adverse effects on physical and mental health (Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP); How to invest in the care economy).

Social protection is an essential tool to address poverty (SDG1), recognize unpaid care work (SDG5), and achieve decent work (SDG8) (UN Women, 2017; Making Social Protection gender-responsive). The International Federation of Social Workers policy on social protections (2016) affirms that social protections are a human right and that they must be in a social policy that promotes social justice, social security and well-being.

The need for gender responsive social protection is magnified by the global climate crisis which exacerbates gender inequality and threatens the livelihoods, health, safety, and security for women and girls around the world. In 2022, the UNEP estimated that 80 percent of people displaced by climate change are women, noting that displacement puts women and girls at greater risk of violence, including sexual violence. Women and girls with less social and economic power are even further at risk.

Accelerating the achievement of gender equality and women's empowerment by addressing poverty requires a commitment to the support of communities and professionals in co-building social protection systems to design preventive and responsive support systems that fulfill the rights and meet the needs of people (IFSW,

2022, People’s Charter) and facilitate co-building an eco-social world. In this process, gender responsive objectives, design, and implementation must be incorporated to tackle structural barriers to gender equality and sustainable poverty reduction in order to address gendered risks and vulnerabilities (Gender-Responsive & Age Sensitive Social Protection Research & Program, n.d.).

A promising practice in social work that addresses these overlapping issues is occurring in the development and promotion of community-based, worker-owned, childcare cooperatives in which poor immigrant women are able to increase their pay, decrease their working hours, and govern their own business (Matthew & Bransburg, 2017).

### **Strengthening Institutions in Co-Building an Eco-social World**

Institutions promoting women’s empowerment and gender equality need to include women in decision-making and support organizational and entrepreneurial models that are egalitarian and build on principles of democratic participation (ILO Women’s Empowerment and Gender Equality, n.d.) in working towards co-building an eco-social world. Women’s economic cooperatives are one such model that also offer sources of social protections through cooperative resources and services such as education, training, financial services, healthcare, childcare, insurance, housing, and legal services.

Worker cooperatives are supported by social workers, who provide technical assistance in establishing them. Social workers assist waste-pickers, primarily women, to form worker cooperatives (Truell, 2015) and provide opportunities to upgrade their skills so they can become service providers in organic waste management and recycling entrepreneurs, thus increasing economic security, dignity (Das, 2012), social support, and knowledge and skills to help to mitigate climate change.

Social workers in Kabul work with local women to develop and support women and family cooperatives that are environmentally and economically sustainable through selling clothes. Cooperatives strengthen institutions through the creation of local economies, community connection, resilience, and joint action for better futures (International Federation of Social Workers News, 2023).

Institutions themselves need to be remade with the incorporation of gendered perspectives. The IMF and World Bank face new challenges that call for the need to reform as climate change and global inflation continue on the current trajectory. Incorporating the perspectives of women of all social and socioeconomic backgrounds through granting access to democratic participatory decision-making into governmental bodies would strengthen these institutions with means for co-building an eco-social world.

### **Financing with a gender perspective in co-building an eco-social world**

Financing with a gender perspective must take into account the gendered impact of austerity-driven policies and loan conditions that disproportionately harm women and girls that require cutting public spending. Women are overrepresented in the public sector, in frontline work such as social work, education and health-care fields; austerity can mean layoffs, wage freezes and significant income reductions. These policies negatively impact human rights of women including women’s right to work, social security, housing, water, and food, health, and violence against women (Center for Women’s Global Leadership, 2019)

Financing with a gender perspective must incorporate investment in the care economy by addressing care infrastructure, care-related social protection, care

services and employment-related care from an eco-social lens. As women are disproportionately impacted by extreme weather events, due to poverty, caregiving and dependent on natural resources for their livelihood (UN WomenWatch: Women, Gender Equality and Climate Change), investing in the care economy with an eco-social lens must be a financing priority. Investing in the care infrastructure includes providing piped water, especially to rural areas, safe and affordable transportation options, hygienic sanitation facilities, access to clean sources of fuel and energy, and expanding the social care infrastructure of schools, hospitals, care homes and housing for underserved communities. Care-related social protection includes connecting social protection programs to labor market activation and skill-building opportunities. Care services include universal public childcare centers, universal health coverage and decent work conditions for domestic and paid careworkers. Employment-related care policies include shared parental leave policies and gender-equitable care leave to meet a variety of care needs (ESCAP, 2022). Investing in the care economy is in alignment with the actions outlined in the People's Charter of ecological integrity, economic reform, employment and work, state social protection

### **Recommendations**

International Federation of Social Workers supports the Commission on the Status of Women with the following recommendations to accelerate the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls as related to reducing poverty and strengthening institutions and financing with a gender perspective in the context of co-building an eco-social world. It is essential that partnerships between the United Nations, civil society, and social work profession are supported, and committed to including women in all decision-making bodies. International Federation of Social Workers makes the following recommendations:

- Invest in and support technical assistance for the development of worker cooperatives in employment arenas that have a low carbon footprint;
- Support and invest in care infrastructure, care-related social protection, care services and employment-related care from an eco-social lens.
- Support and invest in the work of communities and professionals in co-building preventive and gender-responsive social protection systems of health, education and other social services that fulfil their rights and needs.
- Inviting women to access democratic participatory decision-making in all institutions in which decisions are made that impact their lives.