

COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN (CSW) 65th session
AFRICA PRE-CSW65 VIRTUAL-CONSULTATIONS
Monday 22 and Tuesday 23 February 2021 (Experts Segment)
Friday 26th February 2021 (Ministerial Segment)
11am-3pm Addis Ababa Time

BACKGROUND

The sixty fifth session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW65) will be held in New York from 15 to 26th March 2021. This **CSW 65** is being organized under the Priority theme: ***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 CSW remains instrumental in promoting women's rights, documenting the reality of women's lives throughout the world, and shaping global standards on gender equality and the empowerment of women. The Commission takes a leading role in monitoring and reviewing progress and challenges in the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, among others.

The year 2021 is a pivotal year in the world agenda of Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (GEWE). The progress made by governments and all relevant actors was assessed in terms of gender equality after the 25th anniversary of the Beijing Conference and its Platform for Action and 20 years since the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security has been implemented and marked 5th Anniversary of Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development.

At the Africa Level, the Final Review Report on the African Women's Decade 2010-2020 (AWD) has been developed highlighting the achievements made by AU Member States, challenges uncounted and future prospects for accelerating implementation of GEWE's commitments. In addition, the 2021 marks the beginning of the implementation of the new African Women's Decade (2020-2030) on Women's Financial and Economic Inclusion.

These commitments provide a framework for achievement of irreversible and measurable progress towards gender equality and women's empowerment without leaving anyone behind.

The notion of participation is located within the overarching framework of democracy, human rights, and gender equality. Central to participation is the notion of '*active and meaningful inclusion*' of women as full citizens and as decision makers in public and private sector institutions and in political, economic and peace processes. Larger number of women in office can influence gender-responsive public policies and institutional practices. Women have a right to be equally represented and consulted in decision-making. They also have the right to education, to maternal and reproductive health, to social protection and to protection from all forms of violence to enable their access to public life.

The quality, relevance and effectiveness of policymaking and policy implementation increases when power is shared, as recently shown by the critical roles that women have played in responses to the COVID-19 pandemic. Women's organizations are at the forefront of community responses in many countries but struggle because of diminishing funding, increased demands for services, restricted movement and shrinking civic space¹.

¹ CSW SG report <https://undocs.org/E/CN.6/2021/3>

Gender inequalities persist at several levels. Resources and factors of production are unequally distributed. Women are far from being fairly treated in public services, and their limited access to land ownership reduces their ability to undertake economic or political activities.

The legal framework governing elections including laws on elections and on political parties, the Independent electoral commission statutes and laws are still not gender sensitive. Still, progress has been noted in few countries in terms of legislation and implementation such as Rwanda, Senegal and Cabo Verde and Tunisia. Africa has also a woman President in Ethiopia and Women Prime Ministers in Namibia, Gabon, Togo, to mention just a few. However, women representation remains limited and they rarely holding leadership positions.

Violence remains an issue of serious concern in the region and one of the main obstacles to women's progress in public life. It manifests in various forms: psychological, sexual and physical and prevents women from exercising and realizing their political and civil rights. A woman involved in politics in some parts of Africa is often seen as "the one who wears the pants" or as "a promiscuous girl who is easy to get". Perpetrators of violence often seek to stop women from accessing political power and to silence them to limit their perspectives in policy formulation. Women politicians have been killed in office or have had to quit their positions after receiving death threats. Some women have also often withdrawn from elections citing abuse. Women voters, candidates and ministers have faced various forms of targeted, gender-based violence, including sexual violence, cyberbullying, and sexual harassment. Risks from violence against women in politics and during elections are even more daunting in African countries experiencing political polarization, armed conflict and/or managing a post-conflict transition.²

COVID-19 has added a new threat dimension to participation in elections, with women (and men) potentially risking their health if they choose to vote. Conversely, that threat has the potential to depress voter turnout, including by discouraging first-time and/or young women voters from participating. A recent analysis found that "with the outbreak of COVID-19, there is a high risk that women and men may not be able to exercise their rights to vote, as the majority may opt to stay home.

The CSW being a unique space for building convergence among governments, civil society organizations, and technical and financial partners, it is therefore necessary and essential for Africa to speak with one voice and to jointly examine trends, achievements and challenges, and existing gaps as well as actions to be taken to accelerate the implementation of gender equality commitments.

On the above backdrop and building on past experiences in undertaking pre-CSW consultations, the Africa Union Commission (AUC), Women, Gender and Youth Directorate in partnership with the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment (UN Women) and the Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) proposes to convene the Africa Pre-CSW65 virtual consultations on Monday 22 & Tuesday 23, 2021 for technical experts which will then be followed by the Africa Ministerial consultation on **26 February 2021**.

² For example, in Zimbabwe, reports indicate that the culture of violence in elections has been a formidable barrier to young women's participation in politics: Research & Advocacy Unit (RAU) (2015) Do Middle-Class Women Defend Democracy?, Harare, Zimbabwe, <http://researchandadvocacyunit.org/system/files/Middle%20class%20women%20%284%29.pdf>.

The Africa Pre-CSW consultation will focus on the global priority theme ***“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.”*** In addition, the sessions will assess progress on the implementation of the review theme namely *“Women’s empowerment and the link to sustainable development”* and priorities agreed at the sixtieth session of the CSW (CSW60).

During the Ministerial consultation, the African Union Commission will launch the first African Union strategy on Gender Equality and Women’ Empowerment (AU Strategy on GEWE) having its definitions amended and further aligned with Maputo Protocol on Women’s Rights, adopted during the 5th Specialized Technical Committee on Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment (STC on GEWE) in November 2020.

OBJECTIVES

The general purpose of the consultation is:

- To take stock of the progress made in Africa regarding **women’s participation in public life** and **the elimination of violence**, reflecting on the institutional (formal- policy, norms and standards levels), and societal levels (values/norms), the main challenges and obstacles and agree on the Africa regional key messages and key priority actions.

The specific objectives for the Technical Experts (22 – 23 February 2021) will be as follows:

- Brief overview on the CSW65 theme including data and figures on women’s participation in public life and violence against women on the continent.
- Share experiences, challenges, and achievements in line with the CSW65 theme for 2021.
- Discuss emerging issues on the CSW65 theme and reach consensus on key messages and issues to inform discussions prior to and during the CSW65 in New York.

The specific objectives for the Ministerial Meeting (26 February 2021) will be as follows:

- Review /deliberate on and adopt the Common Africa Position (CAP) for CSW65 as prepared and presented by the Technical Experts.
- Discuss and agree on modalities for CSW65 including reaching agreement on how Africa will be organized to speak with one voice at the Global CSW65 to be led by New York.
- Launch the African Union strategy for Gender Equality and Women’ Empowerment.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

- AU Members states prepared to participate in CSW65 and contribute to negotiations towards a CSW65 Agreed Conclusions
- A common stand on progress made to address Women’s participation in public life and elimination of violence agreed to feed into the ministerial meeting on the CSW65 theme
- An agreed upon Common Africa Position and Key Messages on CSW65.

FORMAT OF THE EVENT

The Consultation will be in two segments as follows:

1. Technical Experts Consultation **22 – 23 February 2021**
2. Ministerial Consultation **26 February 2021**

Technical Consultation Summary of Draft Programme of Work (22 – 23 February 2021)

The Technical Africa Pre-CSW65 e-Consultation will take place over 2 days, with virtual participatory sessions of 4 hours per day focusing on the following:

- Opening and a closing
- A plenary on the priority theme which will provide the framework for discussions
- Moderated plenary discussions on the progress made in the implementation of the actions from CSW60 agreed conclusions
- Plenary discussions to review and agree on the common Africa position and key messages to inform the continental and global advocacy

Ministerial Consultation Summary of Draft Programme of Work (26 February 2021)

The Ministerial Consultation will be for 1 day. This Ministerial Session will bring together all the 55 Africa Union Member States. Due to the COVID19 travel restrictions the consultation will be held virtually and organised as follows:

- Opening Session
- Launching of the AU gender equality and women's empowerment Strategy
- Presentation of the Draft CAP – as prepared by the Experts
- Plenary discussions informed by the experts' consultation
- Presentation and discussion on the modalities for the CSW65
- Adoption of the CAP for CSW65
- Closing Session

PARTICIPANTS

- For the first segment of the **Technical Consultation**, participants will be technical experts from various gender machineries including Ministries of Gender and Women's Affairs in all AU Member States, Regional Economic communities (RECs), AUC and other AU Organs and specialized Agencies, UN System, CSOs, involved with CSW discussions and other relevant stakeholders.
- For the **Ministerial Session**, participants will be Ministers responsible for Gender and Women's Affairs in all AU Member States and their Experts, RECS, AUC and other AU organs and Specialized Agencies UN System, CSOs and other relevant stakeholders.

DATES

The meetings will be virtual through zoom as follows:

Technical Consultation – Monday 22 and Tuesday 23 2021 at 11:00am – 3:00pm Addis Time

Ministerial Consultation – Friday 26 February 2021, from 11:00 am to 4:00pm Addis Time

WORKING LANGUAGES

Simultaneous interpretation will be conducted in French, English, Portuguese, and Arabic languages for both the Technical and Ministerial Segments.

DOCUMENTATION

Working documents including concept note, Program of Work and other background documents will be shared with participants electronically ahead of the meeting in French, English, Portuguese, and Arabic languages.