



*International Association of Economic and Social Councils
And Similar Institutions
(AICESIS)*

**INTERVENTION on behalf of AICESIS
Of
Mr. Antonio Marzano
President of the CNEL of Italy**

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Introduction

A series of macroeconomic shocks have taken place at a global level as a result of the economic crisis, which have had an impact on the lives of women around the world and have changed the landscape for gender equality. There is a lot of push-back on gender equality and the empowerment of women. As a result political and policy measures that looked quite possible to realize few years ago (ending of violence against women, work life family balance) appear difficult keeping on the agenda. In the face of increasing backlash against women's rights globally the relation shall focus on the broader and troubling current economic crisis cross cutting violence and gender balance (priority and review items of the current CSW session) to point finally at the emerging issues: the 2015 MDG deadline and beyond.

1. Violence against women is endemic across the world and can take many forms. International statistics are not always comparable, yet incontrovertible evidence shows that violence against women knows no boundaries but incidence rates tend to rise with socio-economic deprivation.

It's extremely important to watch over that the current economic crisis doesn't have even further consequences in increasing the vulnerability of women in social and economic life, and in particular, in increasing gender violence. In many countries it has been reported tensions within households over declining income, leading in some cases to domestic violence.

It is becoming clearer and clearer that investing in ending violence is cost-effective, and adequate resources should be devoted to efforts to end gender-based violence, but in the face of the global downturn that brings increased poverty and fear of job loss, women are constrained from asserting their rights or reporting any violations they have suffered. Many of these cases unfortunately remain unreported, contributing to neglect of this issue in policy discourses.

The recent financial crisis is changing the way we position violence and care, among the many other problems related to gender equality and empowerment of women. What is clear is that a precondition for achieving progress in gender equality lies in **a critical systematic gender analysis of the current crisis and a continuous monitoring of its gender effects**. In particular there is an urgent need to monitor hidden cost of the crisis, such as increased unpaid workloads, decreased access to education and health and increased violence that fall disproportionately on women.

The impact of the economic crisis on women is very clear, both on their paid and unpaid work.

As far as paid work is concerned, while many more men have lost jobs in developed countries especially in manufacturing and construction sectors, women workers, who are more concentrated in service sectors, have also been affected, as the impact has further spread to the other parts of the economy. The fact that at the beginning many more men have lost jobs does not necessarily mean that women have been less negatively affected in the wake of the economic crisis. The key issue here is that women had more disadvantaged positions in the labour market, in general, not only in the industrialized countries but also in developing countries, even before the economic crisis hit.

As far as the unpaid work is concerned, is well known that women are the most responsible in providing food, care of children, elderly and disabled people, so the decline in

households buying power, and the cuts in welfare expenditures have profound implications for women in households, and on unequal distribution of unpaid work in it. For these reasons women experience at the same time job loss, decline in incomes, distress, sale of assets, and difficulties in meeting consumption needs. **As household became the safety nets of last resort, the risk is that women may take on casual and low paid work, still continuing to cope with a big amount of domestic work.**

2. Governments around the world have undertaken a range of measures to respond to the global financial crisis, which go from austerity measures to fiscal stimulus programs and social protection schemes. In taking these measures, underestimate the importance of investing in women, girls and gender equality can lead to the consequence that the long-term impacts of the crisis may be deepened further. More unemployed women and uneducated girls and the growing burden of care lead to deeper levels of poverty and greater inequality for all individuals, not only for women, so making inefficient the effects of stimulus packages and austerity measures put in place. For example, gender inequalities are emphasized when stimulus packages focus on male dominated industries (like large infrastructure construction) or when austerity measures include drastic cuts to social and health services .This is due also to insufficient representation of women in bodies where strategic decisions are assumed to cope with the crisis.

By contrast, programs that offer new employment opportunities for women as well men, help mitigate the impact of the crisis on women and reduce household vulnerability. Stimulus packages that include support for maintaining or expanding social infrastructure, especially health sanitation, care services and education, can help reduce women's unpaid work burden. Budget expenditures have different impacts on men and women and should be assessed in those terms, taking into account both paid and unpaid labour. In particular gender aware budgeting requires recognition of the importance of the reproductive sector and its dynamic interaction with market outcomes.

To assure gender taking into account and to make responses to the financial crisis more gender sensitive, it is important not only to support the collection of sex disaggregated data on employment, work conditions, earnings and unpaid work, but also to give women more voice in political and economic decisions.

3. Mainstreaming greater equality requires that women should be specifically considered throughout any post-2015 framework, with gender sensitive targets and indicators and sex disaggregated data included under each goal. Particular attention is therefore needed to ensure that women's voices are heard. Potential policy instrument to address structural factor and produce greater equality of outcomes should include:
 - The obligation of progressive realization and non retrogression, which means that governments must realize economic and social rights, and cannot take steps backward.
 - Macroeconomic policy to ensure that sufficient productive and decent employment is created to absorb new entrants into the labour force and reduce vulnerable forms of employment in which women and young people are concentrated.
 - Widely accessible and good quality infrastructure and care services to support production and reproduction work, and to reduce the unpaid care work disproportionately undertaken by women
 - Wealth/income redistribution through gender and child responsive budgeting, progressive income taxation, pro-poor fiscal and trade policies
 - Social protection programme to provide access to essential social services and social transfers and doing so contributing to the social economic environmental dimension of

sustainable development.

Activating the efforts of parties for stimulating women's participation in the political process, not only as voters and activists, not only for increasing the attractiveness and image of the party, but as candidates in proportional party lists.

4. AICESIS notes that highly unequal societies tend to grow more slowly than those with low income inequalities, and that crime and violence, in particular against women, are also found to be exacerbated by inequality. Reducing inequalities, and investing in women equality is in everyone's best interest.

Focusing only on the **symptoms** and manifestations of poverty and exclusion rather than in **structural causes** (discrimination, lack of representation) has often led to narrow discretionary measures aimed at addressing short term needs. Without attention to the underlying economic, social, cultural causes of poverty and inequality, the post-2015 development agenda will not progress towards an achieving lasting inclusive progress that is all we want.

AICESIS reminds the opportunity and usefulness of measures that:

- encourage a larger and more equal participation of women through social dialogue in decision making against crisis;
- facilitate the targeting of gender-responsive stimulus packages and their impact assessments through gender disaggregated data analysis;
- take into consideration gender audits before taking decisions about social expenditure;
- promote the dissemination strategies so that microfinance projects, particularly targeted to women, could be part of fiscal stimulus packages;
- watch over research to make sure that economic policies, especially in times of economic crisis, take into consideration gender issues, in particular to face the violence against women;
- implement policies to achieve a gender work-life balance, that may include the updating of qualifications for working women and the creation of services and infrastructures.

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