

SIDE EVENT OF THE ESCR-NET WOMEN AND ESCR WORKING GROUP AND THE MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF FINLAND

CSW 61 – 22 March 2017, 10-11:15 AM
Conference Room B

CONCEPT NOTE

Barriers to the realization of women's economic, social and cultural rights in the realm of work

Background:

The 61st session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW 61) will have as its priority theme '*Women's economic empowerment in the changing world of work*' in the context of the UN Secretary General's High Level Panel on Women's Economic Empowerment and the upcoming 2017 High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development.¹

Human rights standards such as the UN Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), as well as the interpretations by their respective treaty bodies, provide concrete guidance to States regarding the content of various economic, social and cultural rights. The international standards advance both legal and substantive equality in connection ESC rights, including in relation to women's rights to and at work. Several International Labor Organization (ILO) conventions and recommendations create standards and guidance on how to address discrimination and gender equality and provide tools to advance women's economic empowerment in the changing world of work. In addition, women's economic empowerment and the realization of women's rights to and at work are essential for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: for example, pertinent sustainable development goals include those on achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls (Goal 5) and promoting sustained, inclusive economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all (Goal 8), as well as a range of other goals (Goal 1 on ending poverty, Goal 2 on food security, Goal 3 on ensuring health, Goal 4 on quality education and Goal 10 on reducing inequalities).²

Particularly relevant to this theme is recently adopted General Comment 23 on the right to just and favorable conditions of work, issued by the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR) in April 2016. This General Comment, which reinforces and elaborates upon State obligations to ensure the realization of the right to just and favorable conditions of work, is a powerful tool for women's rights advocates to use – in multiple ways – to demand the respect, protection and fulfillment of their human rights.

¹ Concept Note of the Expert Group Meeting on 'Women's economic empowerment in the changing world of work'

² Women's economic empowerment in the changing world of work, Report of the Secretary-General, 30 December 2016.

It is in this context that the ESCR-Net Women and ESCR Working Group (WESCR WG), in partnership with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Finland, proposes to discuss how human rights standards and the substantive equality approach can be used to address non-fulfillment of women's rights to work and at work. Maria Virgínia Brás Gomes, a Member of the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights who co-authored the above-mentioned CESCR General Comment, will lead the panel. Women's rights advocates from different regions will in turn discuss the ways in which various factors, including discriminatory laws, social norms and gender constructs, as well as economic and political policies, continue to prevent women from fully realizing their economic, social and cultural rights in relation to their right to work. They will also share case studies from their own advocacy work about key manifestations of these violations, particularly in the case of domestic workers, workers performing unpaid care work and sweatshop laborers, categories of workers that the CESCR General Comment highlights as facing distinct challenges with respect to the right to work. Panelists will demonstrate that the international human rights framework, of which a substantive equality approach is a central component, is a key strategy through which to advance rights women's rights to work, to just and favorable working conditions and to equality and non-discrimination, all of which contribute to achieving women's economic empowerment.

Presenters:

The discussion will be framed by an international panel of leading women's rights experts and advocates featuring: **Ana Inés Abelenda** (AWID), **Melona Daclan** (Defend Job Philippines) and **Viviana Osorio** (Escuela Nacional Sindical).

The panel will also include comments from **Maria Virgínia Brás Gomes, Member of the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights**.

Opening remarks will be given by the **Permanent Mission of Finland to the United Nations** and **ESCR-Net**.