




13th Gathering of the ParlAmericas Parliamentary Network for Gender Equality


#ParlAmericasGEN


 **TITLE:** Bolstering Social Protection Beyond COVID-19: What the Data Tells Us

 **THEME:** Social protection, universal health, COVID-19, gender mainstreaming, inclusion, intersectionality

 **DATES:** September 13, 22 and October 4, 2021

 **LOCATION:** Virtual

 **PARTICIPANTS:** More than 210 parliamentarians, parliamentary staff, civil society, and government representatives from 31 countries

 **HOST:** The National Assembly of Belize and the Chamber of Senators of Bolivia



This activity aligned with SDGs 1, 3, 5, 10, and 17

The 13th PNGE gathering consisted of three sessions: an inter-parliamentary dialogue, a dialogue with civil society and youth representatives, and a plenary session. These meetings provided a space for productive exchanges on strategies to strengthen social protection systems and programs in inclusive and gender-responsive ways in order to redress the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and structural causes of gender inequality and other forms of social vulnerability. Ensuring access to disaggregated data to guide these actions was also a cross-cutting focus.

The gathering's keynote interview provided a foundation for the dialogues, introducing the concept of social protection and how this can be an effective tool for advancing gender equality. The conversation also focused on good social protection practices and approaches in the region, highlighting how inclusive design and implementation practices facilitate responses to the differentiated needs of the public.

Throughout the virtual sessions, participants and presenters emphasized that reaping the full range of benefits of social protection – including poverty reduction, greater social inclusion, and enhanced economic growth – requires that decision makers apply a gender lens in their work, drawing on available data and tools and taking into account intersectionality.

Participants further affirmed in the dialogues that such an approach is necessary for the complex and ongoing pandemic response and recovery process. Exchanges occurred on initiatives that had been successful and where gaps remained in this regard. COVID-19 recovery processes were seen to provide an opportunity to renew the social contract if decision makers could effectively respond to the most pressing needs of the population, and especially those that have historically faced, and continue to face, exclusion and inequality.

Among the key references and documents presented during the gathering were:

- [COVID-19 Global Gender Response Tracker](#), UNDP and UN Women, 2021
- [Social Panorama of Latin America 2020](#), ECLAC, 2020
- [Mainstreaming Gender into Social Protection Strategies and Programmes](#) UN Women and UNICEF, 2021
- [Summary Status of Women and Men Report - The Impacts of COVID-19](#) UN Women Caribbean, 2021
- [The Economic Autonomy of Women in a Sustainable Recovery with Equality](#) ECLAC, 2021

AGENDA HIGHLIGHTS

Opening remarks by:

- The Honourable **Valerie Woods** (Belize), Speaker of the House of Representatives
- Senator **Gladys Alarcón Farfán** (Bolivia), 1st Secretary of the Chamber of Senators
- Member of the Chamber of Deputies **Maya Fernández Allende** (Chile), President PNGE 2019-2021
- The Honourable **Kevin Bernard** (Belize), Minister of Youth, Sports and E-Governance

Panel on social protection beyond COVID-19:

- Senator **Natalie Campbell-Rodrigues** (Jamaica), Vice-President for the Caribbean of the ParlAmericas PNGE
- Mr. **Carlos Maldonado** (ECLAC)
- Ms. **Zahrah Nesbitt-Ahmed** (UNICEF, Office of Research - Innocenti)
- Ms. **Claudia Brito Bruno** (FAO)

Presentations on parliamentary experiences in promoting inclusive social protection during COVID-19 by:

- Honourable Representative **Jezmi Barraza** (Colombia), Vice-President for South America of the PNGE
- The Honourable Senator Dr. **Marie-Françoise Mégie** (Canada)
- Member of the Chamber of Deputies **Jimena López** (Argentina)
- The Honourable Minister Dr. **Adis King** (Dominica)
- Honourable Member of the National Assembly **Kayra Harding** (Panama)
- Member of the National Assembly **Isabel Henriquez** (Ecuador)
- Member of the National Assembly **Irma Dávila** (Nicaragua)

Closing remarks by:

- The Honourable **Bridgid Annisette-George** (Trinidad and Tobago), Speaker of the House of Representatives and Vice-President of ParlAmericas
- The Honourable **Alincia Williams Grant** (Antigua and Barbuda), President of the Senate and member of the Board of ParlAmericas

Key takeaways from the inter-parliamentary dialogue (September 13)

- The pandemic has worsened a situation of low economic growth and social instability in the region, deepening structural gaps, and inequalities. In response, social protection measures must be expanded to provide universal access to services that mitigate the pandemic's impact.
- Poverty rates are increasing, especially among women, and extreme poverty is on the rise. Unemployment is similarly increasing, with women again more greatly impacted. These gaps require focused attention through social protection programs and policies.
- It is important to proactively consider risks factors to create more resilient public policies. With health measures, overcrowding and limited access to basic services, are negative factors for those living in poverty and must be considered alongside interventions in other areas.
- An intersectional gender lens must be applied when analyzing social issues and implementing solutions. During the COVID-19 pandemic, children, youth, older adults, women, migrants, informal workers, domestic workers, individuals with disabilities, individuals in situations of homelessness, and rural, Indigenous, and Afro-descendant populations have all been among the population groups disproportionately impacted.
- The pandemic's health impacts and related containment measures, as well as challenges with accessing care services due to coverage, resources, and infrastructure, have had a disproportionate impact on women. Care responsibilities have been assumed primarily by women, in line with traditional and unequal gendered divisions of labour. Investing in the care economy can help to correct these imbalances.
- Increased incidence of gender-based violence and food insecurity and undernourishment are further issues that have particularly rural, Indigenous, and Afro-descendant women

- Social protection programs can be accelerators in the region's recovery process as investments in human capital and human dignity. Investing financially in women and girls in particular, and with a whole-of-life approach, has enormous value.
- The [Sustainable Development Goals](#) (SDGs) are an effective tool for evaluating data, designing programs, and ensuring that efforts are focused where needs are greatest.
- The [Santiago Commitment](#), which seeks to prioritize the strengthening of the national machinery for the advancement of women and gender mainstreaming at different levels, can provide useful policy guidance and an impactful starting point for recovery efforts.
- It is important to adopt a flexible, responsive, and data-driven approach when designing and implementing new programs. Decision makers must work alongside women and gender experts to create transformative initiatives.
- Social protection must be complemented by interventions on issues like violence prevention and education in order to achieve its objectives. Governments must also create a supportive macroeconomic environment to enable the allocation of sufficient resources to these programs.

Key takeaways from the parliamentary dialogue with civil society and youth representatives (September 22)

- The pandemic has amplified the need for ongoing dialogue with the population in order to ensure that the diverse needs of the public are understood and tackled directly. The central focus must be placed on those who are most vulnerable in a given context.
- Young people must be among those who are included in decision making processes. In addition to creating avenues for their meaningful involvement, parliaments can also create opportunities and programs to foster youth leadership.

- Both quantitative and qualitative data (including stories and individuals' lived experiences) are valuable and necessary inputs for the creation of high-quality laws, policies, and programs.
- Access to resources and services related to mental health and reproductive health must be an essential part of healthcare considerations in all crisis contexts, including during COVID-19. Emphasis must also be placed on ensuring access to vaccines and support for healthcare professionals.
- Crises both illustrate and exacerbate inequalities, which means some individuals have become more vulnerable during the pandemic. For example, those at risk of experiencing domestic violence prior to the pandemic have become even more vulnerable during stay-at-home restrictions associated with COVID-19.
- Closing the digital gap is important. Unequal access to the internet or necessary electronic devices has affected education and employment
- Sustainable programs and supports that foster youth access to employment, education, and financing, along with other resources, can all be explored. Agriculture and entrepreneurship were two areas of particular interest.
- Strong international relationships that allow for the sharing of knowledge and good practices can contribute to the identification and successful implementation of new social programs.
- Effective collaborations between governments and civil society organizations, and between the public and private sectors, contribute to improved access to information and can enhance policy design and implementation processes.



The Honourable VALERIE WOODS (Belize), Speaker of the House of Representatives and co-host of the gathering

Adopting a gender-responsive approach to strengthening our social protection systems ... requires access to, and the effective use of high-quality information on the population's lived experiences, supporting tools like international agreements, and disaggregated data - all of which provide essential guidance for legislative and policy work on social protection that addresses both immediate needs and helps us to build long-term resilience, overcoming some of the root causes of vulnerability.



The Honourable BRIDGID ANNISETTE-GEORGE (Trinidad and Tobago), Speaker of the House of Representatives and Vice-President of ParlAmericas

The strengthening of our social protection systems could not be more deserving of our attention as legislators and policy makers. This pandemic continues to throw unexpected challenges our way. We must ensure that we are guaranteeing the basic protections, services, and rights that are due to each and every individual, and specifically to women and girls.



The Honourable ALINCIA WILLIAMS GRANT (Antigua and Barbuda), President of the Senate and member of the ParlAmericas Board of Directors

If we are to build back for a stronger future, one that is more resilient despite the many uncertainties we can expect to face, we will need more diverse perspectives and inputs. Inputs on equitable health care, on ending gender violence, on training and education, on workplace protections, on income security, and so much more. And we must all approach these conversations with a mind that is open to differing viewpoints we may not have contemplated. This makes our democracies stronger.



Senator GLADYS ALARCÓN FARFÁN (Bolivia), 1st Secretary of the Chamber of Senators and co-host of the gathering

The pandemic has had differentiated impacts on women, with an increase in violence and gender-based economic and social inequalities ... It is essential [to respond to this challenge] to apply an intersectional gender lens in analysis, and to include women and youth in decision making to ensure that measures respond to the differentiated needs of the groups most affected.



Member of the Chamber of Deputies MAYA FERNÁNDEZ ALLENDE (Chile), President of the PNGE (2019-2021)

The complex crisis we are experiencing must be seen as a historic opportunity to strengthen social protection programs and systems under an inclusive paradigm, recognizing that well-designed, user-centered, and evidence-based social protection systems not only reduce poverty and inequality, but can also positively impact democracy, social cohesion, and sustainable economic growth.



Senator VERÓNICA CAMINO FARJAT (Mexico), President of the PNGE (2021-2023)

This is a very important dialogue ... The problems our youth experience are not only limited to those of students; we are also talking about young workers, mental health problems, and domestic violence ... We must accept the challenge put to us by young people so that we can make things better and work from our parliaments in creative ways, supported by our knowledge of the legal frameworks of each of our countries.

Following the elections held during the plenary session of the gathering, the Executive Committee of the PNGE now consists of:

- Senator **Verónica Camino Farjat** (Mexico)

- The Honourable **Mobina Jaffer**, Senator (Canada)

- Senator **Natalie Campbell-Rodrigues** (Jamaica)

- Honourable Member of the National Assembly **Kayra Harding** (Panama)

- Honourable Representative **Jezmi Barraza Arraut** (Colombia)



The gathering's plenary session (October 4) concluded with a reading of the [declaration](#). Among the commitments adopted by the convened parliamentary delegations are:

- Defend the principles of universality and of solidarity of social protection grounded in human dignity and social inclusion, with special attention to the population groups that have historically faced difficulties in accessing social protection, recognizing the centrality of non-discrimination, gender equality, and the importance of meeting the specific needs of the most vulnerable people.
- Continue the necessary expansion of existing social protection programs for children, facilitating access to nutrition, education, and health services for girls, boys, and adolescents, recognizing these as human rights; and incorporating childcare services and the provision of universal parental leave, in order to prevent and reduce child poverty and eradicate child labor.
- Insist on the need to facilitate access to social protection systems and programs, making use of new technologies whenever possible, and addressing the risks of exclusion associated with characteristics such as gender, disability, ethnicity, and employment status.
- Require competent authorities to collect disaggregated data, as well as quantitative and qualitative first-hand testimonials and information, particularly from women, Indigenous, Afro-descendent, and Indo-descendant peoples, and other groups that are traditionally underrepresented in decision-making processes, for use in the creation, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of social protection systems and programs.
- Maintain constant dialogue on social protection with the relevant institutions and civil society to inform our legislative actions with regard to these issues and ensure that existing programs and benefits are widely known, understood, and accessible by the beneficiary population.
- Defend and guarantee the annual increase of public spending on social protection programs, including in the context of austerity measures and fiscal contraction caused by the economic effects of crises, such as that stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic.



The complete agendas (September [13](#), [22](#), and October [4](#)), [press release](#), keynote interview podcasts ([English](#) and [Spanish](#)), [video recording playlist](#), and [presentations](#) from this activity can be accessed on the [ParlAmericas website](#).

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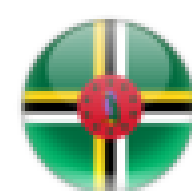
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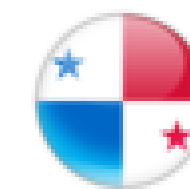
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ParlAmericas works towards strengthening democracy and governance by accompanying **ELECTORAL PROCESSES**



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ParlAmericas organizes consultations and builds **MULTI-STAKEHOLDER PARTNERSHIPS** with young leaders and civil society organizations



ParlAmericas facilitates the exchange of parliamentary **GOOD PRACTICES** and promotes **COOPERATIVE POLITICAL DIALOGUE** in pursuit of the Sustainable Development Goals



ParlAmericas promotes policies and legislative measures to mitigate and adapt to the effects of **CLIMATE CHANGE**



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