



Report of the Canadian Section of ParlAmericas

13th Gathering of the ParlAmericas Parliamentary Network for Gender Equality

Virtual Sessions

September 13, 22 and October 4, 2021

Report

Delegation members and staff

Between 13 September and 4 October 2021, Belize's National Assembly and Bolivia's Chamber of Senators hosted the 13th Gathering of ParlAmericas' Parliamentary Network for Gender Equality (PNGE), which was held virtually. The Canadian delegation comprised Mr. Marc G. Serré, MP, Chair of the Canadian Section of ParlAmericas, Senator Rosa Galvez, Vice-Chair of the Canadian Section and President for North America of ParlAmericas' Parliamentary Network on Climate Change, Senator Mobina S.B. Jaffer, Senator Kim Pate and Senator Marie-Francois Mégie. During the meeting, Senator Jaffer was elected the PNGE's Vice-President for North America.

Julie Pelletier, Association Secretary, as well as Clare Annett, Alison Clegg and Erin Virgint, Advisors to the Canadian Section, supported the delegation.

Activities during the 13th Gathering of ParlAmericas' Parliamentary Network for Gender Equality

The theme for the 13th Gathering of the PNGE was "Bolstering Social Protection beyond COVID-19: What the Data Tells Us." The meeting was attended by legislators from 21 countries in the western hemisphere, as well as by parliamentary staff, subject-matter experts, and representatives of both civil society and youth organizations.

A. 13 September 2021: Inter-Parliamentary Dialogue

The meeting's first session, which took place on [13 September 2021](#), was an inter-parliamentary dialogue with United Nations specialists about the benefits of social protection policies that are inclusive. The session included "keynote interviews" and a panel discussion.

1. Keynote interviews

During the [first keynote interview](#), Representative Valerie Woods, Speaker of Belize's House of Representatives and co-host of the meeting, posed questions to Isiuwa lyahen, Programme Specialist for Economic Empowerment and Statistics at the UN Women Multi-Country Office for the Caribbean. In identifying the socioeconomic impacts of a health crisis like the COVID-19 pandemic and the importance of a gender-responsive approach to addressing such a situation, Isiuwa lyahen explained that social protection policies include a wide range of initiatives that aim to prevent – and protect people from – poverty, social inequalities and exclusion; examples include universal healthcare, parental leave and income supports. Isiuwa layhen also highlighted that, while it is a good practice to ensure that the social protection policies implemented in response to the pandemic are inclusive, these kinds of policies could have been integrated into countries'

social support systems as preventative measures to enhance populations' resilience in the event of a crisis.

In the [second keynote interview](#) [AVAILABLE IN SPANISH ONLY], Brazilian Senator Yolanda Condo Ponce posed questions to Dr. Roxana Maurizio, the International Labour Organization's Regional Specialist on Labour Economics. Dr. Maurizio spoke about social protection and social security systems, particularly in the context of the pandemic, and noted that social protection and social security systems that are inclusive are central to reducing economic, social and gender inequalities. In emphasizing the importance of incorporating a gendered approach to the development and implementation of social protection systems, Dr. Maurizio asserted that strengthening social programs and services may address the root causes of gender inequality and other social vulnerabilities, both in the context of the pandemic and beyond. According to Dr. Maurizio, legislators have a role to play in promoting equity through strengthening their countries' social protection systems and ensuring that those systems are inclusive.

2. Panel Discussion

Jamaican Senator Natalie Campbell Rodrigues moderated the panel discussion, which involved presentations by:

- Dr. Carlos Maldonado, Social Affairs Officer with the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean;
- Dr. Zahrah Nesbitt-Ahmed, Gender and Development Research Manager with the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund Office of Research – Innocenti; and
- Claudio Brito Bruno, Policy Officer for Gender and Social Systems with the Food and Agriculture Organization.

Senator Campbell Rodrigues explained that social protection programs, which are social contracts between the state and citizens, help to ensure that the population's basic needs are met. According to Senator Campbell Rodrigues, applying a gender lens to the design of these programs can address the root causes of many social exclusions and inequalities. Senator Campbell Rodrigues further noted that the COVID-19 pandemic has affected women and men differently; many women have experienced a greater burden in relation to care work, violence directed against them and against children, a high rate of unemployment and a loss of income, leading to greater insecurity and poverty.

Dr. Maldonado expanded on the ways that women have been affected by the pandemic, especially those in Latin America and the Caribbean, and highlighted certain factors exacerbating the pandemic's effects; these factors include:

- a lack of medical coverage and medical infrastructure;
- the gendered division of labour and burdens in relation to care work; and
- the impacts of intersecting identities or additional vulnerabilities.

As well, Dr. Maldonado pointed to increased access to money transfers and the expansion of existing social programs as some of the short-term measures implemented

in Latin America and the Caribbean in response to the pandemic. Finally, in providing recommendations to address the pandemic's effects, Dr. Maldonado suggested investments in the "care economy" and emphasized that any social protection programs implemented in response to the pandemic should be universal.

Dr. Nesbitt-Ahmed explained that gender discrimination is often a root cause of poverty and other social inequalities, and stressed that these inequalities can change or accumulate throughout one's life, or one's "life course." Dr. Nesbitt-Ahmed described the [Gender-Responsive Age-Sensitive Social Protection \(GRASSP\)](#) research program, which is a "five-year multi-country mixed-methods research and evaluation program" that conducts a gender analysis of countries' social protection programs across four areas and prioritizes social protection policies throughout the life course; the four areas are: "the overarching framework, a risk and vulnerability assessment, the specific actions and programme design features and monitoring and evaluation and governance framework." According to Dr. Nesbitt-Ahmed, the GRASSP research program has four policy implications:

- Social protection strategies must incorporate a comprehensive gender risk and vulnerability analysis across the life course.
- The process of developing and implementing gender-responsive policies and programs to address issues and inequalities must be strengthened.
- Policymakers must design and deliver programs based on identified gendered risks and vulnerabilities.
- Gender equality advocates and experts must be included when decisions are made about the design and implementation of social protection policies and programs.

Claudio Brito Bruno referenced women's employment during the pandemic, reiterating that certain sectors have been more negatively affected than others and that women comprise large proportions of the workforce in many of these sectors. As well, according to Claudio Brito Bruno, more women are leaving the workforce in 2021 than in 2020, perhaps partly because of the increased burden of either caring for children or undertaking other care work, with some women – for instance, women living in rural areas – experiencing specific barriers or having unique needs concerning childcare and other services. As such, Claudio Brito Bruno's recommendations underscored the need to consider the particular needs of rural women, and suggested that the state must consider its role in providing care when it creates new care services and spaces in public facilities.

Following the presentations, the legislators posed questions, many of which focused on supporting women's economic security to reduce poverty and gender-based violence. As well, the legislators and panelists discussed the need to expand access to healthcare and COVID-19 vaccinations with the goal of achieving universal and equitable access. They also noted the importance of applying an intersectional gender lens to social protection programs to ensure that the specific needs of different groups of women – such as women in rural areas or Indigenous women – are met.

In the closing remarks for the session, Member of Parliament Bridgid Annisette George, Speaker of the House of Representatives of Trinidad and Tobago, spoke about the role

of disaggregated data in creating and strengthening social protection policies that address social inequalities throughout a woman's life course.

B. 22 September 2021: Parliamentary Dialogue with Civil Society and Youth Representatives

The meeting's session on 22 September 2021 was focused on a [Parliamentary Dialogue with Civil Society and Youth Representatives](#). With the goal of identifying measures that address the most pressing needs during the COVID-19 pandemic, civil society and youth representatives discussed emerging data and their lived experiences.

The Honourable Kevin Bernard, Belize's Minister of Youth, Sports and E-Governance, provided welcoming remarks that underscored the need for legislators to engage in ongoing and direct dialogue with diverse members of the public – including women, youth and other vulnerable populations – during the pandemic in order to address their needs. The welcoming remarks delivered by Bolivian Senator Gladys Valentine, 1st Secretary of the Chamber of Senators, asserted that legislators from around the world can collaborate, strengthen international bonds and learn from one another's policies to achieve good results concerning response to – and recovery from – the pandemic.

Mexican Senator Veronica Camino, then PNGE's Vice-President for North America, moderated the parliamentary dialogue with civil society and youth representatives, and pointed to the virtual forums emerging throughout the pandemic as helpful avenues for international cooperation, as well as for sharing best practices and information. The session was organized into two discussions: social protection responses to meet the needs of marginalized groups; and data and lived experiences. Both focused on the ways in which legislators could support and collaborate with youth and civil society organizations in responding to, and recovering from, the pandemic.

The youth and civil society representatives spoke about lived experiences and the initiatives implemented in their respective countries. Many of their comments focused on the ways in which the pandemic has affected youth's employment and education.

During the session, Senator Pate spoke about parliamentary initiatives that could involve civil society and youth representatives and organizations, such as a shadow parliament where members of the public could be paired with ministers and could participate in the legislative process. Senator Pate also explained that, while Canada is a relatively wealthy country, gaps remain in access to health services and other social protection programs. Finally, Senator Pate indicated that political interns working with parliamentarians provide useful perspectives on connecting with youth, such as through social media, and on encouraging their leadership.

Senator Alincia Williams-Grant, President of Antigua and Barbuda's Senate and member of ParlAmericas' Board of Directors, provided closing remarks that summarized the information shared by the youth and civil society representatives and that further underlined the need for legislators to continue engaging in meaningful ways with the public.

C. 4 October 2021: Plenary session

The meeting's [plenary session](#), which occurred on 4 October 2021, started with welcoming remarks from Speaker Woods, Bolivian Senator Gladys Valentina Alarcón Farfán, 1st Secretary of the Chamber of Senators, and Chilean Deputy Maya Fernández Allende, then the PNGE's President. Their remarks focused largely on the importance of data in strengthening social protection policies. Speaker Woods specified that legislators must engage with civil society and youth representatives and organizations in order to gain the knowledge needed to develop such policies. In echoing Speaker Woods' comments, Senator Alarcón Farfán suggested that intersectional and gender analyses based on high-quality data disaggregated by various identity factors are integral to developing strong social protection policies. Finally, Deputy Fernández Allende highlighted that access to Wifi and Internet should be expanded and otherwise improved, and acknowledged the PNGE's work concerning gender equality during the pandemic and beyond.

Senator Campbell Rodrigues summarized the main conclusions from the Inter-Parliamentary Dialogue on 13 September 2021, while Mexican Senator Verónica Camino Farjat presented an overview of the key points raised during the Parliamentary Dialogue with Civil Society and Youth Representatives on 22 September 2021. On behalf of the youth and civil society representatives, Alicia Wallace – from Bahamas Equality – and Floridalma López – from the Guatemalan Parliament for Children and Adolescents – reported on the perspectives that were shared during the 22 September 2021 session.

The plenary session also included a parliamentary panel on the topic of experiences in promoting inclusive social policy during the COVID-19 pandemic, and concluded with both commitments made during the session and the results of the elections for all positions on the PNGE's executive committee.

1. Parliamentary Panel on Experiences in Promoting Inclusive Social Protection during COVID-19 and Beyond

Colombian Representative Jezmi Barraza Arraut moderated a discussion that involved presentations by:

- Senator Mégie;
- Argentinian Deputy Jimena López;
- The Honourable Dr. Adis King, Dominica's Minister of Youth Development and Empowerment, Youth at Risk, Gender Affairs, Seniors' Security and Dominicans with Disabilities; and
- Panamanian Deputy Kayra Harding.

Senator Mégie spoke about Canada's gender-responsive approach to recovery from the pandemic, noting commitments to implement an early learning and childcare system in collaboration with the provinces and territories, as well as the importance of continuing to improve disaggregated data collection. In addition, Senator Mégie highlighted that, during the pandemic, Canada has allocated additional funding to organizations that support women experiencing violence.

Deputy Lopez spoke about efforts in Argentina to ensure that hospitals are being adequately resupplied throughout the pandemic. As well, Deputy Lopez referenced further financial supports for aging populations for their retirement from the workforce, increased employment insurance for those losing their jobs, and a doubling of funds allocated to the care of children, the last of which is intended to ease the burden on mothers and grandmothers who are caring for children.

Dr. King spoke about Dominica's approach to social protection policies, noting that the country experienced a severe hurricane just prior to the pandemic, a situation that underscored the need to strengthen and scale up these policies. Furthermore, Dr. King explained that collaborations between the private sector and the public sector to ensure that resources are being equally distributed is a key for Dominica's inclusive response to the pandemic.

Deputy Harding pointed out that, like in many countries, women in Panama are at the forefront of the pandemic response; women have held key positions and been present throughout the decision-making process as the country's response to COVID-19 has been planned. Finally, with approximately 70% of the eligible population being vaccinated, Deputy Harding praised Panama's vaccination efforts but added that the country will continue to pursue a higher rate.

2. Commitments

Legislators adopted the final [declaration](#), which was introduced by Senator Condo Ponce. The declaration emphasizes strengthening social protection systems to address the "structural causes of gender inequality and other forms of social vulnerability exacerbated by the profound socio-economic and public health impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic." As well, it contains 13 commitments, all of which focus on establishing and/or improving various aspects of inclusive social protection policies.

3. Election results

Elections for all positions on the PNGE's executive committee were held, with the following [results](#):

- President: Senator Camino Farjat;
- Vice-President, North America: Senator Jaffer;
- Vice-President, Central America: Deputy Harding;
- Vice-President, South America: Representative Barraza Arraut; and
- Vice-President, The Caribbean: Senator Campbell Rodriques.

Respectfully submitted,

Marc G. Serré, MP
Chair, Canadian Section of ParlAmericas

Travel Costs

ASSOCIATION	Canadian Section of ParlAmericas
ACTIVITY	13th Gathering of the ParlAmericas Parliamentary Network for Gender Equality
DESTINATION	Videoconference
DATES	September 13, 22 and October 4, 2021
DELEGATION	
SENATE	Hon. Rosa Galvez Hon. Mobina Jaffer Hon. Marilou McPhedran Hon. Marie-Françoise Mégie Hon. Kim Pate
HOUSE OF COMMONS	Marc G. Serré
STAFF	Ms. Clare Annett Ms. Julie Pelletier
TRANSPORTATION	\$ 0.00
ACCOMMODATION	\$ 0.00
HOSPITALITY	\$ 0.00
PER DIEMS	\$ 0.00
OFFICIAL GIFTS	\$ 0.00
MISCELLANEOUS	\$ 0.00
TOTAL	\$ 0.00