



INTERNATIONAL SOCIAL SECURITY ASSOCIATION
ASSOCIATION INTERNATIONALE DE LA SÉCURITÉ SOCIALE
ASOCIACIÓN INTERNACIONAL DE LA SEGURIDAD SOCIAL
INTERNATIONALE VEREINIGUNG FÜR SOZIALE SICHERHEIT

IEN Technical Seminar on gender mainstreaming Opening session

Hans-Horst Konkolewsky, ISSA Secretary General Reykjavik, Iceland, 31 May 2018

Dear Sigríður Lilly Baldursdóttir
Director General of the Social Insurance Administration in Iceland
Dear representatives of the Ministry of Welfare,
Ladies and gentlemen, dear colleagues and friends,

It is a great pleasure for me to welcome you all here in beautiful Reykjavik at the opening of the ISSA's Technical Seminar on gender mainstreaming in social security. This is indeed a special day for our Association as it is the very first event of the ISSA to be organized in Iceland.

I am therefore most grateful to our host, Ms Baldursdottir, for the kind invitation, and for the outstanding commitment and engagement of Ms Baldursdottir and her team in the organization of this event. I would also like to express my appreciation to the representatives of the Icelandic Ministry of Welfare that is co-hosting this event and that also has been very much involved in the preparation of this Seminar.

You might wonder about, how it came about that we – finally – are celebrating an ISSA event in Iceland. To answer this question I need to go back in time, exactly 2 years, when Ms Baldursdottir spent some months of her study leave at the ISSA Secretariat in Geneva.

And after quite some years as Secretary General of the ISSA, I can tell you that not many visitors have left such an impact – but this is of course not a surprise for those of you that know our host well.

During Ms Baldursdottir's time at the Secretariat, she raised a number of key questions about gender and social security and encouraged the ISSA to strengthen its activities in this important field.

Jointly with Katrin Westling Palm, the former Director General of the Swedish Pension Agency and Adriana Lender, the former Director General of the Swedish Social Insurance Agency, who is joining us for this event, she organized a briefing in Geneva to discuss in particular the role that gender mainstreaming can play in social security. The briefing was attended by staff of the ISSA and of the International Labour Office and left quite an impact on both organisations.

And one of the concrete results is our Seminar today and tomorrow and the presence of almost 60 delegates from 29 social security organisations representing 18 countries demonstrates the strong interest of our European members in promoting gender equality in social security.

I am also pleased to welcome two representatives from international organisations who are known for their commitment to reduce inequalities: Ms Monika Queisser, Head of the Social Policy Division of the OECD, and Mr Miguel de la Corte Rodriguez, legal officer at the Gender Equality Unit of the European Commission.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Women face inequalities across the life course as unpaid work and care or part-time or underpaid jobs negatively impact their access to adequate social security coverage. This challenge of grave inequalities is addressed by the important mandate given to all of us by the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals related to gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls.

In this context, it is evident that the ISSA must use all opportunities to become a key international actor for promoting gender-sensitive social security systems.

With our 320 member institutions in 155 countries, the Association is indeed uniquely placed to put this key issue on the agenda of social security debates both regionally and also globally.

Positively, we can build on a number of recent ISSA activities in this field. For instance, the ISSA has identified inequalities, and in particular gender inequalities, as one of the ten global challenges for social security which we presented during the World Social Security Forum in Panama in November 2016.

Regional Ten Challenges reports for Africa, the Americas and Asia have been produced and in addition to highlighting the challenge of gender inequalities they all include possible solutions. A report for Europe will be prepared for the Regional Social Security Forum in Baku (Azerbaijan) in April next year, and will also be built on our discussions here in Iceland.

The analysis presented in these reports is also benefitting from the ISSA' megatrends report on gender and family published last year. This report, which analyses gender based inequalities, their impacts on social security schemes and potential administrative and policy answers that could help to reduce them, has gained substantially from the input of experts from Nordic countries and knowledge from ISSA Technical Commissions.

Also important to mention are the current efforts to ensure that gender is considered appropriately in the ISSA Guidelines, the global professional standards for social security administrations. Eight of our 11 sets of Guidelines are currently being reviewed, and gender aspects are being considered as part of this review.

However, and as mentioned before, the ISSA must also act to ensure that its knowledge and innovative solutions are promoted and spread both within and beyond its network to promote gender equality globally.

I am therefore pleased that we here can count on a number of key partnerships, such as with the International Labour Office, our sister organization in Geneva. As some of you may know, the Director General of the ILO is presenting this week his report on 'The Women at Work Initiative' at the International Labour Conference, and the ISSA will address the Conference next week to support this initiative and bring the conclusions of our Seminar to this important event.

The ISSA is also a member of the newly established Gender Working Group of the Social Protection Inter-Agency Board in which the World Bank, the ILO and other UN agencies work together to shift global practices on gender-responsive social protection.

I am pleased that through this membership, the ISSA member institutions will be able to contribute to the next session of the Commission on the Status of Women, which will focus specifically on social protection.

The experience of social security institutions in their delivery of social benefits is indeed invaluable for this important work at the international level.

In order to achieve real impact our vision must be supported by concrete strategies and tools. We must build on experiences and innovative approaches and learn from each other.

I am therefore very pleased that in the next one and a half days, the ISSA European Network offers us an opportunity to look first into the main causes of gender inequalities linked to social security and, second, the tools and good practices that social security institutions and policymakers could use to impact change.

In particular, the concept of gender mainstreaming will be presented as an important tool to raise attention and introduce gender-sensitivity and awareness at all levels. A specific aspect of these two days is our wish to make this Seminar challenging and interactive.

Based on what we are learning from the speakers and our own experiences, we will be able to have time as part of working groups to actively exchange and search for solutions on how to introduce gender mainstreaming in our organizations.

I believe that we are all looking forward to an exciting agenda with highly interesting keynote presentations and case studies. And based on the working groups, we should all be able to build some concrete ideas of what we can do to reduce inequalities after returning to our organisations. And in the same spirit, I would like to request you to discuss and bring your ideas about potential future work of the ISSA.

Despite many years of experience and efforts to address gender inequalities, there are still important gaps that need to be addressed even in developed regions like Europe. As the ISSA's commitment is global, we would appreciate your initiatives and ideas about possible activities and research to ensure that the messages and findings of this Seminar and other activities have a global outreach.

As we are preparing our Programme of activities for the years 2020-2022 in the coming months, we are committed to strengthening our efforts to promote gender equality in social security administration and look towards your input and suggestions.

And let us recall, that improving gender equality in social security is critical not only for women and men but also for our societies - in the words of Helen Clarke, former Prime Minister of New Zealand and Administrator of the UNDP:

“Any serious shift towards more sustainable societies has to include gender equality”

Finally, let me already now thank all the speakers and moderators who have accepted to participate and share their expertise, allowing this event to be highly relevant, and close by once again expressing my sincere thanks to the Social Insurance Administration and the Ministry of Welfare for their warm welcome in Iceland.