



## Removing Structural Barriers to Women's Economic Empowerment Short title: Advancing Women's Economic Empowerment

**Side event: 70<sup>th</sup> session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (#CSW70)**

Wednesday March 11, 2026, 13:15 - 14:30

UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) Chamber, United Nations Headquarters

**Summary:** Women around the world continue to face systemic barriers to full economic participation, including discriminatory laws, restrictive policies, unequal access to financial services, and under-representation in economic decision-making. For many women, notably Indigenous women, and women with disabilities, such barriers are compounded by intersecting forms of inequality that contribute to higher levels of poverty, violence, unemployment, and economic insecurity. To address these barriers, Canada and the Republic of the Philippines, will convene a conversation to provide insight on how partnership and collective action can foster sustainable livelihoods for all women, especially women most impacted by economic inequality and insecurity. By highlighting key policy innovations and scalable solutions, this timely discussion seeks to advance the economic empowerment of all women by responding to their unique needs and circumstances.

**Background:** Barriers to women's economic empowerment limit economic agency, hinder entrepreneurial growth, and reduce the ability of all women to engage effectively in public and economic life.

UNCSW 70's priority and review themes reinforce this link:

- Removing discriminatory laws and structural barriers strengthens access to justice and economic agency.
- Equitable economic opportunities enhance women's influence in public life and support sustainable development.

In this discussion, international partners will offer insights to how strong gender-equality legislation, active efforts to expand women's economic participation, and leadership in multilateral forums translate into practical strategies for removing structural barriers, and advance inclusive and sustainable economic empowerment for all women, particularly women with disabilities, and Indigenous women, who face distinct and intersecting barriers that limit access to capital, supports, and opportunities.

**Concept:** This event will explore how countries can dismantle systemic economic barriers through:



**Canada**





1. **Legal and Policy Reforms:** Eliminating discriminatory laws and regulations that restrict women's economic participation.
2. **Access to Finance and Markets:** Expanding pathways for women entrepreneurs through credit, digital tools, and market access.
3. **Gender-Responsive Trade and Investment:** Integrating gender considerations into trade frameworks, investment strategies, and economic recovery models.

**Format:** Opening remarks, two facilitated questions, and reflection, as time allows.

### Key Topics

- Removing discriminatory economic and legal barriers.
- Strengthening access to justice for women and girls, notably Indigenous women, and women with disabilities
- Increasing accessibility in justice systems, financial services, and economic institutions.
- Supporting inclusive entrepreneurship and equitable access to capital
- Gender- and disability-responsive trade and investment frameworks.
- Digitalization, technology access, and inclusive innovation.
- Intersectional approaches to addressing structural and systemic barriers.

### Participants

Opening Remarks: The Hon. Rechie Valdez, Minister of Gender Equality and Secretary of State (Small Business and Tourism)

Moderator - Dr. Amanda Dale, Candidate (Canada) for the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women for the 2027-2030 term.

### Panelists

- Republic of the Philippines (Representative, TBC)
- Sitabile Dewa, Founder and Regional Director, Pan African Women Political Leaders Movement (PAWLEM)
- International Disability Alliance (Representative, TBC)
- Lori Straznicky, Federal Pay Equity Commissioner, Canadian Human Rights Commission
- Evelyn Huntjens, Director of Indigenous Initiatives, DisAbled Women's Network of Canada (DAWN)
- Meenu Sikand, Vice-Chair, Canadian Women's Foundation (CWF); Founder and CEO of Accessibility for All (AFA),
- Magnolia Perron, Director of Strategy, National Aboriginal Capital Corporations (Canada)

