IN BRIEF

UN WOMEN'S RESPONSE TO COVID-19

How is UN Women Responding?

UN Women has developed rapid and targeted responses to mitigate the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on women and girls and ensure that the long-term recovery positively impacts them.

UN Women's response to COVID 19 includes policy advice and programmatic interventions. The response is part of the broader UN wide response.

UN Women Executive Director Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka issued a Call to Action to governments and other stakeholders on the need for response to the COVID-19 pandemic that takes gender perspectives into account. Subsequently, UN Women issued a ten-point checklist for Governments to guide a gender-sensitive response. We are working closely with UN partners to ensure a strong gender equality focus, particularly in the social and economic impact of the crisis. The UN Secretary-General has been a vocal proponent of the gender dimensions of this crisis.

UN Women has led the development of the UN Policy Brief: The impact of COVID-19 on Women, launched by the UN Secretary-General. This brief demonstrates how women and girls' lives are changing in the face of COVID-19 and outlines priority measures for the immediate response and longer-term recovery efforts. UN Women has played an integral role in the development of the report Shared Responsibility, Global Solidarity: Responding to the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19.

UN Women is also working within a range of United Nations partners to ensure a strong gender lens on various aspects of the response. UN Women has contributed to a number of issues briefs, such as COVID-19 and Human Rights: We are all in this together. With ILO and UNICEF, UN Women has issued guidance on Family-friendly policies and other good workplace practices in the context of COVID-19: Key steps employers can take. UN Women and UNICEF have partnered to produce the brief: Promoting Positive Gender Roles in Marketing and Advertising.

UN Women has created an array of policy guidance to inform its programmes and global advocacy. Notable among these is the policy brief specifically on violence against women COVID-19 and Ending Violence Against Women and Girls. UN Women is also making gender data widely available through a dedicated COVID-19 section in the Women Count Data Hub.

UN Women has developed a response framework focusing on five priorities:

1. Gender-based violence, including domestic violence, is mitigated and reduced
2. Social protection and economic stimulus packages serve women and girls.
3. People support and practice the equal sharing of the burden of care.
4. Women and girls lead and participate in COVID-19 response planning and decision-making
5. Data and coordination mechanisms include gender perspectives

Gender-based violence, including domestic violence, is mitigated and reduced

Violence against women and girls, especially domestic violence, has dramatically increased in lockdown conditions. In some countries, a 40% increase has been reported. UN Women is raising awareness of the "shadow pandemic" of violence against women and girls. The Secretary-General has issued an urgent appeal for peace at home in line with his call for a global ceasefire. UN Women work in this area is guided by its policy brief COVID-19 and Ending Violence Against Women and Girls.

UN Women focuses on five areas in its response:
• Prevention and awareness-raising
• Support for rapid assessments
• Access to essential services, including hotlines and shelters
• Violence against women in public spaces
• Support to women's groups

UN Women is monitoring and/or undertaking **rapid assessments** of violence against women and girls and COVID-19 in many countries, including Bosnia and Herzegovina, Egypt, Fiji, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Malawi, Morocco, Palestine, South Africa, Tonga, Tunisia and Vanuatu. The Safe and Fair programme in Asia Pacific reports increased risk of sexual exploitation and violence by border police and armed guards, for people travelling home, and increased risk of psychological violence to women migrant workers who lost their jobs and are no longer able to support their families. The Police Development Department in North Macedonia is using official statistics to monitor reported increases in crimes of violence against women during the lockdown.

UN Women focuses on prevention and access to essential services (health, justice and policing, social services, helplines and coordination of these services) to mitigate risks of violence against women and girls and provide support services to those who have experienced and/or witnessed violence. UN Women is supporting partners to update referral pathways and service delivery protocols, including with police and justice institutions in Bolivia, Ecuador, South Africa, Sudan, Trinidad and Tobago, Vanuatu. In South Africa, UN Women is supporting the establishment of an Emergency GBV Referral System for the country during lockdown with 85 NGOs and Churches.

UN Women is also supporting online or phone-based service provision and counseling in Fiji, Jordan, Lebanon, Ukraine. In refugee camps in Jordan, counselling services for women GBV survivors are being provided by phone and UN women is also providing essential sanitation supplies for clinics and shelters.

Women and girls are also facing increased fear and violence in **public spaces** where streets and transport are deserted in social distancing conditions, as seen in the Philippines and other countries. Globally, through our **UN Safe City and Safe Public Spaces Initiative**, UN Women works with local governments, justice/police/health sectors, and grassroots women's organizations, to deepen support across municipal departments (transportation, parks, public work spaces, sanitation, and housing) in ensuring safe public spaces for women and girls during the crisis.

In all country offices, **UN Women is supporting women's CSOs as our core partners**, many of which are struggling during this time particularly with the surge in cases of GBV. The **UN Trust Fund to End Violence against Women** is reviewing all current grants to identify funds that could be quickly reallocated to provide immediate assistance to local women's organizations. Subject to donor contributions, the UN Trust Fund will also establish a COVID-19 Funding Window to expand this support.

Social protection and economic stimulus packages serve women and girls

Women disproportionately work in insecure,[1] lower-paid, part-time and informal employment, with little or no income security and social protection, such as health insurance. They are therefore less protected from economic shocks in times of crisis.[1] Fragile gains for women's economic empowerment are severely threatened by the impact of COVID-19.

Women UN Women focuses in four areas to address this impact:

- Support for assessments and policy advocacy to drive accurate policy responses
- Support to women-owned enterprises
- Private sector engagement
- Gender-responsive procurement

UN Women helps assess the gender impact of COVID-19 on livelihoods of women-owned small businesses and women employees with its private sector partners. Livelihoods programmes such as Cash for Work and Job Placements under UN Women's Leadership, Empowerment, Access & Protection in Crisis Response (LEAP) programme, Markets for Change to support women traders, Climate-Resilient Agriculture to support women farmers, Rural Women's Economic Empowerment and Second Chance Education to develop skills among disadvantaged women will be expanded to address the impact of the economic crisis.

UN Women conducts **social and economic assessments** from a gender perspective to understand needs and tailor responses. In the Arab States, UN Women is conducting rapid assessments on challenges/needs of female entrepreneurs. Support measures are being identified for the national level and will inform the on-going joint programme Work4Women with ILO. In South Africa, UN Women is working with government partners to assess how women in the informal sector (domestic workers, hawkers, etc.) are included in supply chain databases and socio-economic rescue initiatives to preserve their livelihoods and maximize recovery potential post-pandemic. In Asia-Pacific, a survey is providing proxy statistics for key issues around employment, loss of income, use of time, and access to health care. In **Europe and Central Asia**, studies have been initiated on women's unpaid care work and economic constraints faced by women entrepreneurs and women in the informal sector. In **Georgia**, together with the TASO Foundation, UN Women interviewed women small-business-owners working in rural areas on the impact of COVID-19 on their operations. Simultaneously, UN Women is building women's economic resilience and endurance to future shocks. In the Caribbean, UN Women is partnering with UNDP and UNICEF to conduct socio-economic assessments.

UN Women is already supporting **women owned SMEs** across regions. In the **Arab States** and **Latin America and the Caribbean**, UN Women is focusing on major economic sectors impacted by COVID-19 that employ women, including tourism, hospitality, and in the informal sector through guidelines and capacity building on how to develop tools/plans to mitigate the risks and impact of the outbreak. In **South Africa** UN Women is offering a suite of virtual learning courses through online virtual **classrooms** with Google and MTN. This virtual set up is assisting 4,500 women owned businesses to apply for and access government stimulus funding. In addition, UN Women South Africa is assisting 2,000 women farmers through their associations to apply for permits to continue farming, trading and accessing government information on food supply during the lockdown.

UN Women is also mobilizing **cash, essential supplies and food** to mitigate the impact of COVID. In **Senegal,** UN Women has reallocated funds from the climate-resilient agriculture programme to purchase rice from participating women producers to be distributed by the Government to vulnerable families receiving monthly cash transfers. In **Lebanon**, we are providing unconditional cash transfers under the UN Women cash for work and job placement programmes. In **Jordanian** refugee camps, UN Women is working with WFP to ensure direct-cash based interventions through WFP's block chain technology and OneCard Platform. **In Latin America and the Caribbean,** UN Women is publishing a paper on gender and cash transfers, including those for women with unpaid care responsibilities, with recommendations on including women working in the informal sector, domestic workers and women with no income dedicated to unpaid care work.

UN Women in **Asia-Pacific**, **Europe and Central Asia (ECA)** and **Latin America and the Caribbean** (LAC) is engaging **private sector companies** that are signatories of the Women Economic Principles (WEPs) to provide effective response to support gender equality in the workplace, across the value chains and throughout communities as part of their WEPs commitments. UN Women is helping fast-track gender-sensitive business response and recovery, and gain commitments from business leaders. In Argentina, Colombia, Ecuador, Mexico and Uruguay, UN Women has published briefs for **private sector partners** including on measures to reconcile remote work schemes with care responsibilities. In **Turkey**, with Koc Holding, an employer of 90,000 people, a gender assessment is underway to support a gender-sensitive corporate response. With ILO and UNICEF, UN Women has issued guidance on Family-friendly policies and other good workplace practices in the context of COVID-19: Key steps employers can take.

Gender-responsive procurement is used as a strategic lever to create opportunities for women entrepreneurs, including in the Win-Win programme in Latin America and the Caribbean. In **Mali**, UN Women is procuring goods from women owned enterprises and cooperatives supported by its programmes to prepare survival kits to be distributed to the most vulnerable (an estimate USD 200,000). In **South Africa**, UN Women is making available a database of women-owned businesses to the Government to stimulate procurement opportunities.

People support and practice the equal sharing of the burden of care

Overloaded health systems alongside social distancing and school closures place a greater burden on care and domestic work, exposing women to an increasing burden, unpaid work and time poverty.

UN Women focuses on three key areas to address this issue:

- Support for needs assessment and development of adequate public policies
- Support to care workers, including domestic workers
- Behavior change campaigns

In **Argentina**, an online survey on care and remote work was developed jointly with ILO to collect inputs for strategies and public policies. In **Chile**, UN Women advocates for the inclusion of domestic workers as a priority for the Government and the UN response. In **Ecuador**, in partnership with UNDP, cash transfers to women are implemented in a "cash for work" modality with emphasis on women in mobility and the population in poverty, using the social assistance delivery database of the Ministry of Inclusion. In Latin America and the Caribbean as well as in other regions, some of the work to support care workers overlaps with the economic support for women in the informal sector.

Changing social norms that support unequal distribution of care responsibilities is urgent in the current stay at home context. UN Women is conducting social mobilization to challenge these stereotypes. The **#HeForSheAtHome** campaign seeks to inspire men and boys to help balance the burden in their households. UN Women and UNICEF have partnered to produce the brief: Promoting Positive Gender Roles in Marketing and Advertising. UN Women **Morocco** is working to encourage men and boys to share domestic and childcare work with women, including with children's education. UN Women **Malawi** is supporting awareness-raising and sensitization of influencers, youth networks, and religious/faith/traditional leaders, teachers, herbalists, traditional healers on COVID-19, and addressing cultural practices that might impact the spread of the disease. UN Women **Lebanon** will launch a joint awareness raising campaign with **UNDP** on social norms, burden sharing and domestic violence. In **Latin America**, the Campaign **CaringForWork** in partnership with PAHO/WHO and ILO raises the visibility of women working in health and other care tasks.

Women and girls lead and participate in COVID-19 response planning and decision-making

The potential leadership of women in pandemic preparedness and response is not being sufficiently leveraged. Despite women constituting the majority of frontline healthcare workers, women are not effectively represented in national and global health leadership.[1] Little has been done to ensure that women's voices are reflected at the decision-making table and − likely, as a result − gender perspectives are often ignored in responses.[1] The Gender and COVID-19 academic working group has also recommended that better inclusion of women frontline workers in all decision-making and policy spaces can improve health security surveillance, detection, and prevention mechanisms.

UN Women focuses on four key areas under this priority:

- Convening leaders and decision-makers to advocate for the importance of women's leadership in the response
- Support to women's organizations and women on the frontlines of the response
- Support for women living with HIV
- Awareness-campaigns and social mobilization

UN Women and the OECD convened the **Women Leaders´ Virtual Roundtable on COVID-19 and the Future** to discuss ways of leveraging women's leadership to identify and prioritize policy measures that facilitates a more gender-inclusive recovery path. UN Women is supporting the African Women Leaders Network (AWLN) on messaging and grassroots advocacy around women's leadership during the pandemic.

UN Women and the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) convened **high-level meetings with Ministers of Women** of Latin America and the Caribbean to exchange information on the measures to protect and promote women's rights as part of the crisis response. Participants asserted the need for strong multilateral action and change of paradigm for the economic and social future for the region. UN Women and ECLAC also developed a **regional mapping study of gender-responsive policy measures**, **including those relating to care policies**, which is being used to monitor and compare country responses.

Support to **women's organizations** through UN Women's [Women, Peace and Humanitarian Fund](#), the Spotlight Initiative and the [Trust Fund to End Violence Against Women](#) will continue and expand, though adapting to new realities that constrain movement and access due to COVID-19.

In **Bangladesh**, Camps-in-Charge Gender Officers are working in camps focusing on supporting COVID-19 preparedness and response activities as well as cyclone and monsoon preparedness and overall support for gender aspects of protection/GBV cases. For this they are working through the 24 Rohingya volunteers and women leaders and their networks across 12 camps. In **Myanmar**, UN Women is mobilizing, empowering and equipping women-led organizations/networks - especially Rohingya women-graduates from the Rakhine Gender Leadership Programme. In **Nepal**, UN Women convened 17 leaders representing women's and excluded groups' organizations and networks, including organizations of persons with disabilities, LGBTI organizations, and Dalit women organizations, across the seven provinces of Nepal to identify key emerging issues and jointly advocate to the government and HCT. A platform that includes more than 30 women organizations/partners in **Gaza and the West Bank** in **Palestine** was created to provide a space for information sharing and to amplify the voices of women's organizations in humanitarian processes, especially in relation to the COVID-19 preparedness and response plans.

UN Women is also directly supporting the women on the frontlines of response and promoting their role in prevention. In **Kenya**, UN Women is training and equipping frontline health providers with mental health and wellbeing programmes for families. In **Georgia** and **North Macedonia**, UN Women is facilitating health and social care workers and caregivers with women-friendly personal protective equipment and flexible working arrangements. And UN Women is advocating to include front-line women health workers in decision-making and policy spaces for improved health security surveillance, detection and prevention mechanisms. To enable women to plan a key role in preventing transmission, in **Central African Republic**, UN Women has distributed a first batch of 100 washing stations to the Minister of Women's Promotion to be placed around Bangui, closer to the women.

The nexus of HIV and COVID19 brings to the fore the unique challenges facing women who are living with HIV. UN Women is supporting the networks of women living with HIV to: **Ensure women living with HIV have access to life-saving treatment, care and support services**.

For example, in Asia and the Pacific together with UNAIDS, UN Women is advocating for uninterrupted access to HIV treatment for women living with HIV. In Thailand, antiretroviral therapy is now dispensed in three- to six-month doses in order to prevent people living with HIV from running out of medicines and to reduce their need to access the health system during the COVID-19 pandemic. UNAIDS and UN Women are now working with the Ministries of Health in the region to follow the same practice.

Assessing the impact of COVID-19 on women living with and affected by HIV is a critical dimension of the analysis UN Women is undertaking. For example, in Ukraine UN Women is rolling out a qualitative study to explore the issues women living with and affected by HIV face in the context of COVID-19 in order to tailor the response.

Ensuring a diversity of women's voices are included in response efforts, UN Women is **establishing platforms for women living with HIV to participate in the decision-making around COVID-19 responses.** In Asia-Pacific, UN Women supports the International Community of Women Living with HIV- to develop a comprehensive strategy to address the faced by women and girls living with and affected by HIV in the region.

Stigma and discrimination against women living with and affected by HIV in the context of COVID-19 is undertaken under the framework of the Global Partnership for Action to Eliminate All Forms of HIV-Related Stigma and Discrimination, that UN Women co-leads with UNDP, UNAIDS, and the Global Network of People Living with HIV. Support to the International Community of Women Living with HIV-East Africa is assisting in adapting approaches to reduce stigma and discrimination against women living with HIV to the context of the COVID-19 outbreak in three countries of the region.

Leveraging our existing social media and advocacy networks and platforms, UN Women-led inter-agency campaigns are celebrating to the work of women on the frontlines of preparedness and response. For World Health Day on April 7th, **UN Women, UNFPA, and WHO** launched a social media campaign to celebrate and honor the work of nurses and midwives fighting COVID-19, and advocate for nurses and midwives' access to critical supplies. In **Afghanistan**, UN Women launched the COVID-19 Prevention campaign called *Salam for Safety*, placing women as central campaign figures to combat the spread of the disease. In **China**, UN Women led a UN system International Women's Day campaign celebrating women first responders and raising awareness on the gendered impacts of the outbreak. The campaign hashtag #AMessageToHer reached **28 million people**, and #GenerationEquality reached 32 million people.

Data and coordination mechanisms include gender perspectives

UN Women is making available technical tools and resources, such as gender analysis/research in emergency contexts; rapid gender assessments tools/check lists; integrating a gender perspective into response to emerging diseases; and integrating gender equality into humanitarian action. Un Women has issued tailored Policy Briefs on the gender dimensions of the COVID19 pandemic. Data is also key, and UN Women is supporting partners to collect and use sex-disaggregated data.

UN Women is also providing direct technical support to governments and UN partners. In Lebanon, UN Women works with WHO to support the protection and gender response and support the government's national response. Gender experts are deployed to support the **Tunisian** government's response to COVID-19. In **Timor-Leste,** UN Women is providing technical assistance to line ministries to ensure the state of emergency declared incorporates gender and protection considerations. In **Viet Nam**, UN Women and UNICEF are supporting the Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs to develop codes of conduct and safeguarding measures for women and children in quarantine centers set up as a result of the COVID-19 outbreak. In **Paraguay**, the advisory services to the Ministry of Women are provided jointly between UNDP, UNICEF, UNFPA and UN Women. UN Women **Jordan** has collaborated with the Jordanian National Commission for Women to develop a guidance document on integrating gender into COVID-19 preparedness, planning and response. The document provides concrete recommendations and has been disseminated in English and Arabic to a range of stakeholders including governmental counterparts, UN agencies, and working groups in Jordan.

UN Women participates in UN humanitarian structures and UN agencies' COVID-19 preparedness and response plans to ensure that gender perspectives are integrated in programming.

A few examples from the country level illustrate this work: The Gender Theme Group in **Lebanon** producing common messages and a gender and COVID programming 'cheat sheet' for UN, donors and implementing partners. In **Nepal**, key advocacy messages developed by UN Women have been endorsed by the Humanitarian Country Team. Other interagency initiatives are highlighted in other sections of this report. UN Women **Jordan** is providing technical expertise on gender to WHO and OCHA on contingency planning and has recruited a Gender and Public Health in Emergencies Expert. Gender theme groups of **Argentina, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic** and **Paraguay** are developing joint action plans to ensure a gender responsive COVID 19 response.

UN Women is also producing **gender data** and making it widely available through a dedicated COVID-19 section in the Women Count Data Hub. The emerging picture presents sex and age disaggregated data updated bi-weekly, by WHO. It also offers a data-driven policy response through a 10-point checklist for decision-makers and contains a repository of resources and an overview of UN Women's primary data collection efforts. In **North Macedonia** multisectoral gender analyses of the impacts of the crisis on women and girls using data disaggregated by sex, age, disability and other relevant vulnerability factors are beginning to provide an evidence base for policymakers, decision-makers and COVID-19 responders and the Ministry of Defense, as a front-line responder, is analyzing how women in the Ministry and Army are being affected by COVID-19.