

Key Messages
Women and COVID-19 report
9 April 2020

- A pandemic amplifies and heightens all existing inequalities. With COVID-19 this is even more so. Across every sphere, from health to the economy, security to social protection, the impacts of COVID-19 are exacerbated for women and girls simply by virtue of their sex.
- These impacts risk reversing limited gains made on women's rights in the past decades.
- At the same time, women are critical to our resilience and recovery. Placing women's economic recovery at the centre of our short-term responses and longer-term recovery and rebuilding will make these efforts more effective, and contribute to building the inclusive, equal, and more resilient societies we need coming out of this crisis.
- The policy brief today highlights the social and economic impacts of the pandemic on women across four areas – economic, health, unpaid care, and gender-based violence.
- All of these impacts are further amplified in contexts of fragility, conflict, and emergencies where social cohesion is already undermined and institutional capacity and services are limited.

Compounded **economic** impacts are felt especially by women and girls who are generally earning less, saving less, and holding insecure jobs or living close to poverty.

- Women are the majority of those employed in sectors the worst hit by business closures, including the service sector and tourism. The situation is worse in developing economies where the vast majority of women's employment – 70 per cent – is in the informal economy with few protections against dismissal or for paid sick leave and limited access to social protection.
- It is expected that this global recession will look significantly different than past recessions because of the gendered patterns of unemployment and poverty.
- It is likely that the crisis will roll back fragile gains made on women's participation in the formal labor market – and with it knock-on impacts on personal and family income and gender equality.
- The **Policy Brief recommends** actions including prioritizing putting money in the hands of women through cash transfer programs, expanding social protections including to informal workers, and alleviating the tax burden on women-owned businesses.

The **health** of women is adversely impacted through the reallocation of resources and priorities, including sexual and reproductive health services.

- Women may be at greater risk of exposure as they constitute 70% of the global health workforce on the frontlines of response.
- Women often have less access to health facilities and care as well as insurance coverage.
- We have seen from past pandemics that as resources are shifted across sectors to respond to the crisis, the impacts on women's health, and sexual and reproductive health in particular, is measurable, with maternal mortality levels increasing and access to contraception stymied.
- The **Policy Brief** calls for specific attention to be paid to the needs and protection of female health workers, the continuation of standard health services including for pre and ante natal care and family planning, and for messaging on public health to be transmitted in a way that is accessible to women.

The COVID-19 global crisis has made starkly visible the fact that the world's formal economies and the maintenance of our daily lives are built on the invisible and **unpaid labor** of women and girls.

- With children out of school, intensified care needs of older persons and ill family members, and overwhelmed health services, demands for care work in a COVID-19 world have intensified exponentially.
- Prior to the crisis, women already averaged three times more time spent on work in the home than men. This figure increases exponentially in contexts with limited infrastructure, where hours are spent on fetching water, and firewood or meeting basic survival needs of the family. Unpaid care labor has a direct nexus with wage inequality, poverty, health stressors, and lower education outcomes.
- The **Policy Brief** recommends the expansion of social protections, expansion of child care programmes, and the design of economic recovery packages which finally make visible and place a value on unpaid care in the formal economy.

As the COVID-19 pandemic deepens economic and social stress coupled with restricted movement and social isolation measures, **gender-based violence** is increasing exponentially.

- One in three women will experience violence in their lifetime. One in five has experienced violence in the last year. These women are now being forced to 'lockdown' at home with their abusers at the same time that services to support survivors are being disrupted or made inaccessible.
- Rates of violence against women are spiking globally – cities and countries are registering increases of reporting, from 20% in some contexts to a doubling of reports in others.
- For many women and girls, the threat looms largest where they should be safest: in their own homes. That was the basis for the Secretary-General's appeal earlier this week, building on my call for a global ceasefire to end all violence everywhere, including violence in the home. **We have seen an incredible response to this call – with 124 countries responding in 24 hours to echo the call and commit to a response.**
- The **Policy Brief recommends** for all countries to make prevention and response part of their national COVID-19 response plans, ensure domestic violence shelters are designated essential services, move help and reporting and response online where possible, and increase funding to civil society organizations providing services in communities.
