



# COVID-19

## Gender-Responsive Local Economic Recovery Handbook

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**W**omen's economic empowerment is a catalyst for gender equality and inclusive and sustainable development. But adverse gender and social norms impede the realization of this goal by 2030. Women lack access to leadership positions, political participation and decision-making, gender gaps abound in education, unpaid household, and care work; the overrepresentation of women in informal economic and work environments; lack of infrastructure and access to digital, financial and property assets and laws are discriminatory or insufficient in protecting women's rights.

Although women are at the frontline of the response to the COVID-19 crisis, they are grossly under-represented in government's response mechanisms. For example, the new dataset on women's representation in COVID-19 taskforces states that out of a total 225 task forces across 137 countries, women make up only 24% of task force members.

This mirrors their low representation in public and leadership positions, in all spheres of governments. Women's full and inclusive participation in public institutions is critical to ensure their needs are adequately addressed in pivotal decisions that are being made.

The COVID-19 crisis has set back decades of work by further widening the gap in many fronts, from employment rates to unpaid work hours and the poverty gap between men and women. To ensure that progress is not reversed, we must devise and implement sustainable strategies at the local level to create a roadmap for recovery and resilience for women, communities, businesses, and nations.

This Handbook highlights the importance of localization of the SDGs especially regarding gender equality, helps assess the impact of COVID-19 on women's economic security and recovery, and offers tools to develop feasible solutions at the local level for economic recovery and gender equality.



# Acknowledgements

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# Foreword



As the COVID-19 pandemic threatens to reverse decades of progress on women’s economic empowerment, it has become more urgent than ever to accelerate gender equality through all recovery measures. This includes greater efforts to the crisis are to match the size of the challenge. While we see how women around the world have been at the forefront of recovery efforts, they still remain under-represented in decision-making at both local and national government levels.

Given these challenges, this handbook couldn’t come at a more crucial time. The handbook offers a concrete set of tools for practitioners to implement COVID-19 gender-responsive recovery programmes at the local level. It provides a deep dive into and guidance on all parts of building a gender-sensitive recovery plan, highlights the importance of localization of the gender equality-related Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and outlines how local stakeholders can develop practical planning towards economic recovery.

The handbook builds upon UNDP’s gender equality efforts, which have been central to its development work and seen remarkable progress in the past 20 years. As the largest UN organization in the field, with operations in 170 countries, UNDP plays a key role at the global and national levels to advance women’s rights and gender equality – offering effective, value-for-money development support to countries and partners. The strong presence at the community level makes UNDP a critical partner in accelerating local economic recovery and transformation towards gender-equal societies.

We are happy to partner with UNCDF and UCLG in this important work and to create this valuable resource. We hope the handbook will be used widely to further advance gender equality and local economic recovery as we build forward better together from the COVID-19 crisis toward the SDGs.



**Raquel Lagunas**

Head of Gender

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This handbook is developed at an important time. Gender Responsive Local Economic Recovery is an agenda that needs urgent attention given the devastating impact the pandemic has on the lives of millions of women and girls around the world. A survey conducted in 2020 by UNCDF showed that SMEs have suffered significant reduction in business capacity and anticipated notable reduction in their annual revenue due to COVID-19. Not surprisingly, female-led SMEs reported relatively higher rates of lay-offs and less resources to sustain their business in the short- to mid-term compared to male-led businesses. Local governments are equally experiencing the negative impact of COVID with decrease in financial flows from the centre and shrinking opportunities to raise own revenue with prolong closures and economic activity.

UNCDF's work shows that local financing is critical to address vulnerabilities and most pressing priorities for women and girls. Building local support systems and financing mechanism in partnership with governments and local financial institutions such as Central Banks and Sovereign Funds to protect women SMEs affected by COVID-19 is critical. Local planning and budgeting processes play a key role for effectively implement a COVID-19 response and recovery programme. It will be crucial, therefore, to strengthen and put in place an effective gender responsive planning and budgeting system for swift availability and deployment of financial resources where needed most for a systemic and timely response on COVID-19. Inequalities between men and women specially in care economy have worsened with disruptions in access to schooling, day care facilities for children. Therefore, there is an urgent need to leverage financing to promote essential services for care for elderly, which together with child-care is increasingly becoming a major impediment for women's economic engagement in countries around the world.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'David Jackson', written in a cursive style.

**David Jackson**

Director, Local Development Finance  
UNCDF



The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted critical fault-lines in the way we have structured our societies. It has shown us that those who constitute the backbone of our communities, those who care for us, are often the ones not being protected and cared for. Moreover, it has become clear that many of these frontline and invisibilized roles are taken up by women.

Ensuring women are at the center of public and political life is critical. This will require creating enabling environments for participation, closing the digital gap, and ensuring equal access to education. However, more than an increase in numbers, we need new models of governance that are driven by communities that protect the commons and hold local service provision as an important building block of wellbeing.

In the COVID-19 aftermath, a gender-responsive approach will be fundamental to build the resilience of women and people of all genders, restoring and strengthening their economic power and job opportunities. Local and regional governments have a key role to play in addressing women's exclusion in the workforce. This spans from ensuring equal pay for decent work, to the provision of basic services, to addressing the unequal distribution of reproductive and care work. It further calls for men and boys to embrace equality in all parts of life. In short, this is what we mean by "feminizing politics": placing care at the center and building communities that care and are cared for.

This Handbook is an important reference tool, as it highlights critical pathways to women's economic empowerment and recovery based on territorial analysis and inclusive economic assessments. Equality-driven cities and territories together can challenge the exclusionary structures and commit to ensuring women, transgender and non-binary persons can participate fully and thrive in everyday political and economic life.

Our century-old expertise in decentralized cooperation should serve as an amplifier of good experiences and lessons learnt. We welcome the partnership with UNDP and we, as UCLG, commit to organizing learning opportunities, and to support inclusive economic recovery and local leadership development.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'ES' with a flourish.

**Emilia Saiz**  
Secretary-General  
United Cities and Local Governments

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