

Report on the UN Women Global Response to COVID-19



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POLICY, PROGRAMME & INTERGOVERNMENTAL DIVISION
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

I.	Introduction	4
II.	Ending violence against women	6
III.	Economic resilience	11
IV.	Leadership, Women and Girls' Participation	13
V.	Gender mainstreaming in national responses and data collection	16
VI.	Response to COVID- 19 in humanitarian settings	18
VII.	Conclusion	21

I. Introduction

COVID-19, caused by the new coronavirus SARS-CoV2 first came to the attention of the [World Health Organization \(WHO\)](#) on 31 December 2019, following a report of a cluster of cases of ‘viral pneumonia’ in Wuhan, People’s Republic of China. On 30 January 2020, WHO declared COVID-19 a “global health emergency” and on 11 March 2020, WHO declared COVID-19 a “global pandemic.” This report captures how the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women) has mobilized action to bring attention to and address the gender dimensions of the pandemic from the global to the country level, leveraging its triple mandate of normative support, United Nations coordination, and operational activities.

UN Women responded immediately, in concert with United Nations partners, to ensure that the gender dimensions of the pandemic were brought to the attention of the global community and informed the United Nations response at the highest levels. On 20 March 2020, UN Women Executive Director Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka issued a [call to action](#) to governments and other stakeholders on the need for a global response to the COVID-19 pandemic that takes gender perspectives into account, including through sex-disaggregated data and social protection for women. Shortly after, Deputy Executive Director Åsa Regnér issued a [ten-point checklist](#) for governments for a gender-responsive COVID-19 response. On 6 April, a second thought leadership article by the Executive Director described the growth of the ‘[Shadow Pandemic](#)’ of violence against women and girls (VAWG), a recognition that sparked global use of this term to characterize the central impact on women and girls, closely followed by the policy briefs and data infographics that provided both the evidence and the recommended responses.

The Secretary-General drew attention to the gender dimensions of the pandemic from the outset. On 9 April 2020, the Secretary-General issued his [Policy Brief: The Impact of COVID-19 on Women](#), with strong support from UN Women, highlighting the pandemic’s role in “deepening existing inequalities, exposing vulnerabilities in social, economic and political systems,” which in

turn were amplifying its impacts. In addition, the Secretary-General linked the issue of rising levels of VAWG to his repeated calls for a global ceasefire, stating that *“Peace is not just the absence of war. Many women under lockdown for #COVID19 face violence where they should be safest: in their own homes. Today I appeal for peace in homes around the world. I urge all governments to put women’s safety first as they respond to the pandemic.”*¹

Through its membership in the United Nations Sustainable Development Group, UN Women contributed to ensure a strong focus on gender equality in the [UN framework for the immediate socio-economic response to COVID-19](#), which built on the report [Shared Responsibility, Global Solidarity: Responding to the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19](#). UN Women integrated gender equality in the framework’s five streams of work through the inclusion of gender-based violence (GBV), support to women’s employment and women-owned enterprises, unpaid care, gender-responsive fiscal packages, health, inclusion of women’s groups and voices, and sex-disaggregated data. As these were developed at the country level, UN Women’s contribution to the United Nations Country Team (UNCT) COVID-19 response is included in 85 out of 108 of the UNCT Socio-Economic Response Plans (SERPs).

The framework is the basis for the [United Nations Response and Recovery Fund for COVID-19](#), a United Nations inter-agency fund administered through the Multi-Partner Trust Fund (MPTF) Office. As an ex officio member of the Fund’s Steering Committee, UN Women successfully advocated for the second round of calls for proposals to establish a 30 percent funding target for proposals to focus on the gender dimensions of the response, based on the [Gender Equality Marker](#).

UN Women also serves on the WHO-led United Nations Crisis Management Team and prepared a gender analysis of the WHO Preparedness and Response Plan, which resulted in a more gender-responsive update of the plan in April 2020 (see Chapter V).

UN Women and its partners issued [a series of five policy briefs](#) on key areas affected by the COVID-19 pandemic:

¹ <https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/04/1061052>

economic fallout, the care economy, VAWG, women's leadership, and women's role in post-conflict cease-fires and peace processes. The 60-member Inter-Agency Network on Women and Gender Equality, chaired by the UN Women Executive Director, published the [IANGWE Compendium on Integrating Gender Considerations in the Response to COVID-19: Key Messages and Actions from UN Entities](#), which captures the key messages and efforts of United Nations system entities as they address the varied gender dimensions of the pandemic.

Further thought leadership articles by the Executive Director to audiences such as the Group of 7 (G7) ([Women working on the front line](#)), G20 ([Addressing the economic fallout of COVID-19: Pathways and policy options for a gender-responsive recovery](#)), and Commonwealth Heads of Government ([Build Back Better: Women at the Centre of Decision-Making](#)) drew attention to the global evidence-based analysis and policy recommendations of UN Women.

UN Women led interagency collaboration² to address critical data gaps through the [Gender Monitor](#), a compilation of indicators that inform gender-responsive policy action on COVID-19. UN Women and WHO joined forces to provide the latest available data on COVID-19 cases by sex and age on the [Data Platform](#). In September 2020, UN Women and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) launched the [COVID-19 Global Gender Response Tracker](#), which monitors policy measures enacted by governments worldwide to tackle the COVID-19 crisis, and highlights responses that have incorporated a gender lens.

Global media disseminated information and messages by UN Women about the gender dimensions of the crisis and the response needed among key audiences. From March 2020 onwards, over 5,000 earned media articles mentioned UN Women and gender-related COVID-19 information, including in top-tier international media.³ From March to December 2020, a total of 2,000 posts

related to COVID-19 have been shared on UN Women corporate social media accounts garnering more than 138 million impressions and more than 3.7 million interactions. Global goodwill ambassadors and influencers broadened UN Women outreach efforts, including Nicole Kidman, Marta Vieira da Silva, Danai Gurira and Emma Watson, as well as regional and national goodwill ambassadors. The Unstereotype Alliance public service announcement (PSA) on the 'Shadow Pandemic' featuring actress Kate Winslet was shared by the Secretary-General and boosted global awareness with 22,350,085 unique users reached through the hashtag #Shadow-Pandemic, attaining more than five million views on Facebook alone.⁴

UN Women tapped into new partnerships with Google and Facebook. UN Women advertisements on VAWG during the pandemic and other COVID-19-related content, viewed over five million times and driving over 600,000 visits to UN Women websites, were rolled out from July to December 2020 on Google Search globally, valued at US\$1.5 million. Similarly, Facebook provided advertising space to promote social media messages from UN Women to the rise of VAWG during COVID-19, receiving more than 305 million impressions and nearly 18 million interactions.

UN Women also amplified COVID-19 related social media messages and campaigns of the United Nations system, including the WHO [#SafeHands Challenge](#) campaign, the United Nations [Verified](#) campaign, the [Women Rise for All](#) campaign, and the Secretary-General's appeal for peace in homes around the world.

In March 2020, UN Women developed a global programme proposal to provide a framework for its response from the global to local levels: [Gender-Responsive Prevention and Management of the COVID-19 Pandemic: from Emergency Response, Recovery and Resilience](#), the structure of which informs this report. UN Women reallocated its resources at the global,

2 International Labour Organization (ILO), International Telecommunications Union (ITU), United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), UN Women, World Food Programme (WFP), World Health Organization (WHO) and many others.

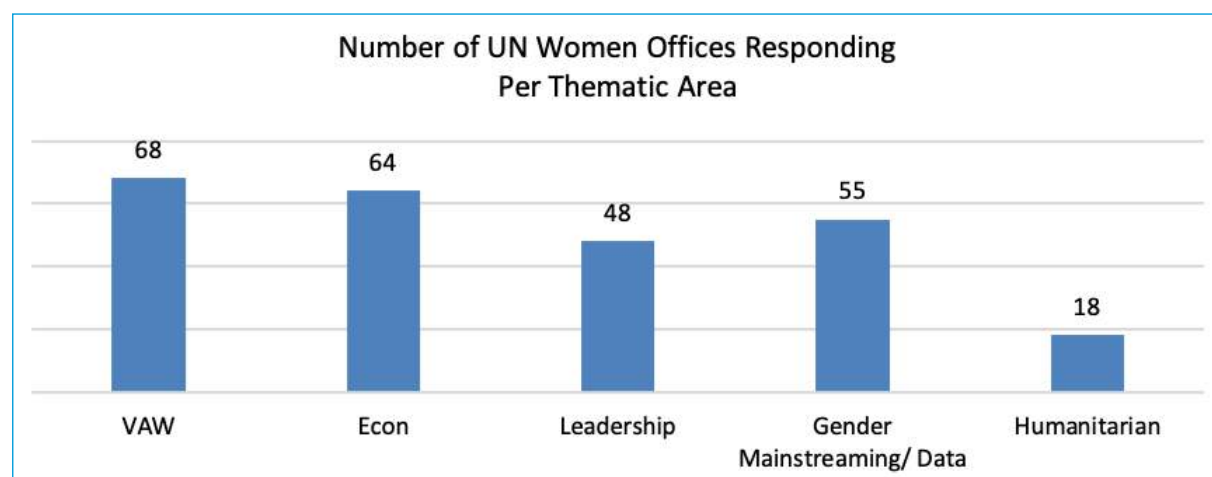
3 BBC, CNN, Associated Press, Reuters, The New York Times, The Wall Street Journal, The Guardian, The Economist, Forbes, ABC News (United States), ABC Australia, China Daily, Times of India, Dawn, El País.

4 <https://www.unstereotypealliance.org/en/news-and-events/press-releases/may-27-2020> (accessed on 27 January 2021).

regional and country levels to enable programme continuity while addressing the effects of COVID-19. This included [regular resources](#), which allowed the flexibility to allocate funds when and where they were most needed. As the COVID-19 pandemic emerged and grew in magnitude, these unrestricted resources enabled a faster and more comprehensive response.

This enabled UN Women to support governments, the United Nations system and civil society organizations (CSOs) through convening, policy advocacy, service delivery and technical assistance in 88 countries and through each of its six regional offices. Sixty-eight UN Women offices provided support to prevent and

respond to VAWG – the largest area of its response; followed closely by support to economic resilience and social protection in 64 offices. Fifty-five offices supported evidence, data and gender mainstreaming in national COVID-19 response mechanisms, and 48 offices convened women leaders in government and civil society to ensure that their voices informed national policy. UN Women supported a range of actions to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 in humanitarian settings across 18 countries.



II. Ending violence against women

Global Context and Response

UN Women identified the [Shadow Pandemic of Violence against Women and Girls](#) that exists in all countries, growing amid the COVID-19 pandemic. Prior to the pandemic, 243 million women and girls had experienced physical and/or sexual violence by an intimate partner in the 12 months prior to April 2020.⁵ Since the outbreak of COVID-19, emerging data and reports from

those on the front lines have shown that all types of VAWG, particularly domestic violence, have intensified. It is estimated that for every three months of lockdown an additional 15 million cases of GBV are expected.⁶

The policy brief, [COVID-19 and Ending Violence against Women and Girls](#), highlighted the emerging evidence of the impact of COVID-19 on VAWG and was followed up by a series of [policy briefs](#) that provided technical guidance on ending violence against women (EVAW)

⁵ https://data.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/documents/COVID19/Infographic_VAW-COVID19.pdf (accessed on 27 January 2021)

⁶ UNFPA, 27 April 2020, https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/resource-pdf/COVID-19_impact_brief_for_UNFPA_24_April_2020_1.pdf (accessed on 27 January 2021).

issues related to COVID-19.⁷ UN Women also highlighted the impact of COVID-19 in the reports of the Secretary-General on: (1) intensification of efforts to eliminate all forms of violence against women;⁸ (2) trafficking in women and girls;⁹ and (3) intensifying global efforts for the elimination of female genital mutilation.¹⁰

The Secretary-General's call on 5 April 2020 for measures to address the "horrifying global surge in domestic violence" received the endorsement of 146 Member States. UN Women engaged nine United Nations agencies, funds and programmes to develop a [joint statement](#) in June 2020, also in support of the Secretary-General's call for a "ceasefire" of VAWG. The statement highlighted six calls to action: support to women's organizations; ensure that services remain open and responsive; prioritize police and justice responses; install preventative measures; collect data ethically; and improve services.

On behalf of the Secretary-General, UN Women led the development of a **political engagement strategy** beginning in August 2020, which called for specific commitments from government leaders on how Member States are funding, preventing, responding and collecting data on ending VAWG during the pandemic. The first UN Women virtual General Assembly high-level side event on Gender-based Violence in a COVID-19 Context, Activating Collective Responses, Innovative Partnerships and Proven Policies was held on 29 September 2020.

The UNDP/UN Women COVID-19 [Global Gender Response Tracker](#) analysed over 2,500 measures across 206 countries and territories finding that the largest number of gender-sensitive measures to be stepping up was action to address VAWG. Seventy-one per cent

of all gender-sensitive measures (704 measures across 135 countries) focused on preventing and/or responding to VAWG. This is a heartening response to the [Secretary-General's call to action](#). Yet, only 48 out of 135 countries have treated measures on VAWG as essential services and an integral part of national and local COVID-19 responses.

Country and Regional Response

EVAW is the largest area of UN Women response to the COVID-19 pandemic with 68 countries and regional offices¹¹ having mobilized to respond to the increases in the prevalence of VAWG in the face of decreasing access to services, largely due to isolation measures. UN Women leveraged its existing programmes to provide a comprehensive and rapid response to the impact of the pandemic on VAWG at the country level and to ensure that prevention and response strategies to address VAWG are informed by evidence of the impact on the safety of women and girls and adapted to the context of quarantines and social distancing policies. UN Women took action in the following areas:

- Strengthening services and adaption to the COVID-19 context, while advocating that they be considered essential services for continued availability, access, funding and safety
- Data collection, analysis and use on VAWG and on needs and capacities of support services, to inform evidence-based responses
- Support for women's organizations as the centre of policy change, recovery and solutions, ensuring that no one is left behind

7 Safe transport; Domestic violence in workplace settings; Prevention of VAWG, Safe cities and safe public spaces and a follow-up brief on recommendation in action: Ensuring safe cities and safe public spaces with women and girls; Online and ICT-facilitated violence against women; Essential services for survivors; Data collection and EVAW.

8 A/75/274

9 A/75/289

10 A/75/279

11 Countries: Afghanistan, Albania, Argentina, Bangladesh, Benin, Bolivia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Botswana, Brazil, Burundi, Chad, Chile, China, Colombia, Côte d'Ivoire, Egypt, El Salvador, Ethiopia, Guatemala, Guinea, Honduras, India, Indonesia, Iraq, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, Lebanon, Malawi, Malaysia, Mali, Mexico, Moldova, Morocco, Mozambique, Namibia, Niger, Nigeria, Papua New Guinea, Pakistan, Paraguay, Philippines, Republic of Korea, Rwanda, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Serbia, Singapore, Somalia, South Africa, South Sudan, Sudan, Tajikistan, Thailand, Togo, Turkey, Uganda, Ukraine, United Republic of Tanzania, Uruguay, Viet Nam. Regional Offices for Arab States, Asia and the Pacific, Europe and Central Asia, and sub-regional offices for the Caribbean and the Pacific. The State of Palestine. Kosovo (References to Kosovo shall be understood to be in the context of Security Council resolution 1244 (1999)).

- Media campaigns, awareness-raising and stakeholder engagement.

Strengthening services during the COVID-19 pandemic.

UN Women works with governments, United Nations partners and local organizations, including women's organizations, to ensure that VAW-related services continue during the pandemic. Country offices have responded based on their contexts, with the majority supporting remote service delivery mechanisms such as shelters and safe accommodation and helplines, where access to information on legal services, online counselling and referral to other service providers is accessible. Through the European Union/UN [Spotlight Initiative](#), UNCTs responded by repurposing \$21 million immediately, developing COVID-19 plans in all country programmes, and ensuring that prevention and response would continue, including through supporting online services, innovative access and the use of technology.

UN Women offices in all parts of the world have worked with a range of partners to set up remote and online services, including with technology partners. Together with the longstanding partners of UN Women, the U.S. National Network to End Domestic Violence and the Global Network of Women's Shelters, 62 UN Women country offices contributed to a helpline repository on Facebook. UN Women worked with Twitter to ensure that domestic violence survivors across the Asia and Pacific region¹² could obtain life-saving information when they searched for key words such as "abuse" and "domestic violence". Through WhatsApp, the Vodafone Idea Foundation, NASSCOM Foundation, Sayfty Trust and UN Women launched the MyAmbar app to provide remote services in **India**. In the **Latin America and Caribbean** region and in **Argentina** and **Chile**, UN

ment (PPE), hygiene kits, and cleaning supplies to shelters, vulnerable populations, and to police and justice institutions in **Ethiopia, Guatemala, Jordan, Malawi, Mozambique, Papua New Guinea, Rwanda, Senegal, Serbia, South Sudan, United Republic of Tanzania, Zimbabwe** and in the **Caribbean region** as well as in the **State of Palestine**, and in **Kosovo**.¹³

In countries that were facing a crisis prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, including **Bangladesh, Iraq** and **Somalia**, UN Women worked with partners to provide PPE for women in camps, cash transfers and hygiene kits. Pacific Island states such as **Fiji, Kiribati, Samoa** and **Vanuatu** adapted existing emergency responses developed for natural disasters to the COVID-19 response. UN Women **Jordan** distributed 500 recovery bags to GBV survivors in women's shelters and thousands of items of PPE to first responders and to the 13 UN Women Oasis centres.

UN Women worked closely with law enforcement to monitor cases, support referrals and to ensure that investigations would continue. In **Jordan, Mexico, Pakistan, Senegal, Uganda, Ukraine** and in the **Caribbean region**, UN Women supported training for law enforcement officials in responding remotely. In **Colombia**, UN Women worked with the Attorney-General to develop a tool to monitor cases of extreme VAW. In **Guatemala**, in cooperation with the Public Ministry, UN Women donated protective suits to the Office of the Prosecutor of the Section Against the Crime of Femicide for the management of crime scenes. In **Nigeria**, community surveillance groups were established to monitor incidences of VAWG and refer cases to law enforcement. The **Uganda** Police Force, with support from UN Women and funding by the Government of Sweden, established a dedicated toll-free hotline for reporting and respond-

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