



IANWGE COMPENDIUM ON INTEGRATING GENDER CONSIDERATIONS IN THE RESPONSE TO COVID-19: KEY MESSAGES AND ACTIONS FROM UN ENTITIES



IANWGE

United Nations Inter-Agency Network on
Women and Gender Equality





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FOREWORD

Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka

Executive Director of UN Women;

Chair, United Nations Inter-Agency Network on Women and Gender Equality



With the COVID-19 pandemic, the world faces what the United Nations Secretary-General has identified as the most challenging global crisis since the Second World War. To mitigate its effects, the entire UN system has rapidly pivoted its attention and resources to targeted and system-wide measures addressing the multiple facets of the crisis, one of the most prominent of which is its impact on women and girls. A key facet of recovery plans must be the intentional inclusion of resilient women and girls to build back better.

The effects of the pandemic on women and girls can be seen across the many dimensions of their lives. Maternal mortality, gender-based violence and the burdens of unpaid care work and unemployment on women are significantly increasing due to the crisis. While all students are impacted by school closures, women and girls who are pulled out of educational institutions are less likely to return than men and boys, and this risks reversing hard-earned educational and employment gains for women and girls. At the

same time, we are seeing just how reliant the world is on the increased contributions of women as workers and caretakers in almost all dimensions of public, private and economic life, often without recognition or compensation. It is critical that the global response to and recovery from the COVID-19 crisis actively reverses these harmful trends and includes women in the shaping of those plans.

The UN system must work together to ensure that the varied impacts of COVID-19 on the lives of all women and girls are comprehensively addressed, and that women's voices are fully represented in that work. In this context, as Chair of the United Nations Inter-Agency Network on Women and Gender Equality (IANWGE), one of the largest networks of gender focal points in the UN system, I am pleased to present this compendium which takes an 'all of UN system approach' to the COVID-19 crisis. The compendium brings together the collective gender expertise of 32 entities and contains coordinated, action-oriented key messages on incorporating gender considerations at all stages of the COVID-19 response, followed by detailed entity-specific messages and actions.

The compendium is a response to [*A UN framework for the immediate socio-economic response to COVID-19*](#), which details the United Nations' planned urgent socio-economic support to countries in the face of COVID-19 through five streams of work. It serves as an essential resource to support all actors, including governments, civil society partners and UN entities, in their systematic integration of gender considerations into the COVID-19 crisis response, with longer-term impact. This means ensuring that all women have access to adequate health services; the provision of social protection and basic services to help women cope with adversity, including gender-based violence; prioritizing the protection of women's economic empowerment including specific



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vulnerabilities in the labour market; guiding the necessary surge in fiscal and financial stimulus measures to make macroeconomic policies work for women; and promoting women-led resilience and response systems.

This compendium is a call to action for governments and all relevant stakeholders to put women and girls at the centre of COVID-19 response and recovery. I encourage you to disseminate the compendium widely and to act on its coordinated messaging as we address this unprecedented global challenge together, in solidarity. I have faith that as a collective we have the capacity to meet this crisis head-on and to create better, more equal societies. Women and girls, and indeed humanity, deserve nothing less.

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a series of loops and a long horizontal stroke.

Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka

Executive Director of UN Women; Chair, United Nations Inter-Agency Network on Women and Gender Equality



INTRODUCTION

As COVID-19 continues its global sweep it leaves no part of humanity unaffected. Beyond the health emergency, countries around the world find themselves dealing with its unprecedented socio-economic consequences, including its disproportionate impact on women and girls and on the exacerbated exclusion and inequalities they face as a result of the pandemic. Further, women and girls who experience additional and intersecting forms of discrimination and marginalization, such as women and girls with disabilities, older women, indigenous women, LGBTI women, rural women and women in conflict-affected contexts, may suffer heightened challenges.

In what would otherwise have been a critical year for gender equality as the global community prepared to mark the twenty-fifth anniversary of the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic risks rolling back many of the valuable and hard-won gains that had been made in the past decades.

Addressing the outbreak's unequal and long-term impact on women and girls, and supporting their central and essential role in responding to COVID-19, requires a coordinated response that incorporates the gender dimensions of the outbreak. It is imperative that an effective COVID-19 response include women and girls in all of their diversity, both as leaders and participants, in the formulation of policies and programmes for emergency preparedness, response and recovery.

All public institutions, including the United Nations, must respond to the crisis in all its dimensions. In recognition of both the contributions of women and girls in the crisis as well as the particularly devastating social and economic consequences they face, the Secretary-General has urged governments to place women and girls at the centre of their COVID-19 recovery efforts.¹

In the report,² [*Shared responsibility, global solidarity: Responding to the socio-economic impacts of COVID-*](#)

[*19*](#), the Secretary-General emphasises the need for the United Nations to work in a coordinated and decisive manner to ensure that lives are saved, livelihoods are restored, and the global economy and the people we serve emerge stronger from this crisis.

To operationalize the response of the United Nations to the COVID-19 crisis, the subsequent report [*A UN framework for the immediate socio-economic response to COVID-19*](#)³ (UN Framework) details the United Nations' planned urgent socio-economic support to countries in the face of COVID-19. The UN Framework consists of an integrated support package across 5 pillars of work:

1. Health First: Protecting Health Services and Systems during the Crisis;
2. Protecting People: Social Protection and Basic Services;
3. Economic Response and Recovery: Protecting Jobs, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises, and Informal Sector Workers;
4. Macroeconomic Response and Multilateral Collaboration;
5. Social Cohesion and Community Resilience.

The United Nations Inter-Agency Network on Women and Gender Equality (IANWGE), chaired by the Executive Director of UN Women and comprised of gender specialists from 60 United Nations offices and departments, funds and programmes and specialized

¹ [Policy Brief: The Impact of COVID-19 on Women April 2020](#)

² [Shared Responsibility, Global Solidarity: Responding To The Socio-Economic Impacts Of Covid-19 March 2020](#)

³ [A UN framework for the immediate socio-economic response to COVID-19", April 2020](#)

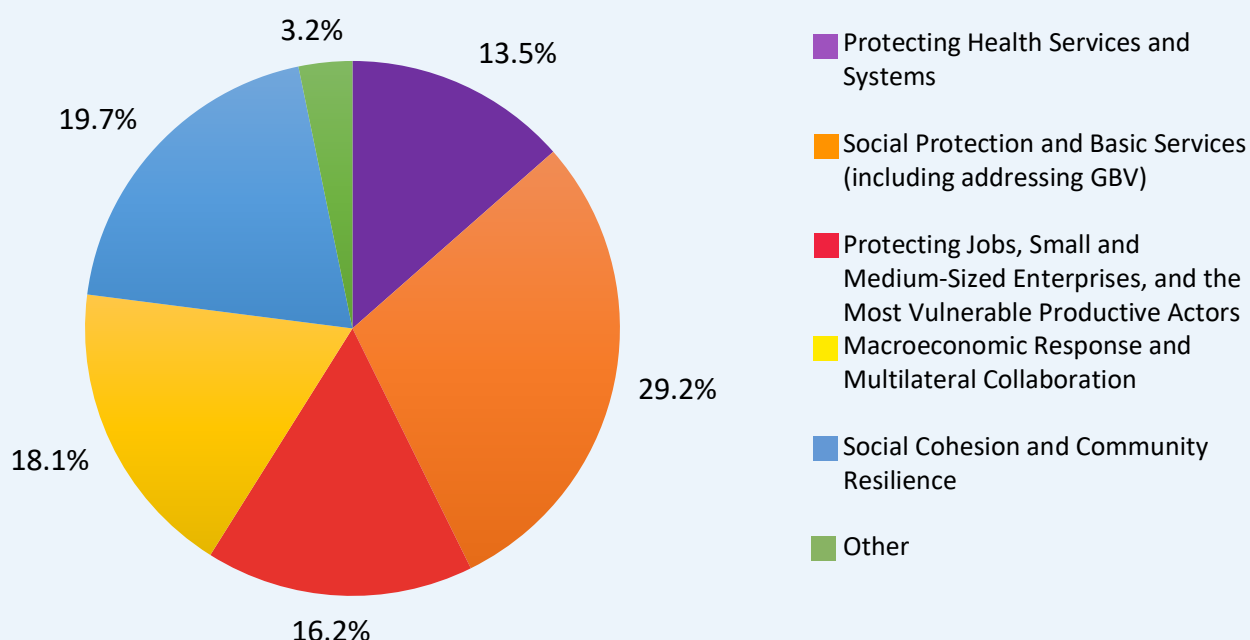
agencies, has responded to the call of the Secretary-General for coordinated action during this crisis. This resulting compendium captures the key messages and efforts of the entities of the UN system as they address the varied gender dimensions of the pandemic. It presents 32 individual action-oriented entity briefs supplemented by a coordinated set of common messages aligned with the five pillars of the socio-economic response of the UN Framework.

The compendium aims to support all actors, including the UN system, governments, and civil society partners, to systematically integrate gender considerations into the COVID-19 crisis response. Women's leadership and participation at all stages of the COVID-19 recovery and response is a critical cross-cutting issue which must be systematically addressed and integrated within each of the UN Framework's pillars.

Figure 1 below presents the distribution of the key messages as aligned to the five pillars of the UN Framework. Collectively the entities of the UN system placed strongest emphasis on the need for gender-responsive social protection and basic services, including those addressing gender-based violence, in the context of integrating gender considerations in the crisis response.

For a comprehensive list of resources from the UN system on Gender and COVID-19, please see this [list of gender-related COVID-19 resources by UN entity](https://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/how%20we%20work/unsystemcoordination/gender-related-covid-19-resources-by-un-entity-en.pdf?la=en&vs=2803).⁴

Figure 1: Distribution of key messages from the UN System on integrating gender considerations in the response to COVID-19, by pillar of the UN framework



⁴ List of gender-related COVID-19 resources by UN entity: [https://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/how%20we%20](https://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/how%20we%20work/unsystemcoordination/gender-related-covid-19-resources-by-un-entity-en.pdf?la=en&vs=2803)

[work/unsystemcoordination/gender-related-covid-19-resources-by-un-entity-en.pdf?la=en&vs=2803](https://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/how%20we%20work/unsystemcoordination/gender-related-covid-19-resources-by-un-entity-en.pdf?la=en&vs=2803)



IANWGE COORDINATED MESSAGING ON GENDER AND COVID-19

Women's leadership and participation for an inclusive and effective response to COVID-19

Women stand at the frontlines of the COVID-19 crisis, as health care workers, care-givers, and as some of the most exemplary and effective national leaders in combating the pandemic. The crisis has highlighted both the centrality of their contributions and their disproportionate burdens. Women's leadership and participation are essential to effective response and recovery efforts, be it in peaceful societies or in conflict settings, where women and girls are most at risk and where the provision of health services may be affected by the political dynamics of the conflict. Women leaders and women's organizations have already demonstrated their skilled ability to successfully lead in COVID-19 response and recovery. To uphold women's rights and fully leverage the potential of women's leadership in pandemic preparedness and response, women's ongoing roles in the response must be recognized. Women, especially women from marginalized groups, such as women with disabilities, minority, refugee, or displaced women and more broadly, women's organizations must be included in all decision-making. In addition, women must have access to sufficient and reliable information to make informed choices that support the recovery of their communities. As such, the importance of including women and their perspectives in all of their diversity in the formulation and implementation of policies and programmes at each stage and in all spheres are addressed within the five pillars that follow.



I. Health First: Protecting Health Services and Systems during the Crisis

Despite constituting the majority of frontline healthcare workers, women remain disproportionately under-represented in national and global health leadership. In past health emergencies, the lack of participation of women in such spaces has led to gaps in responses to the specific experiences, challenges and requirements of women and girls. **Ensuring the equal participation of women at the decision-making level in all stage of the response, recovery and rehabilitation remains critical.**

Women stand at the frontlines of the COVID-19 response. Making up 70 per cent of the health

workforce,⁵ and the majority of health service industry workers, as well as primary care givers for sick family members, women play a key role in ensuring the well-being and resilience of their communities. In addition to being more exposed to the virus, these women also face the risk of exhaustion and burn out. **Governments need to ensure that all care sector professionals are adequately protected against transmission, including by ensuring availability of personal protective equipment which include menstrual hygiene products such as sanitary pads and tampons, in addition to gloves, masks and gowns.**

Women are more likely to be in the household and charged with the provision of food, water and the management of family health. Keeping households

⁵ WHO (2019) Gender equity in the health workforce: Analysis of 104 countries



clean with various detergents and cleaning materials may expose women to chemical pollution harmful to their health. **It is therefore important that information on the proper use of these cleaning materials be shared at household levels, especially with women.**

Women and girls face particular barriers to accessing hygiene and sanitary materials due to increased household competition for scarce resources and/or decreased household income. **Securing access to preventive measures, including water, soap and sanitizers, without discrimination, and addressing the barriers and risks women and girls face in accessing hygiene and sanitary materials and facilities, is key.**

Threats to and interruption of routine, core health services pose a danger to women and girls. Evidence from past epidemics, including Ebola and Zika, indicate that efforts to contain outbreaks often interrupt and divert resources from essential health services. **The continuity of these core services, including for sexual and reproductive health such as family planning, access to contraceptives, pre- and post-natal health, and care of women and girls with HIV, must be ensured.**

Older women and men are at a higher health risk from COVID-19. Women represent the majority of older persons world-wide, especially those over the age of 80. They tend to have lower incomes and pensions, if any, and fewer possibilities to access care and other services. **Governments need to prioritize the care needs of older persons living alone or in residential care, particularly those without access to services**

reach all women and girls, including those in refugee and IDP camps, remote and rural communities.

The collection and reporting of sex disaggregated data and gender analysis, at a minimum, on infection cases and deaths is necessary to better understand the differentiated impact of COVID-19 on women and men.



II. Protecting people: Social Protection and Basic Services

Women do two and a half times as much unpaid care work as men, so when health systems are overloaded, that burden lands largely with women. At present, the burden of unpaid care work on many women is increasing due to school closures, aged family members at risk and other consequences of the COVID-19 outbreak, further restricting women's work and economic opportunities. **The value of paid and unpaid care work in supporting the world economy must be recognized to ensure investments in and resilience of the care economy in current and future crises. In addition, the global response to the current outbreak presents an opportunity for the redistribution of unpaid care and domestic work. Universal social protection, which relieves the care burdens disproportionately borne by women and girls, constitutes an essential component of any policy designed to combat the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19 in the short as well as longer term.**

The COVID-19 outbreak has exacerbated the already high prevalence of gender-based violence (GBV),

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