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# SAFEGUARDING AND ADVANCING WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT IN THE WAKE OF COVID-19: AN OPPORTUNITY TO BUILD BACK BETTER

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# **SAFEGUARDING AND ADVANCING WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT IN THE WAKE OF COVID-19: AN OPPORTUNITY TO BUILD BACK BETTER**



The following paper reflects the vision of GWL Voices for Change and Inclusion on recommended action points required to mitigate the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic on women's economic empowerment. It is intended to serve as an advocacy document to position strategic messages by GWL members in multilateral fora and processes, including in the context of the 25th Anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and Generation Equality Forum.

COVID-19 has become an unprecedented and unpredictable global crisis. Whilst it is still too early to completely and fully understand the long-term effects, social and economic forecasts predict extremely concerning scenarios, with particularly devastating effects for women.





With plummeting economic activity, women are in a worse position to face this crisis. Not only as a direct consequence of the pre-existing precariousness and vulnerability of female employment, but also because, unlike any other modern recession, the downturn triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic has hard-hit highly feminized sectors, such as the manufacturing, hospitality or retail industries.

Emerging data also confirms a differentiated and more acute impact on women-led SMEs worldwide, partly as a result of their lower access to digital technologies and skills, financial services and assets and business networks, as well as their high levels of informality [1]

Across the world, women's employment is in fact overwhelmingly informal. With limited labour and social protection, it is not surprising that women informal workers have borne the brunt of the COVID-19 crisis. Domestic workers have been at particular risk. While the need for caregiving and cleaning services has increased, lockdowns and quarantine measures have made it difficult to maintain pre-pandemic working arrangements, resulting in a loss of income and employment among this largely female workforce. [2]

[1] UN Women, 2020, *Guidance for action: Supporting SMEs to ensure the economic COVID-19 recovery is gender responsive and inclusive*.

[2] Solidarity Center, 2020. "Domestic workers left out in the cold".



Although job destruction has disproportionately affected low-paid and low-skilled jobs, women across all income groups have been largely affected, because of the burnout associated with juggling and balancing increased work and home commitments during the pandemic. In fact, globally, the rising demand for care in the context of the COVID-19 crisis as a result of school closures and confinement measures, has not only deepened and exacerbated the already disproportionate burden of women's unpaid care and domestic work but has also led to reductions in working time and permanent exit from the labor market. Available data overwhelmingly confirms that women, that already spent on average three times as much time as men on unpaid care and domestic work before the pandemic, are still doing the lion's share. [3]

As the crisis exacerbates labour market instabilities along with gender inequalities in access to economic resources and in the division of unpaid care and domestic work, many more women are expected to fall into destitution. The disproportionate impacts on women could therefore reverse decades of gains achieved in gender equality in the labor market, as well as exacerbate existing disparities and the perspectives of recovery.

[3] ILO, 2020, *Observatorio de la OIT: La COVID 19 y el mundo del trabajo. Quinta edición.*



**GWL Voices for Change and Inclusion call leaders, across the world and from all segments of society, to increase commitments to address these impacts and integrate gender equality as a central and fundamental element of all response and recovery efforts, as a catalyst for building back an inclusive, sustainable, resilient future for everyone.**

## RECOMMENDED ACTION POINTS



### Employment protection

- Provide targeted **support to feminized sectors and occupations**, including through the provision of **fiscal stimulus packages** to sectors where women are over-represented.
- **Support women-led enterprises and businesses**, including through cash grants, subsidized and state-backed loans, tax and social security payment deferrals and exemptions.
- Expand and strengthen **gender-responsive social protection systems**, with floors to cover all women in formal and informal employment, through a combination of contributory and non-contributory schemes.
- Promote legal and policy frameworks to **facilitate and incentivize the transition of workers and economic units from the informal to the formal economy**, including by introducing simplified tax and contributions assessment and payment regimes, in line with ILO Recommendation No. 204.



## The care protection

- Implement measures to **reduce and redistribute domestic and care responsibilities within households** and to **reconcile work and family life**, including in the context of remote work schemes.
- Prioritize **investments in the care economy and in the design of comprehensive care systems**, including through the provision of affordable quality childcare and long-term care services for the sick and elderly.



## Legal forms

- **Reform and eliminate laws that directly or indirectly discriminate against women** and enact legislation to promote women's economic empowerment.
- Ratify ILO Convention 189 and **ensure domestic workers are granted the same rights and protections** under the law as other occupations.



## Building assets

- Ensure **women's financial inclusion** as a key enabler for women's economic participation and respond to the unmet demand for credit, especially among women-owned micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises.



- Ensure increased access for women and girls to **Internet and mobile technology**, including through investments in education and digital literacy initiatives, in order to reduce the digital gender divide.
- Promote and facilitate access for women to **STEM studies and careers**.
- Provide women with training in **business strategies, digital skills and financial capabilities** to promote their resilience and competitiveness.



## Public and private sector practices

- Adopt measures to promote an increased participation of women-owned businesses in **public procurement processes**.
- Integrate **gender equality principles into business practices and culture**, such as equal pay for work of equal value, parental leaves, gender-responsive supply chain practices and policies to prevent and eliminate violence against women.
- Promote **gender lens investing** in women-led or -owned businesses; companies supporting gender equality in the workplace and companies developing products/ services that impact women's quality of living.



## Macroeconomic policies

- Ensure **trade policies are gender responsive** and remove trade barriers that limit women's access to international markets.
- Ensure **gender-responsive fiscal policies** to secure resources for gender equality and women's rights policies.



## Leadership for economic recovery

- Support and promote **women's active participation and leadership** at all levels in COVID-19 economic response and recovery plans.
- **Support and fund locally led women-centered solutions** to drive systemic change to build women's economic resilience at the community level.



## Changing social norms

- Develop national policies with adequate funding to address the increased prevalence of **gender-based violence** during the pandemic, including to eliminate violence and harassment in the workplace in line with the ILO Convention No.190.
- Implement measures to **transform gender-discriminatory norms** and practices that deny women their socioeconomic rights and restrict their economic opportunities and autonomy.





## Tracking gender data for better decision-making

- Invest and collect **sex disaggregated data** to ensure that the gender-differentiated impacts of the pandemic are recognized and effectively addressed in the crisis response and recovery plans.

# ABOUT GWL VOICES

**GWL Voices for Change and Inclusion** brought together women who, as part of their individual profiles and professional trajectories, have forged significant contributions from the unifying perspective of multilateral agendas for promoting humanitarian relief, advocating for human rights principles and normative policies, advancing sustainable development, and seeking to lend solution to some of the world's most complex conflicts and challenges.

## OUR OBJECTIVE



**Call attention to and create awareness of the need to achieve full gender equality and empowerment of women across all ambits of society and the critical importance of multilateralism as a vehicle in support of this core objective towards building more inclusive and equitable societies.**



**DISCOVER OUR ACTIONS**



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