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STUDY GUIDE

LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE BOARD

It is an honor to be serving as a part of the Executive Board of United Nations Women at KIIT e-MUN from 29th - 31st January, 2021. We hope to be a part of an enriching academic simulation and engage in a constructive discussion on 'Understanding the effective role of Women in Decision Making in striving to achieve an equal future in a COVID 19 World'.

The background guide shall only be an instrument of assistance to the delegates instead of being the sole basis for your research. The given list of topics is not exhaustive and it is not intended to be. The list is simply indicative of pressing issues and topics of concerns, which must be addressed and will give you a bird's eye view of the gist of the issue. The delegates are at full liberty to bring up any other relevant point for discussion. We understand that MUN conferences can be an overwhelming experience for first timers but it must be noted that our aspirations from the delegates is not how experienced or articulate they are. Rather, we want to see how he/she can respect disparities and differences of opinion, work around these, while extending their own foreign policy so that it includes more comprehensive solutions without compromising their own stand and initiate consensus building.

New ideas are by their very nature disruptive, but far less disruptive than a world set against the backdrop of gender stereotypes and regional instability amidst a pandemic due to which reform is essential in order to integrate gender perspectives in policy making and conflict resolution. Thus, we welcome fresh perspectives for intelligent management of human capital of this planet which shall finally shape the direction of this world.

We sincerely hope that the UN Women of this conference will help you gain experience to become better professionals and persons in future.

May the force be with you!

Regards,

Karishma Kharbanda
Chairperson

Sofie Haljan Schoors
Vice-Chairperson

Shrusti Nanda
Substantive Director

A FEW ASPECTS THAT DELEGATES SHOULD KEEP IN MIND WHILE PREPARING

Procedure

The purpose of putting in procedural rules in any committee is to ensure a more organized and efficient debate. The committee will follow the UNA-USA Rules of Procedure, a link for which has been provided in the last section of this Guide. Although the Executive Board shall be fairly strict with the Rules of Procedure, the discussion of agenda will be the main priority. So delegates are advised not to restrict their statements due to hesitation regarding procedure.

Role of the Executive Board

The Executive Board is appointed to facilitate debate. The committee shall decide the direction and flow of debate. The delegates are the ones who constitute the committee and hence must be uninhibited while presenting their opinions/stance on any issue. However, the Executive Board may put forward questions and/or ask for clarifications at all points of time to further debate and test participants.

Nature of Research/Sources

This Background Guide is meant solely for research purposes and must not be cited as evidence to substantiate statements made during the conference. Evidence or proof for substantiating statements made during formal debate is acceptable from the following sources

1. United Nations: Documents and findings by the United Nations or any related UN body is held as a credible proof to support a claim or argument.

2. Multilateral Organizations: Documents from international organizations like NATO, NAFTA, SAARC, BRICS, EU, ASEAN, OPEC, the International Criminal Court, etc may also be presented as credible sources of information.

3. Government Reports: These reports can be used in a similar way as the State Operated News Agencies reports and can, in all circumstances, be denied by another country. However, a nuance is that a report that is being denied by a certain country can still be accepted by the Executive Board as a credible piece of information.

4. News Sources: State operated News Agencies: These reports can be used in the support of or against the State that owns the News Agency. These reports, if credible or substantial enough, can be used in support of or against any country as such but in that situation, may be denied by any other country in the council. Some examples are - RIA Novosti (Russian Federation), Xinhua News Agency (People's Republic of China), etc

Note- Under no circumstances will sources like Wikipedia, or newspapers like the Guardian, Times of India etc. be accepted. However, notwithstanding the aforementioned criteria for acceptance of sources and evidence, delegates are still free to quote/cite from any source as they deem fit as a part of their statements.

UN WOMEN

UN Women is the global champion for gender equality, working to develop and uphold standards and create an environment in which every woman and girl can exercise her human rights and live up to her full potential. We are trusted partners for advocates and decision-makers from all walks of life, and a leader in the effort to achieve gender equality.

UN Women is the [United Nations](#) entity dedicated to gender equality and the empowerment of women. A global champion for women and girls, UN Women was established to accelerate progress on meeting their needs worldwide.

UN Women supports UN Member States as they set global standards for achieving gender equality, and works with governments and civil society to design laws, policies, programmes and services needed to ensure that the standards are effectively implemented and truly benefit women and girls worldwide. It works globally to make the vision of the [Sustainable Development Goals](#) a reality for women and girls and stands behind women's equal participation in all aspects of life, focusing on four strategic priorities:

- Women [lead, participate in and benefit equally](#) from governance systems
- Women have [income security, decent work and economic autonomy](#)
- All women and girls live a life free [from all forms of violence](#)
- Women and girls contribute to and have greater influence in [building sustainable peace and resilience](#), and benefit equally from the prevention of natural disasters and conflicts and [humanitarian action](#)

UN Women also coordinates and promotes the UN system's work in advancing gender equality, and in all deliberations and agreements linked to the 2030 Agenda. The entity works to position gender equality as fundamental to the Sustainable Development Goals, and a more inclusive world.

Status of women

Gender equality is not only a basic human right, but its achievement has enormous socio-economic ramifications. Empowering women fuels thriving economies, spurring productivity and growth. Yet gender inequalities remain deeply entrenched in every society. Women lack access to decent work and face occupational segregation and gender wage gaps. They are too often denied access to basic education and health care. Women in all parts of the world suffer violence and discrimination. They are under-represented in political and economic decision-making processes.

Over many decades, the United Nations has made significant progress in advancing gender equality, including through landmark agreements such as the [Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action](#) and the [Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women](#) (CEDAW).

Working for the empowerment and rights of women and girls globally, UN Women's main roles are:

- To [support inter-governmental bodies](#), such as the [Commission on the Status of Women](#), in their formulation of policies, global standards and norms.
- To help Member States implement these standards, standing ready to provide suitable [technical and financial support](#) to those countries that request it, and to forge effective partnerships with civil society.
- To [lead and coordinate the UN system's work on gender equality](#), as well as promote accountability, including through regular monitoring of system-wide progress.

Historical perspective

For many years, the United Nations faced serious challenges in its efforts to promote gender equality globally, including inadequate funding and no single recognized driver to direct UN activities on gender equality issues. In [July 2010](#), the United Nations General Assembly created UN Women, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, to address such challenges. In doing so, UN Member States took an historic step in accelerating the Organization's goals on gender equality and the empowerment of women. The creation of UN Women came about as part of the UN reform agenda, bringing together resources and mandates for greater impact. It merges and builds on the important work of four previously distinct parts of the UN system, which focused exclusively on gender equality and women's empowerment:

- Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW)
- International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW)
- Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women (OSAGI)
- United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM)

Governance

According to UN General Assembly [resolution 64/289](#), which established UN Women, the organization is governed by a multi-tiered intergovernmental governance structure as follows:

“(a) ... the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council and the [Commission on the Status of Women](#) shall constitute the multi-tiered intergovernmental governance structure for the normative support functions and shall provide normative policy guidance to the Entity;

“(b) ... the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council and the [Executive Board](#) of the Entity shall constitute the multi-tiered intergovernmental governance structure for the operational activities and shall provide operational policy guidance to the Entity.”

UN Women governing documents

- [UN General Assembly resolution 64/289 on system-wide coherence](#) (A/RES/64/289). Paragraphs 49–90 relate to the establishment of UN Women.
- [UN General Assembly resolution 63/311 on system-wide coherence](#) (A/RES/63/311)
- [Comprehensive proposal for the composite entity for gender equality and the empowerment of women: Report of the Secretary-General](#) (A/64/588)

Guiding documents

Several international agreements guide the work of UN Women:

- [UN Women's strategic plan, 2018–2021](#) outlines UN Women's strategic direction, objectives and approaches to support efforts to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. It supports the implementation of the [Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action](#) and contributes to the gender-responsive implementation of the [2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#).
- [Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women](#) (CEDAW) and the [optional protocol](#). The “women's bill of rights” is a cornerstone of all UN Women programmes. More than 185 countries are parties to the Convention.
- [Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action](#) (PFA). Adopted by governments at the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women, this document sets forth governments' commitments to enhance women's rights. Member states reaffirmed and strengthened the platform in 2000 during the global [five-year review of progress](#), and pledged to accelerate its implementation during the [10-year review](#) in 2005, the [15-year review](#) in 2010, the [20-year review](#) in 2015, and the [25-year review](#) in 2020.
- [UN Security Council resolution 1325 on women, peace and security](#) (2000) recognized that war impacts women differently, and reaffirmed the need to increase women's role in decision-making with regard to conflict prevention and resolution. The UN Security Council subsequently adopted seven additional resolutions on women, peace and security: [1820](#) (2008), [1888](#) (2009), [1889](#) (2009), [1960](#) (2010), [2106](#) (2013), [2122](#) (2013), [2242](#) (2015), [2467](#) (2019), and [2493](#) (2019). Taken together, the 10 resolutions represent a critical framework for improving the situation of women in conflict-affected countries.
- In September 2015, governments united behind an ambitious [agenda](#) that features 17 new [Sustainable Development Goals](#) (SDGs) and 169 targets that aim to end poverty, combat inequalities and promote prosperity while protecting the environment by 2030. They were preceded by the [Millennium Development Goals](#) (MDGs) from 2000 to 2015.

Intergovernmental support

In intergovernmental forums at the United Nations, Member States come together to debate and seek agreement on global gender equality norms and standards. These commitments offer the basis for action by governments and other stakeholders to achieve gender equality and women's empowerment at the global, regional and national levels. They provide impetus for adopting and enhancing laws, policies and programmes that bring about equality between women and men.

The main intergovernmental forum for addressing gender equality and the empowerment of women is the [UN Commission on the Status of Women](#). Related issues are also debated in the [UN General Assembly](#), the [Security Council](#), and the [Economic and Social Council](#) (ECOSOC), as well as at major [international conferences](#).

As part of our mandate, UN Women supports Member States in setting norms. We conduct research, and compile and provide evidence, including good practices and lessons learned, to inform intergovernmental debates and decisions. We also assist in implementing norms and standards through our country programmes. In addition, UN Women leads and [coordinates](#) the UN system's work in support of gender equality and the empowerment of women.

Intergovernmental discussions on UN Women's country activities take place in the [Executive Board](#), where a rotating group of UN Member States helps set strategic directions.

INTRODUCTION

The year 2020, marking the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Beijing Platform for Action, was intended to be ground-breaking for gender equality. Instead, with the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic even the limited gains made in the past decades are at risk of being rolled back. The pandemic is deepening pre-existing inequalities, exposing vulnerabilities in social, political and economic systems which are in turn amplifying the impacts of the pandemic.

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:

- 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.
- While early reports reveal more men are dying as a result of COVID-19, the health of women generally is adversely impacted through the reallocation of resources and priorities, including sexual and reproductive health services.
- Unpaid care work has increased, with children out-of-school, heightened care needs of older persons and overwhelmed health services.

- As the COVID-19 pandemic deepens economic and social stress coupled with restricted movement and social isolation measures, gender-based violence is increasing exponentially. Many women are being forced to 'lockdown' at home with their abusers at the same time that services to support survivors are being disrupted or made inaccessible.
- 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.

COVID-19 is not only a challenge for global health systems, but also a test of our human spirit. Recovery must lead to a more equal world that is more resilient to future crises. Fiscal stimulus packages and emergency measures to address public health gaps have been put in place in many countries to mitigate the impacts of outcomes, equality and protection - at their center if they are to have the necessary impacts. This is not just about rectifying long-standing inequalities but also about building a more just and resilient world. It is in the interests of not only women and girls but also boys and men. Women will be the hardest hit by this pandemic but they will also be the backbone of recovery in communities. Every policy response that recognizes this will be the most impactful for it.

To achieve this, the committee must emphasize on these three cross-cutting priorities:

- Ensure women's participation in COVID 19 Planning and Decision - Making
- Evidence across sectors, including economic planning and emergency response, demonstrates unquestioningly that policies that do not consult women or include them in decision-making are simply less effective, and can even do harm. Beyond individual women, women's organizations who are often on the front line of response in communities should also be represented and supported.

<https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/policy-brief-the-impact-of-covid-19-on-women-en.pdf>

- Drive transformative change for Equality by Addressing the Care Economy (paid and Unpaid)

In the formal economy care jobs, from teachers to nurses, are underpaid in relation to other sectors. In the home, women perform the bulk of care work, unpaid and invisible. Both are foundational to daily life and the economy but are premised on and entrench gendered norms and inequalities.

- Target Women and Girls in all efforts to address the socio - economic impact of COVID - 19

It will be important to apply an intentional gender lens to the design of fiscal stimulus packages and social assistance programmes to achieve greater equality, opportunities, and social protection. These three cross-cutting priorities reflect the Secretary-General's recent Call to Action on Human Rights, which singled out measures that, if pursued, would have meaningful impact on the rights of women and girls. These measures have become more vital in the context of the pandemic.

Economic Impacts

The impact of COVID-19 across the global economy will be profound. Already, as described in greater detail in the policy brief 'Shared responsibility, Global Solidarity' on the socioeconomic impacts of COVID-19, markets and supply chains have been disrupted, businesses are required to close or scale back operations, and millions have or will lose their jobs and livelihood. ILO has estimated that full or partial lockdown measures now affect almost 2.7 billion workers, representing around 81% of the world's workforce, while the IMF projects a significant contraction of global GDP, strikingly different from past recessions. Emerging evidence on the impact of COVID-19 suggests that women's economic and productive lives will be affected disproportionately and differently from men. Across the globe, women earn less, save less, hold less secure jobs, are more likely to be employed in the informal sector. They have less access to social protections and are the majority of single-parent households. Their capacity to absorb economic shocks is therefore less than that of men.

https://www.un.org/Sites/Un2.Un.Org/Files/Sg_Report_Socio-Economic_Impact_Of_Covid19.Pdf

<https://blogs.imf.org/2020/04/06/an-early-view-of-the-economic-impact-of-the-pandem>

As women take on greater care demands at home, their jobs will also be disproportionately affected by cuts and lay-offs. Such impacts risk rolling back the already fragile gains made in female labor force participation, limiting women's ability to support themselves and their families, especially for female-headed households. In many countries, the first round of layoffs has been particularly acute in the services sector, including retail, hospitality and tourism, where women are overrepresented.

The situation is worse in developing economies where the vast majority of women's employment – 70 percent – is in the informal economy with few protections against dismissal or for paid sick leave and limited access to social protection. To earn a living these workers often depend on public space and social interactions, which are now being restricted to contain the spread of the pandemic.

The Ebola virus showed that quarantines can significantly reduce women's economic and livelihood activities, increasing poverty rates, and exacerbating food insecurity. In Liberia where approximately 85 percent of daily market traders are women, Ebola prevention measures (which included travel restrictions) severely impacted women's livelihoods and lasted much longer.

From past experience and emerging data, it is possible to project that the impacts of the COVID-19 global recession will result in a prolonged dip in women's incomes and labor force participation, with compounded impacts for women already economic security. Moreover, while men's economic activity returned to pre-crisis levels shortly after preventative measures subsided, the impacts on women's economic security and livelihoods.

<https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2014/11/in-liberia-mobile-banking-to-help-ebola-affected-women-traders>

From past experience and emerging data, it is possible to project that the impacts of the COVID-19 global recession will result in a prolonged dip in women's incomes and labor force participation, with compounded impacts for women already living in poverty. For those who, as a result of recent economic growth managed to escape from extreme poverty, they are likely to fall back into this most vulnerable of situations once again.

Economic Recovery Measures

A growing chorus of voices are questioning the glaring lack of women in COVID-19 decision-making bodies. Men dominating leadership positions in global health has long been the default mode of governing. This is a symptom of a broken system where governance is not inclusive of any type of diversity, be it gender, geography, sexual orientation, race, socio-economic status or disciplines within and beyond health – excluding those who offer unique perspectives, expertise and lived realities. This not only reinforces inequitable power structures but undermines an effective COVID-19 response – ultimately costing lives.

Everything we do during and after the COVID-19 crisis must aim to build more equal, inclusive and sustainable economies and societies.

This is perhaps the clearest lesson emerging from the pandemic. This includes gender-responsive economic and social policies and placing women's economic lives at the heart of the pandemic response and recovery plans.

As of March 31, 65 countries had passed fiscal response packages equivalent to a total of US\$4.8 trillion. A total of 106 countries had introduced or adopted social protection and jobs program in response to COVID 19 by April 3.

Within these packages, social assistance (non-contributory transfers) is the most widely used tool, followed by social insurance and supply-side labor market interventions. It is important for these interventions to incorporate sex disaggregated data, a gender lens and specific targeting of women. For example, cash-transfer programs are the most widely used social assistance intervention. Sectors where women are a large proportion of workers, and where supply chains have been disrupted, should have adequate access to credit, loans, grants so they can retain the female workforce. Similarly, disbursement procedures need to take into account women and girls' care obligations and possible informal status in their employment to make benefits accessible to them.

Beyond this, the whole range of economic policies – for both immediate response and long-term recovery – need to be designed and implemented with a gender lens. This includes removal of barriers that prevent full involvement of women in economic activities, equal pay and equal opportunities, social protection schemes that factor in existing biases, financing for women entrepreneurs and mechanisms to promote women's self-employment. Such economic responses would include both the public and private spheres.

Equally, narrowing gender-based education gaps and ensuring women remain in and expand their participation in the formal labor market will play a significant role in providing many economies with the capacity to 'rebound' with stronger, more equitable and sustainable growth.

Lastly, current social protection systems are not wide enough. Many women will not have access as safety nets frequently depend on formal participation in the labor force. In South Asia, over 80 percent of women in non-agricultural jobs are in informal employment; in sub-Saharan Africa this figure is 74 percent; and in Latin America and the Caribbean 54 percent of women in non-agricultural jobs participate in informal employment. Access to benefits such as health insurance, paid sick and maternity leave, pensions and unemployment benefits need to reach beyond formal employment and be accessible to women in all spheres of work.

http://www.ugogentilini.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Country-social-protection-COVID-responses_April3-1.pdf

Net zero emission targets allow for a sequential climate policy strategy, since they can only be reached by a combination of conventional mitigation and some amount of carbon dioxide removal to offset residual emissions. Only when key emitters are able to prove that pathways to net zero are feasible in the real world, based on a much higher and hopefully actionable level of understanding, it would make sense to plan and prepare for huge amounts of carbon dioxide removal to go “net negative,” as an integral part of a climate recovery strategy that aims to secure the politically agreed temperature range of 1.5–2°C.

Differentiation between environmental quality objectives and policy action targets has the potential to change the way climate researchers look at policymaking. On the one hand, researchers will have to accept their relatively limited role in the process of policy formulation and even more limited role in policy action. On the other hand, they should not feel pressured to make pragmatic concessions when formulating long-term environmental objectives that are worth pursuing, as originally happened in case of the 2°C temperature target.

Pursuing net zero emissions targets will conceptually shift climate policy in two ways: it will become both more ambitious but paradoxically also more pragmatic. Current long-term reduction targets do not reach 100 percent, and many climate progressive countries still use some version of the 80–95 percent range (by 2050) introduced in the IPCC's Fourth Assessment Report in 2007. Such a target allows many governments and companies to locate a substantial share of their emissions within the remaining 5–20 percent, suggesting they are only partially affected by current climate policy pathways.

This is especially true where very ambitious reduction measures encounter substantial technological, economic, or political obstacles. This constellation is also advantageous for climate progressive governments and environmental NGOs in that they can focus their proposed solutions essentially on expanding renewables and economy-wide electrification while increasing energy efficiency. They do not need to discuss unpopular and costly measures, such as capturing and storing CO₂ in the steel and cement industry, producing synthetic fuels for long-distance and heavy-duty transport, using negative emissions technologies of building the necessary infrastructure for the widespread use of hydrogen as a potential zero-carbon feedstock in the chemical industry - challenges to be tackled to create zero emissions energy systems. It is also important to promote the exchange of good practices and efforts to scale up programs that have proven successful at the local or regional level, as well as to identify and address barriers preventing successful implementation.

It is recommended that national response plans

- Put cash in women's hands — if a country has an existing program in place that can directly place money in the hands of women, such as conditional cash transfer programs using mobile banking, those programs should be expanded.
- Introduce measures that can either be implemented with low transaction costs (such as temporarily eliminating electricity bills for poor consumers).
- Use pre-existing national social protection programs and adapt targeting methodologies to ensure income for groups affected by COVID-19 and especially where women are heavily represented (tourism, teaching, retail, restaurants, hospitality, etc.).
- Extend basic social protection to informal workers.
- Introduce measures to alleviate the tax burden on women owned businesses.
- Use women's networks and civil society organizations, including microfinance and savings groups, to communicate on benefits.
- Integrate a gender assessment in all country assessments to understand the impact of COVID-19 on women and girls, including economic impact, and how to address it effectively.

Direct support to informal workers and women-led businesses is especially critical: Financial support needs to target hard-hit women-led enterprises and businesses in feminized sectors with subsidized and state-backed loans, tax and social security payment deferrals and exemptions. Governments could, for instance, support income replacement measures to informal workers (as in Thailand and Peru), including measures that specifically cover domestic workers. Public procurement of food, basic supplies, sanitary and personal protective equipment could directly source from women-led businesses. Women In Informal economy need to be supported to access cash transfers or unemployment compensation, especially those who don't have access to banking..

How can the UN help?

The UN can provide gender analysis and sex-disaggregated data to inform national policies, including those related to COVID-19 response programs and policies. We can advise governments on what measures can be implemented with low transaction costs, and on how to target programs to provide income for women that are disproportionately represented in sectors affected by COVID-19 quarantine and lockdown policies. In so doing, the UN can advise governments on the most effective ways to put cash in women's hands, including through expanding cash transfer programs, advise on conditionalities, and propose how programs can leverage mobile banking to ensure women can both access and control the use of funds. The UN can support the design of fiscal stimulus programs that are well-targeted to women.

Mainstreaming gender equality is an intrinsic part on the road to recovery from COVID-19

2020 is a pivotal year for public policy, with the COVID-19 pandemic affecting at least 183 countries. Countries and multinational institutions are struggling as the pandemic not only tests our healthcare systems but creates chaos in our economies with implications far beyond previous financial crises. There is a danger, illuminated by the absence of any language around gender at the G20 Extraordinary virtual Summit on COVID-19 that the important strides made in the last fifteen years to balance women in policymaking are at risk. The consequences of this would be short-sighted as we start to rebuild economic sectors and labor forces.

In the immediate term, we know that women are a vital part of the healthcare infrastructure that is battling the pandemic head-on. Women comprise almost 7 out of 10 health and social care workers and contribute \$3 trillion annually to global health, half in the form of [unpaid care work](#). This includes highly skilled workers – in OECD countries, [just under 50 percent of doctors are female](#), and this proportion has been increasing as the share of female graduates continues to rise – and those in lower-skilled positions.

Experts find that pandemics make existing gender inequalities for women and girls worse, and can impact their treatment and care. [The World Economic Forum has warned](#) that 'as health systems become stretched, many people with COVID-19 will need to be cared for at home, adding to women's overall burden, as well as putting them at greater risk of becoming infected'. Unpaid caregiving is already an obstacle for women globally, with negative impacts on women's opportunity to participate in the formal economy and seek education or training.

Summary

- Despite numerous global and national commitments to gender-inclusive global health governance, COVID-19 followed the usual modus operandi –excluding women's voices.
- Lack of representation is one symptom of a broken system where governance is not inclusive of gender, geography, sexual orientation, race, socio-economic status or disciplines within and beyond health – ultimately excluding those who offer unique perspectives and expertise.
- Functional health systems require radical and systemic change that ensures gender-responsive and intersectional practices are the norm – rather than the exception.
- Open, inclusive and transparent communication and decision-making must be prioritized over closed-door or traditional forms of governance.
- Data collection and governance policies must include sex and gender data, and strive for an intersectionality approach that includes going beyond binary representation in order to produce results that are inclusive of the full gender spectrum.

Conclusion

Twenty-five years after the landmark [Beijing women's conference](#), politics remains overwhelmingly the domain of men. Today, women are not even a quarter of all elected politicians in the world. At this rate, it will take a century to [close the gender gap](#) in politics and more than two centuries for women to attain economic equality.

The global average for women's representation in parliament has inched up from [11.2 to 24.9 percent](#) in the last two decades. While this can be seen as progress, it is still far from the one-third threshold considered the minimum needed to shape law and policy for gender equality.

Now with the COVID-19 crisis, women's absence in decision making is having a direct impact on people's lives. Countries with more women in leadership – in governments, cabinets, legislatures – have delivered COVID-19 [responses that consider the effects of the crisis on women and girls](#). But they are exceptions rather than the norm.

Such a lack of women's perspectives can have deadly consequences. For example, the spike in violence against women and girls under pandemic lockdown measures, making the home one of the most unsafe places for women, was only to be expected. But most governments failed to anticipate it and have been slow to respond. Not enough policymakers are using a gender lens to examine the evidence and lack of equal representation in parliaments is largely to blame.

Nationally legislated gender quotas and affirmative policies like temporary special measures have proven to be a critical first step in bringing more women into the ranks of elected politicians. Along with other actions like mandatory representation in candidate and party lists, they have had visible impact in several countries.

Notably, and in large part due to such measures and advocacy by women's groups, women's average representation in parliaments in the Eastern Europe and Central Asia region now averages 24.6 percent, as UNDP's interactive platform [#EqualFuture](#) shows. This is close to the global average and a big step forward from [7.6 percent in 1995 and 18.1 percent in 2010](#). Gender quotas in Serbia, Ukraine and North Macedonia have led to women significantly raising their numbers in parliament.

But these measures don't go far enough.

What needs to change for women to move from the political margins to the mainstream? Many intersecting factors underpin gender disparities in public life. They must be tackled simultaneously.

First are a set of measures aimed at leveling the field in the electoral domain. While quotas have helped, we need more complex strategies to improve the overall political landscape. These include voter education to combat gender stereotypes, expanding women's access to campaign financing, fostering cross-party and regional coalitions of women in politics, and engaging with the men who control political parties and agendas.

Second is the hard work of dismantling structural and social barriers that obstruct women. A fundamental but often forgotten factor that underpins gender inequality is [women's burden of unpaid care and domestic work](#). [Redistributing it more equally](#) in family and society is essential to women realizing their economic and political opportunities.

An unexpected consequence of the pandemic lockdown in some countries has been [more men picking up a larger share of household and care work](#). We must seize this opportunity to do more to allow women equality in the labour market. This means not only ensuring that social protection systems cover household costs of care but, crucially, building social infrastructure to care for the young, elderly, sick and disabled.

Evidence shows that [investment in the care sector creates many more jobs](#) than a similar investment in, say, construction. What's more, these are decent, low-carbon and secure jobs that will make this an attractive sector for men and women and raise the quality of and demand for care services. COVID-19, more than any comparable crisis in recent history, urges us to bring in structural reforms that will have a transformative impact on women's participation in politics and the economy.

Patriarchal values, tradition and conservative norms exert a powerful hold and cannot be fought just with advocacy campaigns. Women as much as men, as candidates and voters, harbour harmful gender norms and stereotypes that portray politics as the domain of men. Confronting and combating these trends require coordinated strategies that target gender bias in education, media, social affairs, health and employment.

Violence in politics is a global and growing phenomenon. Women are [targeted for their gender and](#) routinely face vicious gender-based cyber violence that is often life-threatening. This is a huge deterrent to aspirants, especially younger women, who must enter electoral politics in far greater numbers if the gender gap is to be bridged. None of this is easy, but women leaders and parliaments and local assemblies in a growing number of countries are showing us the way.

At the national level, women parliamentarians have driven crucial legislation on women's rights – for example, [criminalizing violence against women in North Macedonia](#) and [early and forced marriage in Kyrgyzstan](#), and [promoting women's entrepreneurship in Montenegro](#). We know that [women in decision-making positions at the local level promote human development because](#) they more often than men prioritize community over individual needs.

There are other pressing reasons why gender diversity must become intrinsic to good decision-making and responsive governance. Today's complex problems call for smarter solutions. Whether it is the COVID-19 pandemic, rising inequalities combined with gender wage and labour gaps, or climate change, our responses must consider a multiplicity of perspectives and experiences – informed by gender, race, background, education, class and occupation. Women in politics don't derive their power on their own – they are most successful when they are seen as part of influential women's networks in science and industry, civil society and the media.

Equal participation in political decision-making is a matter of gender equality. Women are half the world's population and must have equal say in all decisions that affect their lives.

UN WOMEN GENDER EQUALITY AND COVID-19 RESOURCES

- In Focus: Gender equality matters in COVID-19 response: <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/in-focus/in-focus-gender-equality-in-covid-19-response>
- COVID-19 and ending violence against women and girls: <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2020/04/issue-brief-covid-19-and-ending-violence-against-women-and-girls>
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