



## Briefing Note

### EUROCITIES city dialogue on the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on women

16 June 2020, 14:00 - 16:00 CET

*This briefing note provides background information to outlining the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on women. It will form the basis of the discussion on measures taken by cities to counter the adverse and multifaceted impact of the pandemic on their female populations.*

#### **The impact of COVID-19 on women**

The coronavirus pandemic has hit women particularly hard, especially those experiencing multiple forms of discrimination. It has exacerbated and laid bare the structural inequalities that continue to disadvantage women. This makes it crucial to employ a gendered and intersectional approach to understanding women's experience of the pandemic. This gendered dimension of COVID-19, as a health crisis with a heavy socio-economic impact, should form the basis for measures that offer immediate and long-term support for women. Moreover, it needs to lead to informed policy making that works towards more equal societies and opportunities for women beyond the crisis.

#### **Lack of representation and involvement**

Women constitute the majority of key workers in essential services such as healthcare, the food industry or education. However, they are underrepresented in decision-making processes concerning their own employment or safety. Across the board, leadership roles are less open to women than to men and therefore less democratic in taking into account female workers' interests. Yet women are not only underrepresented in decision making roles; they are also neglected in concrete measures to tackle the pandemic. For instance, the majority of medical trials and research are gender blind and take male test persons as the norm in developing vaccines and medicines.<sup>i</sup> Not only can this render medical therapies less effective for women; it can also induce adverse side effects only or mainly experienced by women.

#### **Bigger health and economic impact**

With up to 76%, women make up the majority of healthcare workers in the EU. The same holds true for the care sector more generally. More than 93% of childcare workers, 86% of personal care workers and 95% of domestic cleaners and helpers are women.<sup>ii</sup> As indispensable frontline workers, they are at a higher risk of being infected with the coronavirus because they are potentially exposed to ill patients on a daily basis. Outside of the care sector, women also frequently work in essential jobs that require close contact to customers, for instance as cashiers in supermarkets.

Globally, 41% of women are employed in sectors at particularly high risk of a severe COVID-19 impact on jobs and working hours.<sup>iii</sup> Women are generally more likely than men to work in temporary, part-time or otherwise precarious employment situations with lower pay and

worse access to legal and social protection. Moreover, women's overrepresentation in informal sectors, such as in housekeeping or the hospitality industry, heightens their risk of a sudden job loss. In the current situation, these factors come together to create a higher risk of women being particularly vulnerable to the economic impact of the pandemic.<sup>iv</sup>

### **Unpaid work and inequality at home**

Very often, women also shoulder additional burdens at home, which puts them at a greater disadvantage in relation to their main paid work. Before the pandemic, women were estimated to spend 13 hours more than men on unpaid care and housework every week.<sup>v</sup> Due to confinement of children at home, women are facing an even greater burden of care and housework. With more women doing their paid work from home, it is also difficult to balance these different responsibilities. They often must shoulder additional burdens during confinement at home, with the bigger part of caring, schooling and housework responsibilities falling on women.<sup>vi</sup> This shift can lead to pushing women back into their homes in more than just a figurative way, as it will often be comparatively lower paid women that give up their jobs to take on unpaid care work. The result is a reinforcement of gender inequality and increased levels of economic dependency of women.

### **Domestic violence on the rise**

Emerging data has traced a worrying rise in domestic violence against women and girls. In some EU countries, cases of domestic violence rose by a third in the week after lockdown was established.<sup>vii</sup> Lockdown measures keep women in confined living conditions and limit their possibility to escape serious attacks and to access women's shelters and other support services outside the house.<sup>viii</sup> In addition, online and ICT facilitated violence against women is increasing as social platforms are used more frequently and can take the form of physical threats, sexual harassment or online stalking.<sup>ix</sup>

Confronted with this multi-factorial problematic, cities have stepped up during the COVID-19 pandemic to adapt their services and provide additional support to women. They are now working towards mitigating the long-term impact of this crisis on women and ensuring a fair recovery that will benefit women.



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- <sup>i</sup> EIGE (2020), “Gender impacts on health”, accessible here: <https://eige.europa.eu/covid-19-and-gender-equality/gender-impacts-health>
- <sup>ii</sup> EIGE (2020), “Frontline workers“, accessible here: <https://eige.europa.eu/covid-19-and-gender-equality/frontline-workers>
- <sup>iii</sup> ILO (2020), “Policy Brief: The COVID-19 response: Getting gender equality right for a better future for women at work”, accessible here: [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---gender/documents/publication/wcms\\_744374.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---gender/documents/publication/wcms_744374.pdf)
- <sup>iv</sup> European Women’s Lobby (2020), “Women must not pay the price for COVID-19!”, accessible here: [https://www.womenlobby.org/IMG/pdf/ewl\\_policy\\_brief\\_on\\_covid-19\\_impact\\_on\\_women\\_and\\_girls-2.pdf](https://www.womenlobby.org/IMG/pdf/ewl_policy_brief_on_covid-19_impact_on_women_and_girls-2.pdf)
- <sup>v</sup> EIGE (2020), “Beijing +25: the fifth review of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action in EU Member States”, accessible here: <https://eige.europa.eu/publications/beijing-25-fifth-review-implementation-beijing-platform-action-eu-member-states>
- <sup>vi</sup> Cristina Benlloch & Empar Aguado Bloise (2020), “Teletrabajo y conciliación: el estrés se ceba con las mujeres », The Conversation, accessible here: <https://theconversation.com/teletrabajo-y-conciliacion-el-estres-se-ceba-con-las-mujeres-137023>
- <sup>vii</sup> European Parliament FEMM Committee (2020), “COVID-19: Stopping the rise in domestic violence during lockdown”, accessible here: <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/20200406IPR76610/covid-19-stopping-the-rise-in-domestic-violence-during-lockdown>
- <sup>viii</sup> UN Women (2020), “COVID-19 and ending violence against women and girls”, accessible here: <https://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2020/issue-brief-covid-19-and-ending-violence-against-women-and-girls-en.pdf?la=en&vs=5006>
- <sup>ix</sup> UN Women (2020), “Online and ICT facilitated violence against women and girls during COVID-19”, accessible here: <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/brief-online-and-ict-facilitated-violence-against-women-and-girls-during-covid-19-en.pdf>