



WEBINAR PROCEEDINGS

# Gender Gaps in Eurasia: The Daunting Effects of COVID-19

Tuesday 9 February 2021



## ■ ORGANISATION FOR ECONOMIC CO-OPERATION AND DEVELOPMENT

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## ■ OECD EURASIA COMPETITIVENESS PROGRAMME

The OECD Eurasia Competitiveness Programme, launched in 2008, helps accelerate economic reforms and improve the business climate to achieve sustainable economic growth and employment in two regions: Central Asia (Afghanistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan), and Eastern Europe and South Caucasus (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine). The Programme contributes to the OECD outreach strategy implemented by the Global Relations Secretariat, and works in close collaboration with specialised expert divisions across the OECD.

[www.oecd.org/globalrelations/eurasia.htm](http://www.oecd.org/globalrelations/eurasia.htm)

## ■ GENDER GAPS IN EURASIA

Gender equality is not just a moral imperative, it is also critical to the creation of stronger, more sustainable and more inclusive economies. OECD estimates suggest that if women's participation rates reached those of men by 2030, GDP would increase by around 12%. The OECD has long placed gender equality at the top of its agenda. The OECD Gender Initiative examines barriers to gender equality in education, employment, and entrepreneurship.

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the socio-economic vulnerability of women in the Eastern Partner region (EaP) and Central Asia. Domestic violence has increased dramatically, women have taken on more unpaid work, remittance flows to households have fallen and labour market conditions have deteriorated, particularly in sectors relying heavily on female workers and with high levels of informality.

Women are also at the forefront of the fight against COVID-19, representing around 70% of the medical staff worldwide – Eurasia is no exception. First estimates show that the COVID-19 pandemic could set back gender parity in the region by around 15 years. The OECD Eurasia Competitiveness Programme works to advance women's equality and empowerment in the Eastern Partner (EaP) region and Central Asia, highlighting the specific social, institutional and economic realities of these countries to address gender gaps effectively.

[bit.ly/genderOECDeurasia](http://bit.ly/genderOECDeurasia)

## WEBINAR PROCEEDINGS

### ■ Overview

The webinar *Gender Gaps in Eurasia: The daunting effects of COVID-19* provided a platform to discuss a draft OECD note on the topic, which summarises the main challenges facing women in the region following the onset of the pandemic and presents policy recommendations to ensure a more inclusive and sustainable recovery for all. The webinar discussed the main issues and options for supporting women and men across the region, building on OECD experience, in order to ensure that the recovery is equitable and inclusive. Government representatives from the region and members of the development community were invited to share their experiences and insights. The OECD draft policy note on *Gender Gaps in Eurasia* will be revised, taking the webinar discussions into account, and will be released on **8 March, International Women's Day**. It will provide a basis for further OECD work on women's empowerment and equality in the region.

Following the opening remarks, which framed the discussions, the OECD Secretariat provided an overview of the effects of COVID-19 on women in Eurasia, while drawing on the most recent data from across the region. Policy-makers and experts also discussed the main effects of COVID-19 on women in the region, particularly the effects on the economy and gender equality. The second session focused on good practices to tackle gender inequality and actions to ensure immediate and long-lasting support to women following the outbreak of the COVID crisis. Policy-makers from the region and EU representatives also shared initiatives to support women amidst the crisis and make sure that an inclusive recovery is being planned. The concluding remarks wrapped up the discussions and provided an overview of the main highlights and way forward to address gender gaps in Eurasia.

### ■ Key findings

- Although men are more likely to die of COVID-19 than women, the pandemic has unleashed a range of health risks that particularly or specifically affect women, such as a lack of access to sexual and reproductive health services, a heightened risk of suffering domestic violence and longer-lasting labour market insecurities.
- Women are structurally at greater risk from the economic effects of COVID-19, largely because of their overrepresentation among essential workers in fields like healthcare and their relatively large share of employment in the sectors hit hardest by COVID-19.
- State programmes to “build back better” from COVID-19 should adopt a gendered lens, and encompass programmes that enable women take advantage of new opportunities (e.g., digital skills development). Women should be part of defining and implementing the recovery plans.
- Government policies and action plans on gender should be matched with funding commensurate with their ambitions.
- Monitoring and implementation are often weak points in gender policy. Disaggregated and good-quality data should be produced to enable governments to adopt well-targeted gender policies.

### ■ Opening remarks and introduction

**Mr Andreas Schaal**, Director of OECD Global Relations opened the webinar, noting that first estimates indicate that the COVID-19 pandemic could set back the cause of gender parity in Eurasia by 15 years. He highlighted the importance of providing policy prescriptions to support women's empowerment and improved well-being. Mr Schaal stressed that promoting gender equality would be essential to ensuring a sustainable and inclusive recovery, as Eurasia countries “build back better” from COVID-19.

**Ambassador František Ružička**, Permanent Representative of the Slovak Republic to the OECD, noted that COVID-19 has hit women in Eurasia harder than men in many ways. He pointed to a disproportionately large

economic hit to sectors where women are most commonly employed. He also highlighted women's overrepresentation in "frontline COVID-19 occupations" (such as health and social care work), increased domestic violence and a disruption of access to sexual and reproductive health. Mr Ružička acknowledged the role that women in Eurasia play as agents of change, as in Belarus and Moldova. He stressed that Slovakia is directly engaged in the protection and promotion of gender equality, including at the presidential level. He noted that the country has adopted strategic documents to strengthen the role of women in the society, including the new legislation on equality, a National Strategy for Gender Equality and a National Action Plan for Prevention and Elimination of Violence against Women. Mr Ružička was clear that the Slovak government is committed to policy-making that engenders a fair society and is free of discrimination, violence and harmful practices against women.

**Ambassador Peter Burian**, EU Special Representative for Central Asia, underlined how gender equality, the full enjoyment of all human rights and the empowerment of women and girls are at the heart of the European Union's values. He noted that gender equality and women's rights are fully embedded in the EU's most recent Central Asia Strategy, as well as in the EU inter-regional co-operation programmes. He stressed that the pandemic threatens to exacerbate gender inequalities and called on development partners to continue supporting programmes that advance gender equality and the empowerment of women, in order to avoid the unravelling of hard-won achievements. Mr Burian was clear that the EU's indicative Central Asia programme for 2021-2027 would have a strong focus on gender equality, including in terms of entrepreneurship and workforce participation, as well as transversal issues such as green and digital transformation. He thanked the OECD for its efforts to promote a sustainable and inclusive recovery from COVID-19, and noted that OECD best practices would play a key role in helping Eurasia countries recover.

## ■ Session 1: The socio-economic costs of COVID-19

The first substantive session began with a presentation on *Gender Gaps in Eurasia: the Daunting Effects of COVID-19* by **Ms Talisa zur Hausen**, Policy Analyst in the OECD Eurasia Division. Ms zur Hausen noted that men face higher rates of severe illness and death from COVID-19, for reasons that appear to be linked to both biology and lifestyle choices. However, women in Eurasia face other health pressures and risks, such as access to sexual and reproductive health services. Ms zur Hausen also stressed that the pandemic has exacerbated the significant disparity in unpaid domestic care burdens between women and men in Eurasia. Moreover, women make up the majority of the region's front-line health and social workers, which implies an enhanced risk of occupational contamination.

The pandemic has exacerbated the region's already-high rates of domestic violence, with reports of intimate partner violence (IPV) up 90% in certain countries in 2020. On the economic front, she highlighted lower labour force participation, a widening of the gender pay gap and the structural vulnerability of female-dominated sectors of the economy. Ms zur Hausen suggested that expanding the gender-focused safety net and offering targeted financial mechanisms for female employees and entrepreneurs would be positive steps that could help women recover economically. With regards ensuring an inclusive economic recovery, Ms zur Hausen suggested that female leadership in the private sector could be enhanced by: (a) setting targets or quotas for women in executive positions, (b) putting in place trainings and mentorship programmes for women and (c) offering support packages for families, including maternity/paternity leave, as well as skills training and retention schemes.

**Dr Karima Hamid Faryabi**, Minister of Economy of Afghanistan, took the floor and illustrated the effects of the crisis on women from an Afghan perspective. She stated that women, who earn significantly less than men in Afghanistan, are more likely to be employed in the informal economy, leaving them particularly exposed to labour market insecurity. She also stated that Afghanistan's processing and packaging sectors, which employ a large share of women, have been hit especially hard by the pandemic. Along with falling female participation in the labour force, Dr Faryabi pointed to a 97% spike in gender-based violence. She stated that this came on top of the already-high level of physical, sexual and psychological violence that Afghan women faced prior to the pandemic. In addition, Dr Faryabi cited the closure of schools (where staff are disproportionately female),

the lack of access to experienced female health professionals in Afghanistan, and food shortage as further negative impacts that women are facing as a result of the pandemic. She stated that in order to spur an inclusive recovery from COVID-19 in Afghanistan, it is essential to support women in entrepreneurship, protect their rights and empower them to build a better future. Dr Faryabi expressed her support for continued cooperation with the OECD and its work to help Afghanistan Build Back Better.

**Ms Kateryna Levchenko**, Ukraine's Government Commissioner for Gender Equality Policy, was clear that her country is also experiencing the profound impacts of a pandemic that has a disproportionately negative effect on women's lives. She cited high levels of domestic violence, difficulties combining professional and family life and labour market vulnerability as issues that have been worsened by COVID-19. Ms Levchenko stressed that the government continues to work to support equal opportunities for men and women in society, as is demonstrated by its membership of the Biarritz Partnership for Gender Equality, the Equal Pay International Coalition, the UN Women-convened Gender Equality Forum and others.

She noted that the government has adopted a range of measures to promote gender equality in Ukraine, including a framework of 226 indicators for cross-sectional gender monitoring and gender quotas for political parties – which resulted in 36% increase of women representation on the local level following the October 2020 local elections. Ms Levchenko stated that current government priorities include improving gender equality in education, reducing the gender pay gap by at least 1% annually, further amending legislation to establish employment guarantees for workers with family duties, ensuring equal access to healthcare, as well as creating more domestic shelters and support services for women. She also noted that Ukraine was actively implementing the OECD Council Recommendation on Gender Equality in Education, Employment and Entrepreneurship and the OECD Council Recommendation on Gender Equality in Public Life, with a view to requesting adherence to these instruments in the context of the OECD-Ukraine Memorandum of Understanding.

**Ms Malika Kadirkanova**, Chair of the Senate Committee on Women and Gender Equality of Uzbekistan, stated that women in the country have had a higher risk of unemployment during COVID-19 due to the relatively precarious nature of their employment status. She stressed that Uzbekistan's reforms were designed to take account of the gender challenge, noting that the improvement of women's economic, social and political opportunities is a state priority. She pointed out that last year, Uzbekistan adopted its 2030 Strategy for Achieving Gender Equality. She noted that Uzbekistan has approved 25 laws in order to converge with international gender policy norms and has provided financial support and grants for women who live in vulnerable conditions. She stated that Uzbekistan is cooperating with international organisations on various steps to bridge the gender divide, including the World Bank, UN, Asia Development Bank, OECD and EBRD. Findings from a UN agency joint programme with Uzbekistan helped identify a path forward for building back better from COVID-19, including supporting employment rights for women, income support for families and measures to improve healthcare in the country.

**Ms Elaine Conkievich**, UNDP Resident Representative in Mongolia, stated that Mongolia had taken earlier action than many countries to prevent the spread of the pandemic, which had yielded both positive and negative results for women. While early border closures and internal movement restrictions significantly limited community transmission of COVID-19, the measures had a significant impact on vulnerable groups, including women. Ms Conkievich noted that teachers (the vast majority of whom are women) were forced to shift to virtual learning and often faced dual care burdens. She also pointed to the deleterious effects of the pandemic on women's nutrition, income, access to reproductive healthcare, water and sanitation, and mental health. Ms Conkievich stated that the government's plans to support nutrition, sanitation and the operation of domestic violence shelters during the pandemic had been crucial to women's well-being. In terms of the longer-term recovery from COVID-19, she stated that the country's development programmes would need to be sensitised to gender, with UNDP providing support to align the government's action plan with gender inclusion and equality. She stated that digital skills empowerment should be at the forefront of efforts to support women as Mongolia "builds forward better."

## ■ Session 2: Planning the recovery

The second session began with a presentation from **Mr Willem Adema**, Senior Economist on Family, Gender and Housing in the OECD Social Policy Division. Mr Adema noted that women are structurally at greater risk from the economic effects of COVID-19, not least owing to their overrepresentation among the essential workforce and their employment in sectors that have been hit hardest by COVID-19. He provided an outline of policy responses to labour market and social policies that could help to support women's well-being during the pandemic. These included extending coverage to non-standard workers, providing easier access to benefits for low-income families, making one-off payments to affected workers, delivering alternative public care for the children of essential service workers and providing direct financial support to workers who need to take leave. They also included using dedicated financial facilities to help small businesses address the short-term consequences of the pandemic, ensuring that self-employed women could access emergency financial measures, providing health support to survivors of domestic violence, and making sure that shelters remained open during lockdown, as well as using remote hearings to ensure that lockdowns did not obstruct women's access to justice. He noted that the [OECD Recommendation of the Council on Gender Equality in Education, Employment and Entrepreneurship](#) is a strong lever to advance gender parity priorities while mainstreaming gender in policymaking in key areas.

**Ms Pinar Guven**, Policy Analyst in the OECD Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development Goals Division, noted that the disproportionate impact of the pandemic on women's well-being calls for a twin-track policy approach, including: (a) targeted action and (b) gender mainstreaming. She stated that gender-responsive public governance is critical to preventing further inequalities from developing during COVID-19, as well as tackling deep-rooted stereotypes and inequalities. Ms Guven felt that the pandemic presents an opportunity to design an inclusive recovery, as well as to strengthen governance institutions and processes for gender equality. She noted that some of the biggest challenges for gender equality promotion among policy-makers were a lack of high-quality data, the limited resources allocated to gender equality institutions within government and a limited access to decision-making structures.

In order to address these issues, Ms Guven suggested an eight-point plan, including: (a) using gender mainstreaming tools and processes, (b) strengthening coordination and consultation mechanisms, (c) integrating gender-inclusive policies into emergency management plans, (d) ensuring that decision-making processes are inclusive and representative, (e) monitoring and evaluating pandemic responses from a gender perspective, (f) integrating gender equality into the recovery strategy, (g) using government tools (e.g., budget regulations) to support gender equality outcomes, and (h) strengthening data availability and infrastructure for evidence-based policy-making. She drew attention to the [OECD Recommendation of the Council on Gender Equality in Public Life](#) as a strong policy framework offering useful guidelines for addressing these issues.

**Ms Elvira Surabaldieva**, former Deputy Prime Minister of Kyrgyzstan, discussed the COVID-19 pandemic in her country, along with its gendered effects. She noted that experts believe the country's death toll from COVID-19 was many times higher than its officially reported figure. Ms Surabaldieva explained that nearly one third of Kyrgyzstan's GDP comes from remittances, with 700 000 Kyrgyz citizens working in Russia before the pandemic. The majority of them were forced to return home because of COVID-19, and the government's lack of fiscal space meant that it was unable to provide them with financial aid or support their employment. In addition to a 30% increase in violence against women during the pandemic, Ms Surabaldieva explained that the unemployment rate for women in Kyrgyzstan had increased substantially, with wage cuts and hits to supplementary incomes an additional burden. She also pointed to the fact that women in Kyrgyzstan are overrepresented in frontline COVID-19 sectors such as education and healthcare, with up to 60-70% women in social care.

Ms Surabaldieva noted that the government was taking a number of steps to promote gender equality in Kyrgyzstan. She stated that it was working to introduce a form of healthcare insurance that would ensure better to healthcare for women. She also noted that in order to support SMEs during the crisis, the government had allocated funds to cover interest on micro loans, many of which are held by women. Ms

Surabaldieva stated that she hoped Kyrgyzstan would adopt quotas on women in parliament, noting that currently, less than 10% of political decision-makers in the country are women.

**Ms Nino Tsilosani**, Member of Parliament, Parliamentary Gender Equality Council of Georgia, stated that the COVID-19 pandemic had hit women in the country hard, pointing to their disproportionate representation among the ranks of essential workers, female unemployment and rising levels of domestic violence. She stated that the government was taking proactive measures to protect women, and delineated the Parliamentary Gender Equality Council, the Inter-Agency Commission on Gender Equality, Violence against Women and Corporal Punishment, and the Human Rights Council as relevant institutions in this regard. In particular, the Parliamentary Gender Equality Council has recommended that the government provide financial support to companies in order to help them maintain employment – for instance, tax relief for companies that retain employees. This was particularly salient to the tourism sector, which has been hit particularly hard by the pandemic due to border closures and where women make up the majority of employees. Other recommendations included supporting SMEs owned by women and providing additional support for single parents and disabled people.

Ms Tsilosani explained that the government's anti-crisis measures to support citizens had come in four waves, and had included social compensation for vulnerable groups and people who had lost income during the pandemic. She stated that women were heavily represented in each of these groups, not only as income earners in official or gig economies, but also as parents of children with disabilities or as parents with 3-4 children. She also outlined the government's measures for preventing domestic violence against women. These included a free 24-hour hotline, with legal and psychological support offered in seven languages, as well as crisis shelters to support domestic violence survivors. The domestic violence hotline is equipped with chat mode and a silence button so that victims have the ability to call the police without using their phones.

**Ms Charlotte Isaksson**, Senior Gender Advisor, European External Action Service, stated that the pandemic has affected women economically, in terms of both health and gender-based violence. On the economic front, she noted that women are earning less, saving less, holding insecure jobs and moving towards poverty. On the health side, she noted that the reallocation of resources away from sexual and reproductive health adversely affects many women. She also pointed to the additional stress that women are under from an increased domestic care burden, which is catalysed by children being kept away from school and the additional need to care for sick family members. On the domestic violence side, Ms Isaksson was clear that the lockdowns had increased the likelihood of women being locked in with abusers, with the stress that COVID-19 has created sowing the conditions for increased gender-based violence.

Ms Isaksson stated unequivocally that the recovery from COVID-19 should be used to create a more equal world, with stimulus packages and emergency measures needing to be adapted to addressing health gaps in a gender-equal way. She noted that in November 2020, the EU adopted Gender Action Plan III, which integrates the effect of COVID-19 into a new policy framework on gender equality and women's empowerment. It includes systematic use of gender analysis and systematic integration of a gendered perspective into the EU response to COVID-19. She also stated that gender has been integrated into the new EU Action Plan for Research and Innovation, and that EU development funds to support gender equality were distributed across priorities such as emergency response, health, water and sanitation, as well as dealing with the economic consequences of the pandemic. Ms Isaksson concluded by stressing that COVID-19 priorities for governments should include the following: promoting women's rights and inclusion in decision-making, supporting women in the paid and unpaid care economy, and integrating a gender perspective when designing fiscal policies.

**Ms Lazzat Ramazanova**, Chair of the National Commission for Women and Family Demographic Policy under the President of Kazakhstan, and member of the Mazhilis, stated that women have borne the brunt of the negative impacts stemming from COVID-19. She stated that a collapse in entrepreneurial activities has been particularly worrisome, with a joint study by UN Women suggesting that around 60% of female entrepreneurs were not prepared for the crisis and had limited awareness of existing measures of state support. She indicated that the National Commission for Women and Family Demographic Policy has developed the government's

anti-crisis plan to support women entrepreneurs, socially vulnerable women and women with disabilities, while providing recommendations to better support women through medical institutions and social services.

Ms Ramazanova explained that around KZT 6 trillion (EUR 11.9bn) had been provided in state support to fight the effects of COVID-19, with measures including financial support, preferential tax rates and unemployment benefits. She explained that the government's Concept of Family and Gender Policies in the Republic of Kazakhstan was being updated, with a new action plan being drafted to address points of weakness that have been highlighted by the pandemic (including social problems). The action plan is to include a focus on family happiness and well-being, which are prerequisites for the success of women. Ms Ramazanova concluded by calling for the total eradication of domestic violence in Central Asia, and stating that the issue should be tackled head-on by governments.

## ■ Concluding remarks and next steps

**Ms Alia El-Yassir**, UN Women's Regional Director for Europe and Central Asia, concluded the discussion. She emphasised that gender inequalities are an underlying condition in many societies and reiterated the importance of dealing with COVID-19 through a gendered lens. She stressed that it is important to ensure high-quality data in order to inform effective gender policy-making and enable monitoring. She noted that gender assessment through real-time data collection is necessary to identify gender challenges and provide a quick response. Ms El-Yassir was also clear that government funding to address COVID-19 needs to be gender-responsive, with policies and plans accorded funding that is commensurate with their stated ambitions. She called governments and institutions to further innovate and make use of digital solutions to address gender gaps.

In particular, she stated that family and labour market policies need to be well resourced in order to tackle issues such as domestic care burdens on women and girls. She stresses that financing must be gender-responsive and this was one of the key pillars of the Beijing +25 Declaration and Platform for Action. Without budgets, "we will not walk the talk", she said. Systems and structures should be re-energised with the participation of government and civil society, like it is being done by the annual UN's Commission on the Status of Women (CSW). Finally, Ms El-Yassir stressed that it is critical to address the deficit in women's representation and decision-making around the world. She stated that women must be front and centre of the recovery from COVID-19, with policy-makers supporting female leadership in public life, both in government and across the whole of society.

**Mr William Tompson**, Head of Eurasia Division, OECD Global Relations Secretariat, thanked the participants for their attendance and for their contributions to the discussion. By way of comment, he stated that data, implementation and monitoring are often weak points of gender policy-making in Eurasia, and should be priorities for countries as they Build Back Better from COVID-19. Mr Tompson stressed that the OECD would proceed to finalise the **Gender Gaps in Eurasia: the Daunting Effects of COVID-19** analytical note drawing on insights from the discussion, following which it would be published in English and Russian on the OECD website on International Women's Day, on 8 March.



## ANNEX A: AGENDA

### ■ DRAFT AGENDA

Please note that the timing of the agenda below is based on GMT+1 (Paris).

#### 9:00-9:30 Online Access

Moderator: **Mr William Tompson**, Head, Eurasia Division, OECD

#### 9:30-10:00 Opening remarks

- **Mr Andreas Schaal**, Director for Global Relations, OECD
- **Mr František Ružička**, Ambassador and Permanent Representative to the OECD, Slovak Republic
- **Mr Peter Burian**, Ambassador, Special Representative for Central Asia, European Union

### SESSION I: The socio-economic costs of COVID-19

#### 10:00-10:15 OECD presentation on the gendered effects of COVID-19 in Eurasia

*The OECD Secretariat will provide an overview of the effects of COVID-19 on women in Eurasia, whilst drawing upon the most recent data across the region.*

- **Ms Talisa Zur Hausen**, Policy Analyst, Eurasia Division, OECD

#### 10:15-11:00 Expert discussion: main effects on women in Eurasia widening the gender gap

*Eurasia country representatives and experts will discuss the main effects of COVID-19 on women in the region and the effects on the economy and on gender equality.*

- **Dr Karima Hamid Faryabi**, Minister of Economy, Afghanistan
- **Ms Kateryna Levchenko**, Government Commissioner for Gender Equality Policy, Ukraine
- **Ms Malika Kadirhanova**, Chair of the Senate Committee on Women and Gender Equality, Uzbekistan
- **Ms Elaine Conkievich**, Resident Representative in Mongolia, UNDP

#### Instant poll

*All participants will be invited to take part in an instant poll to gauge the type of support mechanisms that can have a lasting impact for women and men in the region.*

## SESSION II: Planning the recovery

### 11:00-11:20 OECD presentation on policies to support women weather the crisis and ensure an inclusive recovery

*The OECD Secretariat will discuss good practices put in place to tackle gender inequality and actions to ensure immediate and long-lasting support to women following the outbreak of the COVID crisis.*

- **Mr Willem Adema**, Senior Economist on Family, Gender, Housing policies and Social Expenditure Statistics, OECD
- **Ms Pinar Guven**, Policy Analyst, Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development Goals Division, OECD

### 11:20-12:20 Expert discussion: efforts to support women during and post COVID-19

*Eurasia and OECD country representatives will share initiatives to support women amidst the crisis, and make sure that an inclusive recovery is being planned.*

- **Ms Elvira Surabaldieva**, Former Vice Prime-Minister, Kyrgyzstan
- **Ms Nino Tsilosani**, Member of Parliament, Parliamentary Gender Equality Council, Georgia
- **Ms Lazzat Ramazanova**, Chair of the National Commission for Women and Family Demographic Policy under the President of Kazakhstan, member of the Mazhilis of the Parliament, Kazakhstan
- **Ms Charlotte Isaksson**, Senior Gender Advisor, European External Action Service

### 12:20-12:30 Concluding remarks and next steps

- **Mr William Tompson**, Head, Eurasia Division, OECD
- **Ms Alia El-Yassir**, Regional Director for Europe and Central Asia, UN Women

## **ANNEX B: OECD PRESENTATIONS**

**TACKLING CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19)**  
CONTRIBUTING TO A GLOBAL EFFORT

**WEBINAR**

# **Gender Gaps in Eurasia: The daunting effects of COVID-19**

**9 February 2021**

**Talisa zur Hausen**  
Policy Analyst  
OECD Eurasia Division



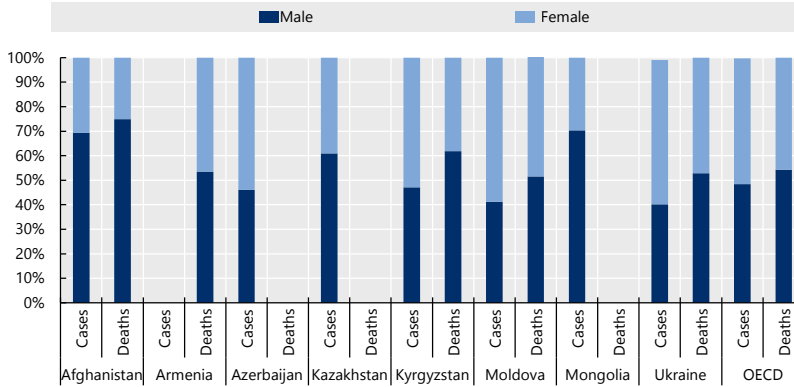
## **Agenda**

- The effects of COVID-19 on men and women
  - Health & care work
  - Domestic violence
  - Labour force participation
  - Gender pay gap
- Women's resilience to the adverse effects of the pandemic
  - Women's vulnerable standing in the labour market
  - Limited financial inclusion and literacy
- Endangering an inclusive recovery
  - Women's participation in the public and private sphere
- Immediate measures for men and women alike



## COVID-19 has brought forth immediate public health effects on men and women

### COVID-19 cases and deaths disaggregated by gender



Figures show that men have experienced a **higher incidence of serious illness and death rates** from COVID-19, resulting from:

- Weaker immune systems and pre-existing conditions
- Lifestyle & behavioural factors (*masculinity*)
- Outbreaks amongst male labour migrants

Sources: HDX, 2020; Curley, 2020; Ragonese, 2020

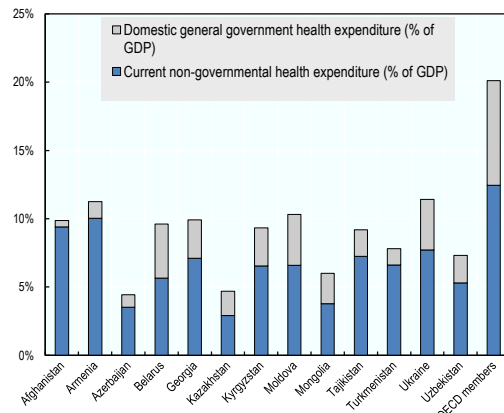


## Yet the pandemic is affecting women in a more complex and long-lasting manner - essential healthcare has been reduced and remains expensive (1/5)

### Reduced access to essential health services

- **Resources are being diverted** from already strained areas
- **Maternal deaths** are expected to rise by 8-38%
- Difficulties in accessing **sexual & reproductive health** services
- **Disruption of NDC** services
- **Conflict-affected regions struggle more**
- **Healthcare is expensive & its access unequal**

### Composition of healthcare expenditure in Eurasia compared with OECD countries, 2018

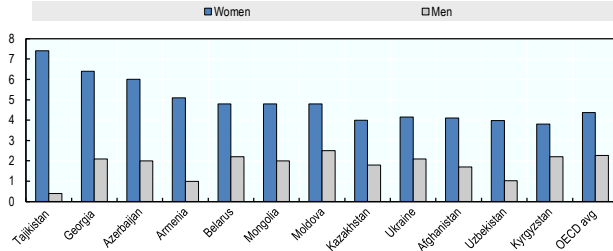


Sources: World Bank, 2018



## COVID-19 risks enhancing unpaid care work for women and puts care workers at a greater risk of contamination (2/5)

Distribution of unpaid care work between women and men



- In Ukraine women carried out 3 times more care work, **rising to 4-5 times**
- **56% of women** in Eurasia stated their additional domestic burden affected their work
- In Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, **80% of women reported a rise in chores**, compared with 58% of men

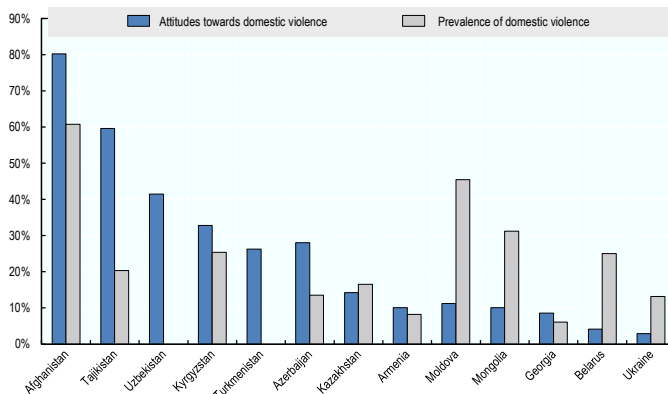
### Enhanced contamination risks for care workers

- COVID-19 has uncovered **structural shortcomings** of the region's care sector
- **Women make up the majority of front-line** healthcare and social workers across the region
- **Shortages of protective supplies** lead to higher infection risks
- Women carry a greater responsibility whilst **caring for elderly and vulnerable** populations



## Particularly women and children are feeling the effects of the *shadow pandemic* – with sharp increases in domestic violence (3/5)

Prevalence of intimate partner violence (IPV) and attitudes justifying IPV, 2019



### COVID-19 effects on IPV rate

- **Tolerance and acceptance of IPV remain high**
- Reporting of IPV went up **by 50-90%**
- **Stricter control by abusers** during lockdowns
- Central Asian countries were already experiencing some of the **highest rates of IPV in the world**
- Lack of **legal and institutional protections**
- **Access to shelters has been reduced**

Sources: OECD, 2019 (SIGI)

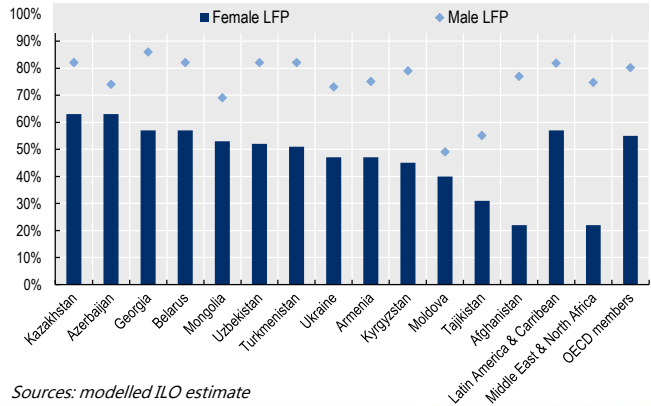


## Women could drop out of the labour market at a faster pace – this is not good news for Eurasia countries (4/5)

### Women's labour force participation is in decline

- **Women's labour force participation has been in decline across the region**
  - In 2019, **LFP** in Eurasia stood at 53% for women compared to 71% for men
  - **Childcare** remains an issue
- **Unlike previous recessions**, women's employment tends to be more affected by COVID-19:
  - With childcare reduced and female sectors affected, women are **experiencing higher unemployment rates than men**
  - **Informal norms and social practices** in Eurasia encourage women into home/family-based occupations

**Male and female labour force participation, 2020**

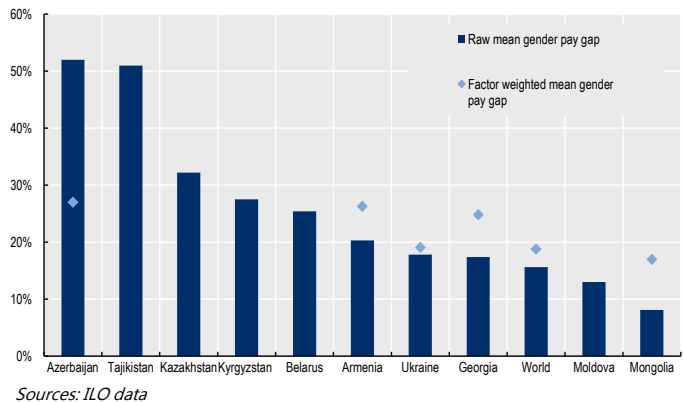


## COVID-19 effects could kick off a vicious cycle and widen the gender pay gap across the region (5/5)

### COVID-19 effects on the gender pay gap

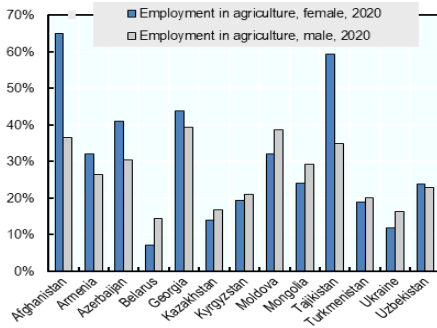
- Pre-crisis, the **pay gap** ranged from 8% in Mongolia to over 50% in Tajikistan and Azerbaijan
- Women in the region tend to work in lower paid positions, **earning 30% less than men** on average
- Due to **rising unemployment rates, reduced working hours and pay cuts**, the gender pay gap risks being widened further
- Dramatic increases in the **unpaid care gap** can motivate women to exit the labour market

**The gender pay gap in Eurasia**



## Women face challenging conditions to counter the crisis (1/2) - as they are employed in hard-hit sectors & prone to working in vulnerable positions

**Employment in agriculture, % of total employment, 2020**



Sources: World Bank, 2020

### Women work in vulnerable positions and sectors

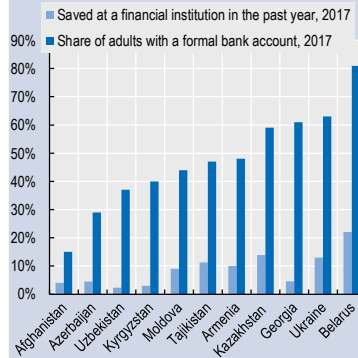
- Due to a **lack of reliable childcare services** and gender specific constraints, women tend to work in vulnerable positions
  - Lower access to **social protection/ healthcare**
  - **Lower productivity**, limited fiscal resources and precarious employment
- Women tend to be employed in sectors such as **textiles, accommodation and food services**, which have been marked by the crisis
  - Particularly **workers in agriculture** (a sector with high informality and precarious working conditions) faced difficulties to make ends meet



## Women's financial inclusion and literacy remain low (2/2)

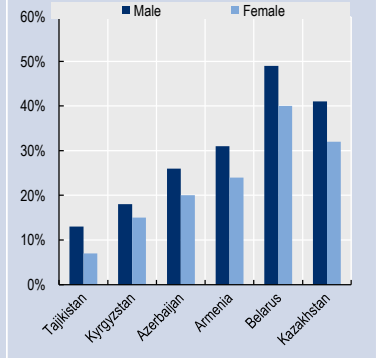
- Women are particularly **reliant on remittances**, mainly in Central Asia, which have dropped due to halted seasonal migration
  - 88% of Kyrgyz women reported a decline, compared to 47% of men
- **Financial inclusion and literacy among women remain low:**
  - **60% do not possess a bank account**
  - Women have **lower savings and limited access to credit and networks**
  - Difficulties in owning fixed assets & securing **collateral**

### Account ownership at a financial institution



Sources: World Bank, 2018; OECD, 2020

### Gender differences in financial knowledge



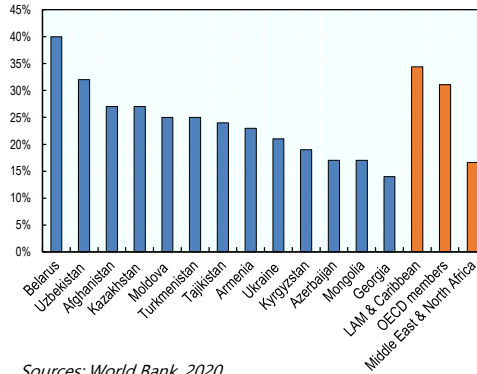


## Endangering an inclusive recovery – women’s participation in public life and the private sector remain limited

### Women are underrepresented in the private sector

- The number of **women in managerial positions varies widely** (15% in Tajikistan; 40% in Mongolia)
- **Female reps among top managers varies** from 2% in Azerbaijan to 33% in Belarus
- In EESC, **women account for 9% of Central Bank board members**, 15% of governing boards of trade unions, and **less than 15% of board members** of companies registered on the stock exchanges

**Proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments (2020)**



### Women’s participation in public decision-making is limited

- Across the region, **19% of parliamentary seats are occupied by women**, compared with 30.1% across the OECD
- **Women’s actual power in decision-making remains limited** by political, cultural and economic barriers
  - 62% of Eurasia’s population believe that men make better political leaders



## Immediate measures should be taken to support women and men recover from the lasting effects of the pandemic (1/2)

Priorities	Types of support	Policy options
Health	• <b>Greater focus on maternal and child health</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Telehealth initiatives and move services to schools/public spaces</li> <li>• Offer health and testing services free of charge</li> <li>• Increased prevention efforts and awareness campaigns</li> </ul>
	• <b>Upscale Eurasia’s healthcare</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Invest heavily in outdated and expensive healthcare systems</li> <li>• Implement a comprehensive and evidence-based public health strategy</li> <li>• Address regional inequalities by offering mobile clinics and care services</li> </ul>
Domestic violence	• <b>Readily accessible mechanisms to report abuse and receive support</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Virtual and free-of-charge psychosocial support</li> <li>• Widespread information / awareness campaigns for victims and perpetrators</li> <li>• Code words at go-to places and transformation of hotels into shelters</li> </ul>
	• <b>Better data collection on GBV</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More widely available anonymous complaint mechanisms &amp; regular surveys</li> </ul>
	• <b>Better legislation and stronger law enforcement</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Draft national gender strategy, in consultation with all relevant actors</li> <li>• Offer mental and physical health services, housing and income support, and access to legal and justice resources</li> <li>• Sign, ratify and implement the Istanbul Convention</li> <li>• Adhere to the Biarritz Partnership for Gender Equality</li> </ul>
	• <b>Coordinated efforts &amp; awareness campaigns and trainings</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coordination between health, police &amp; justice services, NGOs, international actors.</li> <li>• Collaborate with CSO &amp; integrate support mechanisms into health responses.</li> <li>• Provide specialised training to front-line police</li> </ul>



## Immediate measures should be taken to support women and men recover from the lasting effects of the pandemic (2/2)

Priorities	Types of support	Policy Options
Women's economic and political empowerment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Support in the uptake of unpaid care work</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Social policy tools (e.g. paternity leave) to encourage men's uptake of unpaid care work</li> <li>Affordable / free child-care and elderly care services</li> <li>Policies in the areas of infrastructure, social protection and the delivery of social services</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Expand gender-focused safety net</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Offer paid sick leave, unemployment insurance, targeted cash schemes, tax relief payments</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Offer targeted financial mechanisms for women employees/ entrepreneurs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Offer liquidity supports (grants/tax deferrals) to women-dominated sectors in particular</li> <li>Dedicate funding streams or reserved shares of loan programmes, coupled with non-financial support programmes such as business development services (consultancies/ trainings)</li> <li>Facilitate digital banking (fin. Literacy programmes)</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Enhance women's influence in the political sphere</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Boost equal access to public life, including politics, judiciaries, and public administrations for women (<i>OECD Recommendation of Council on Gender Equality in Public Life</i>)</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Enhance women leadership in the private sector</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Setting targets or quotas for women in executive positions</li> <li>Put in place trainings and mentorship programmes for women</li> <li>Offer support packages for families, including maternity / paternity leave (flexible working arrangements), skills training and retention schemes</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improve data collection</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Produce, collect and use sex-disaggregated data to design evidence-based policies</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Awareness campaigns</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Make public-private campaigns tackling gender stereotyping and norms</li> </ul>




### TACKLING CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19) CONTRIBUTING TO A GLOBAL EFFORT

# Thank you

For more information

 <https://www.oecd.org/eurasia/>

 <https://twitter.com/OECDGlobal>

 [Talisa.zurhausen@oecd.org](mailto:Talisa.zurhausen@oecd.org)



**TACKLING CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19)**  
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# “POLICIES TO SUPPORT WOMEN THROUGH THE CRISIS AND INSURE AN INCLUSIVE RECOVERY

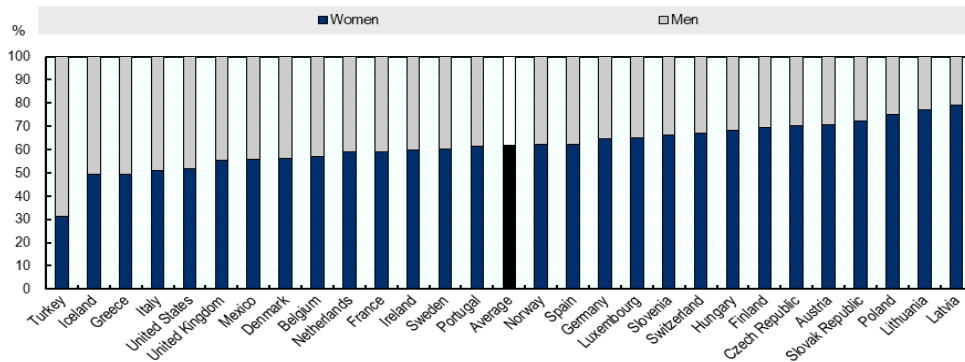
9 February 2021

**Willem Adema, D.Phil**  
Senior Economist, OECD Social Policy Division,  
Family, Gender & Housing policy team  
OECD



## Women make up a large share of employment in sectors most immediately impacted by COVID-19, e.g. retail

Distribution of employment in retail activities, by sex, 2018

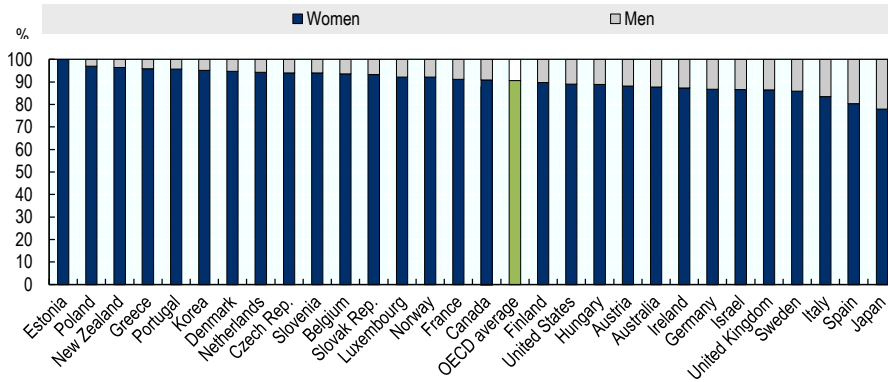


Note: Data refer to women's share of employment in ISIC Rev 4, category 47 (Retail trade, except of motor vehicles and motorcycles).  
Source: OECD calculations based on data from ILO ILOSTAT, <https://ilostat.ilo.org/data/>



## Women are often over-represented among essential service workers

Distribution of the long-term care workforce, by sex, 2016 or nearest year

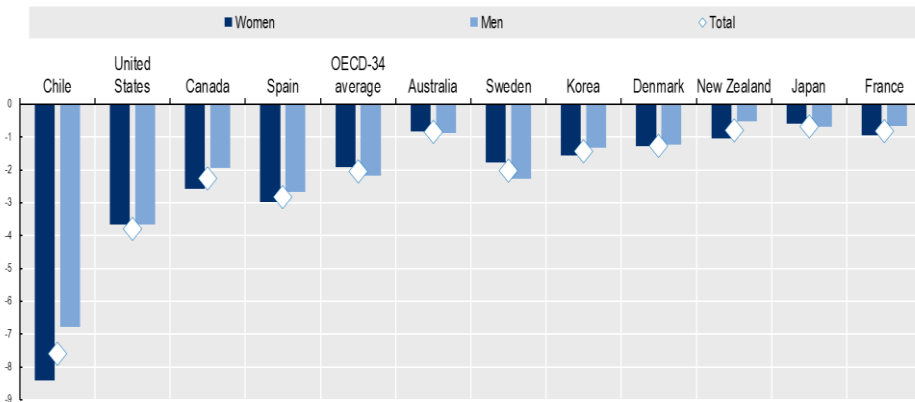


Notes: The OECD average is the unweighted averages of the 29 OECD members shown in the chart. EU-Labour Force Survey data are based on ISCO 4 digit and NACE 2 digit classifications. Data for Greece, Italy and Portugal are based on ISCO 3 digit and NACE 2 digit classifications. Data for Greece must be interpreted with caution because of small samples.  
Source: OECD (2020), Who Cares? Attracting and Retaining Care Workers for the Elderly, OECD Health Policy Studies, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/92c0ef68-en>.



## Across the OECD on average the decline in employment rates has been broadly equal for men and women

Percentage point change in employment rates between Q4 2019 and Q4 2020, 15- to 64-year-olds, by sex (Q3 2020 for European Countries)

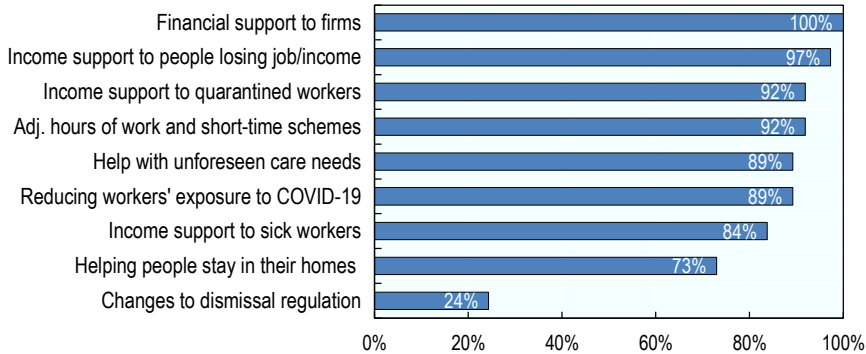


Source: OECD Short-Term Labour Market Statistics database, <http://dotstat.oecd.org/Index.aspx?DataSetCode=STLABOUR>, as accessed 6 February 2021.



## OECD Policy Responses to the COVID-19 Crisis: Labour Market and Social Policy Tracker

### Share of OECD countries that have introduced (or announced) new measures or expanded existing ones in response to COVID-19



Source: OECD (2020), "Supporting people and companies to deal with the Covid-19 virus: Options for an immediate employment and social-policy response", ELS Policy Brief on the Policy Response to the Covid-19 Crisis, OECD, Paris, <http://oe.cd/covid19briefsocial>.

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## Examples of emergency measures that are likely to be particularly valuable for women

### Workers facing job and income loss

- Increase the generosity of out-of-work benefits, and extend coverage to non-standard workers
- Provide easier access to benefits targeted at low-income families, in particular single parents
- Consider one-off payments to affected workers

### Workers with care responsibilities

- Deliver alternative public care for the children of essential service workers
- Provide direct financial support to workers who need to take leave
- Offer emergency care supports, such as child care vouchers, to workers who cannot make other arrangements



## Examples of emergency measures that are likely to be particularly valuable for women (Contd.)

### Small businesses owners and the self-employed

- Set up dedicated financial facilities to help small businesses address the short-term consequences of the outbreak
- Ensure that the self-employed can access emergency financial measures, especially if they do not qualify for out-of-work benefits

### Victims and survivors of domestic violence

- Ensure health supports to survivors is not sacrificed as health systems move on to a “war mind-set”
- Make sure shelters and women’s centres remain open through lockdown
- Pro-actively engage with women and children at risk
- Use remote hearings to ensure that lockdown measures do not obstruct women’s access to justice



## OECD Policy Responses to the COVID-19 Crisis: Policy trackers



### OECD COVID-19 Country Policy Tracker

<https://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/country-policy-tracker/>



### OECD Labour Market and Social Policy Tracker

<http://www.oecd.org/social/COVID-19-Employment-and-Social-Policy-Responses-by-Country.xlsx>



### OECD Fiscal and Monetary Policy Tracker

[https://oecd.github.io/OECD-covid-action-map/data/CoronavirusUpdate\\_AllCountries\\_Public.xlsx](https://oecd.github.io/OECD-covid-action-map/data/CoronavirusUpdate_AllCountries_Public.xlsx)



### OECD Health Systems Response Tracker

<http://www.oecd.org/health/COVID19-OECD-Health-System-Response-Tracker.xlsx>



## Further information



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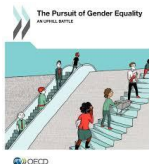
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# TOWARDS GENDER-INCLUSIVE RECOVERY

9 February 2021

**Pinar Guven**  
Policy Analyst  
Public Governance Directorate, OECD



## Public governance for gender equality

### Disproportionate impact of COVID-19 calls for a dual approach:

- targeted action
- gender mainstreaming

### Gender-responsive governance important to:

- prevent furthering inequalities
- tackle deeply-rooted stereotypes and inequalities

### Pandemic presents an opportunity to:

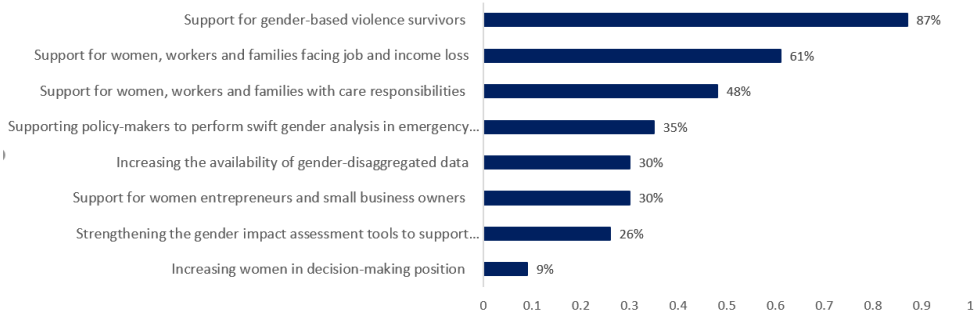
- design inclusive approaches to recovery
- strengthen governance institutions and process for gender equality

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## Governance for bouncing forward to gender equality: *Priorities*

What are the three major challenges that your institution encounters in its efforts to provide an effective response to the crisis?



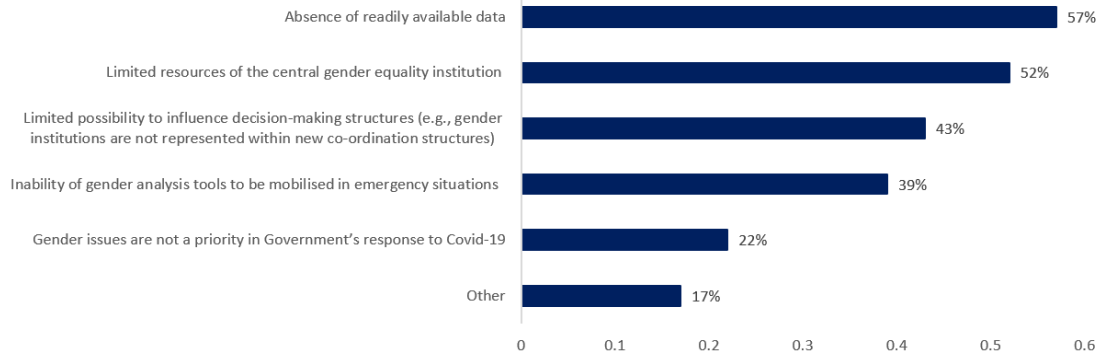
26





## Governance for bouncing forward to gender equality: *Challenges*

What are the three major challenges that your institution encounters in its efforts to provide an effective response to the crisis ?



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## Governance for bouncing forward to gender equality: *Promising practices*

- Use gender mainstreaming processes and tools
- Strengthen coordination and consultation mechanisms
- Integrate gender-inclusive policies into emergency management plans
- Ensure that decision-making processes are inclusive and representative
- Monitor and evaluate pandemic responses from a gender perspective

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## Governance for bouncing forward on gender equality: *Towards Recovery*

- Integrate gender equality into recovery strategies
- Use government tools (e.g., budget, regulations) to support gender equality outcomes
- Strengthen data availability and infrastructure for evidence-based policy-making



## OECD resources to support gender-sensitive recovery

- OECD policy brief “**Women at the core of the fight against COVID-19**”
- OECD policy brief “**Towards gender-inclusive recovery: leveraging the role of the state and government tools**” (*forthcoming*)
- OECD Recommendation on **Gender Equality in Education, Employment and Entrepreneurship** (2013)
- OECD Recommendation on **Gender Equality in Public Life** (2015)
- OECD [Gender Portal](#)



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