

## ► Policy Tool

UN Women – ILO Joint Programme Promoting Decent Employment for Women through Inclusive Growth Policies and Investments in Care

March 2021

# Assessing the gendered employment impacts of COVID-19 and supporting a gender-responsive recovery<sup>1</sup>

## A country-level policy tool

### Key points

- ▶ The gendered employment policy tool offers analytical frameworks and data suggestions to enable assessment of the gender differentiated employment effects of the COVID-19 crisis at the country level. It also identifies policy options to promote gender-responsive national employment strategies.
- ▶ The tool considers interactions between the paid and the unpaid economy and is organized in several steps.
- ▶ First, it provides a checklist of questions and indicators to help in mapping the gender structure of a particular economy with emphasis on pre-existing gender inequalities in labour markets
- ▶ Second, it shows how to trace the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on women's employment and working conditions relative to men, differentiating by types of risk.
- ▶ Third, it discusses policy options to support gender equitable employment outcomes and distinguishes between short-term measures and medium-term measures.
- ▶ Fourth, it develops an organizing principle for tailoring policy responses to specific gender employment structures and socio-economic contexts.

## ► I. Introduction

### The purpose of this tool

The aim of this policy tool is to provide support to ILO and UN Women country offices on the analytical framework and data needed to:

<sup>1</sup> This policy tool was prepared by Marzia Fontana and benefited from comments by Valeria Esquivel, Employment Policies and Gender Specialist, ILO and Anuradha Seth, Senior Advisor, Gender and Macroeconomics, UN Women. The views and suggested approaches in this publication do not necessarily represent the position of funding partners.

- assess the immediate gendered employment impact of the containment and mitigation measures deployed by governments to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic and
- identify policy priorities in the short and medium term to promote a gender-responsive recovery.

The tool is conceived as a stand-alone diagnostic guide but can also be used as a complement to the ILO's Rapid Diagnostic Assessment (RDA),<sup>2</sup> of which it strengthens the gender analytical lens. The tool builds also on other documentation on gender and COVID-19 recently produced by the UN Women and the ILO.<sup>3</sup> Data examples and case studies are provided whenever possible.

### What this tool is

The tool proposes a checklist and indicators to help in constructing **a map of the gendered structure of a particular economy with emphasis on pre-existing gender inequalities in labour markets**. This map would highlight specific vulnerabilities and include information on the main barriers to women's access to decent jobs, taking into account a country's economic structure and social context. **This map can be used as a 'baseline' to assess how the COVID-19 crisis is impacting women's employment and working conditions relative to men, differentiating by kinds and degrees of risk**. This constitutes the main component of the exercise and is aimed at documenting the extent to which gender inequalities in the labour market are being exacerbated by the pandemic. The purpose of the data analysis is to inform a better understanding of what needs to be done to protect workers and promote decent jobs to enable a gender-responsive economic recovery.

The tool also provides an indication of policies needed to foster structural transformation trajectories that are conducive to the full realization of women's and men's economic rights. Changes in sectoral structure as economies evolve out of the pandemic will have gender implications because of different female/male employment intensities in sectors and occupations, and gender bias in norms and institutions which may hinder the achievement of greater equality. A gender employment assessment would aim **to identify policies both for improving working conditions in economic sectors where women already work in large numbers and promoting greater inclusion of women workers in new promising sectors, thus widening their opportunities**.

### An economy-wide perspective

The tool is informed by an economy-wide perspective which includes both the paid and the unpaid economy. This perspective is important in its own right, as a core feature of any gender-aware economic analysis. It is especially relevant to the present assessment because crises such as COVID-19 tend to shift the boundaries between the paid and the unpaid – what gets produced in the market (and by whom) and what must be provided at home (and by whom), with important socio-economic implications. **Reports of the initial impact of the crisis on gender distribution of both paid and unpaid care work indicate a reinforcement of existing gender bias in both labour markets and within homes in several countries,<sup>4</sup> thus giving urgency to policy measures for preventing cycles of negative interaction between paid and unpaid work.**

<sup>2</sup> ILO, 2020. "Rapid Diagnostics for Assessing the Country Level Impact of COVID-19 on the Economy and Labour Market – Guidelines". ILO Technical Brief. [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/--ed\\_emp/documents/publication/wcms\\_743644.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/--ed_emp/documents/publication/wcms_743644.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> United Nations, 2020. "The impact of COVID-19 on Women" UN Secretary-General's Policy Brief, April 2020. New York: United Nations. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2020/04/policy-brief-the-impact-of-covid-19-on-women>. UN Women, 2020. "Addressing the economic fallout of covid-19: pathways and policy options for a gender-responsive recovery". Policy Brief N.15. New York: UN Women <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2020/06/policy-brief-addressing-the-economic-fallout-of-covid-19>. ILO, 2020. "A gender-responsive employment recovery: Building back fairer". ILO Policy Brief [https://www.ilo.org/emppolicy/pubs/WCMS\\_751785/lang--en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/emppolicy/pubs/WCMS_751785/lang--en/index.htm)

<sup>4</sup> ILO, 2020. "A gender-responsive employment recovery: Building back fairer". ILO Policy Brief [https://www.ilo.org/emppolicy/pubs/WCMS\\_751785/lang--en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/emppolicy/pubs/WCMS_751785/lang--en/index.htm). UN Women, 2020. "COVID-19 and the care economy: immediate action and structural transformation for a gender-responsive recovery". Policy Brief N.16 New York: UN Women <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2020/06/policy-brief-covid-19-and-the-care-economy>

## The COVID-19 crisis

Since the WHO declared COVID-19 to be a global pandemic in March 2020, governments in both the global North and global South have locked down cities and countries, and imposed travel restrictions and bans of public gatherings, with significant effects on people's livelihoods and economic and social life. Some of these restrictions are being gradually relaxed, and some other restrictions are re-instated, depending on the severity of the virus. In most cases these restrictions are accompanied by a range of economic support measures aimed at preventing long lasting damage and facilitating economic recovery. Strategies vary across countries, and public responses are uneven and rapidly evolving, depending on a country's exposure to the virus, its institutional and fiscal capacity as well as governments' political orientation. According to the new global gender tracker, a database developed by UN Women and UNDP that tracks policies introduced by governments to deal with the COVID-19 crisis, most countries so far are failing to adequately address women's needs in their social protection and jobs responses to the pandemic.<sup>5</sup>

As reported in the 6th ILO Monitor, as of September 2020, the vast majority of the world's workers continued to be affected by some kind of workplace closure. The ILO Monitor estimates that there was more than a 17 per cent decline in global working hours during the second quarter of 2020 (compared with the fourth quarter of 2019), which is equivalent to 495 million full-time jobs.<sup>6</sup> The effects of both initial containment measures and mitigating measures are being experienced differently by different groups of people, depending on the economic structure and conditions of their country, on how they earn their living and where they live, their gender, ethnicity and migration status as well as other factors. Preliminary assessments show that the negative impact of COVID-19 and related interventions are exacerbating income and wealth inequalities as well as inequalities of opportunities and outcomes in many countries.<sup>7</sup>

## Women bear the brunt of the crisis

**Women everywhere are bearing the brunt of this crisis because of the compound effect of many factors.** They are at higher risk of job losses not only because they are disproportionately employed in sectors highly affected by the lockdown (such as accommodation and food services, and retail trade) but also because they tend to be the first to be dismissed in any sector, due to their more tenuous employment situation relative to men (i.e. their lack of seniority and/or greater prevalence of new and diverse forms of work). Moreover, they are at higher risk of physical and mental distress because they are overrepresented among key workers in the health and care sectors workforce, and face higher demands on their unpaid care work due to temporary closure of schools and care provision facilities, as well as reduced availability of non-COVID related health services.

For example, in the United Kingdom, figures reported in *The Guardian* indicate that at the end of May 2020, mothers were 47 per cent more likely than fathers to have permanently lost their job or quit since the start of the crisis. *The Guardian* article also reports cases of pregnant healthcare workers who said they had been pushed into working during the crisis, while others complained of being laid off, suggesting, in both cases, an erosion of employment rights for pregnant women. In the meanwhile, the UK early child education and care sector, in which 97 per cent of the workforce is female, is on the brink of collapse.<sup>8</sup> In India, a number of sources reported that the working conditions of front-line health workers such as the Accredited Social Health Activist (ASHA) and *Anganwadi* workers, have become particularly hazardous. These

<sup>5</sup> See <https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/news-centre/news/2020/undp-and-un-womens-newly-launch-covid-19-global-gender-response.html>

<sup>6</sup> ILO, 2020. *ILO Monitor: COVID-19 and the world of work. Updated estimates and analysis*. Sixth Edition. Geneva: ILO. [https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/coronavirus/impacts-and-responses/WCMS\\_755910/lang--de/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/coronavirus/impacts-and-responses/WCMS_755910/lang--de/index.htm)

<sup>7</sup> Belser, Patrick. 2020. "COVID-19 cruelly highlights inequalities and threatens to deepen them" Comment Geneva: ILO. [https://www.ilo.org/moscow/news/WCMS\\_740101/lang--en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/moscow/news/WCMS_740101/lang--en/index.htm); Blundell, R. et al. 2020 "COVID-19 and Inequalities" *Fiscal Studies*, vol. 41, no. 2, pp. 291–319 (2020) 0143-5671; IMF. 2020. "Without help, low income developing countries risk a lost decade", IMF Blog, August 2020. <https://blogs.imf.org/2020/08/27/covid-19-without-help-low-income-developing-countries-risk-a-lost-decade/>. Sen, Kunal. 2020. "Five ways coronavirus is deepening global inequality" UNU-WIDER Blog August 2020. <https://www.wider.unu.edu/publication/five-ways-coronavirus-deepening-global-inequality>

<sup>8</sup> "COVID-19 crisis could set women back decades, experts fear" *The Guardian* 29th May 2020; "Women bear brunt of Covid-related work stress, UK study finds" *The Guardian* 9th October 2020.

workers are overwhelmingly women. Not only are they facing high risk of infection due to lack of personal protective equipment (PPE), but they have also become targets of attacks as they go on their daily household visits to assess the spread of the disease.<sup>9</sup> Still in India, a study of individuals surveyed during the strict nationwide 'lockdown' in April 2020 finds that, of the women and men who were employed pre-lockdown, women were about 20 per cent less likely to be employed than men.<sup>10</sup> The same study finds that hours spent on domestic work increased for both women and men, but the increase was higher for women. Similar evidence on the disproportionate increase of unpaid domestic work and care experienced by women is found in other countries such as Argentina, Turkey and Spain.<sup>11</sup>

**Some women are at a significant disadvantage**, such as those who are migrants or refugees; those who are in the most insecure forms of informal employment where 'social distancing' is impracticable (e.g., personal care workers);<sup>12</sup> and those with problematic family situations due perhaps to their children and other relatives' special care needs or/and exposure to domestic abuse.

For all these reasons, it is important that employment impact assessments expose this diversity of circumstances and take account of how gender intersects with other sources of vulnerability to determine terms of inclusion in (or exclusion from) labour markets. **To avoid reproducing gender and other inequalities, policies for economic recovery must pay attention to the causes of pre-existing unequal gender patterns in the world of work and address structural constraints inhibiting women's access to decent jobs.**

This policy tool is organized as follows. Section II recalls the constitutive elements of the ILO's RDA. Section III uses the RDA as a starting point to develop a detailed gendered employment diagnostics and is further divided in subsections outlining four main steps. Section III.a describes indicators and data needed to construct the statistical picture of an economy as gendered structure and section III.b shows how to trace gender-differentiated employment effects of COVID-19 by type of risk (e.g., not only risk of employment loss but also higher risks of disease exposure and deteriorating working conditions for those women continuing to work). Section III.c is about examining interactions between paid and unpaid work. Section III.d identifies challenges likely to be faced by especially vulnerable groups of female workers. Section IV offers guidance on policy measures that can be used to inform a gender-aware approach to recovery efforts focusing on both short-term and medium-term policy responses. It emphasises that short-term policy measures must be conceived as building blocks towards more equitable medium-term development strategies. Section V summarises key points.

## ► II. Main elements of the RDA for country-level labour market impacts of COVID-19

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In order to assist country offices in conducting real-time assessments of the employment effects of COVID-19, the ILO has developed a rapid diagnostics tool,<sup>13</sup> which, as shown in figure 1, is organized around four main areas including: 1. Overview of socio-economic situation, 2. Labour market transmission mechanisms, 3. Identifying workers most at risk and 4. Policy responses.

<sup>9</sup> "India's Army of 600,000 Virus-Hunting Women Goes on Strike" Bloomberg, 6<sup>th</sup> August 2020. <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-08-06/india-s-army-of-600-000-virus-hunting-women-goes-on-strike>

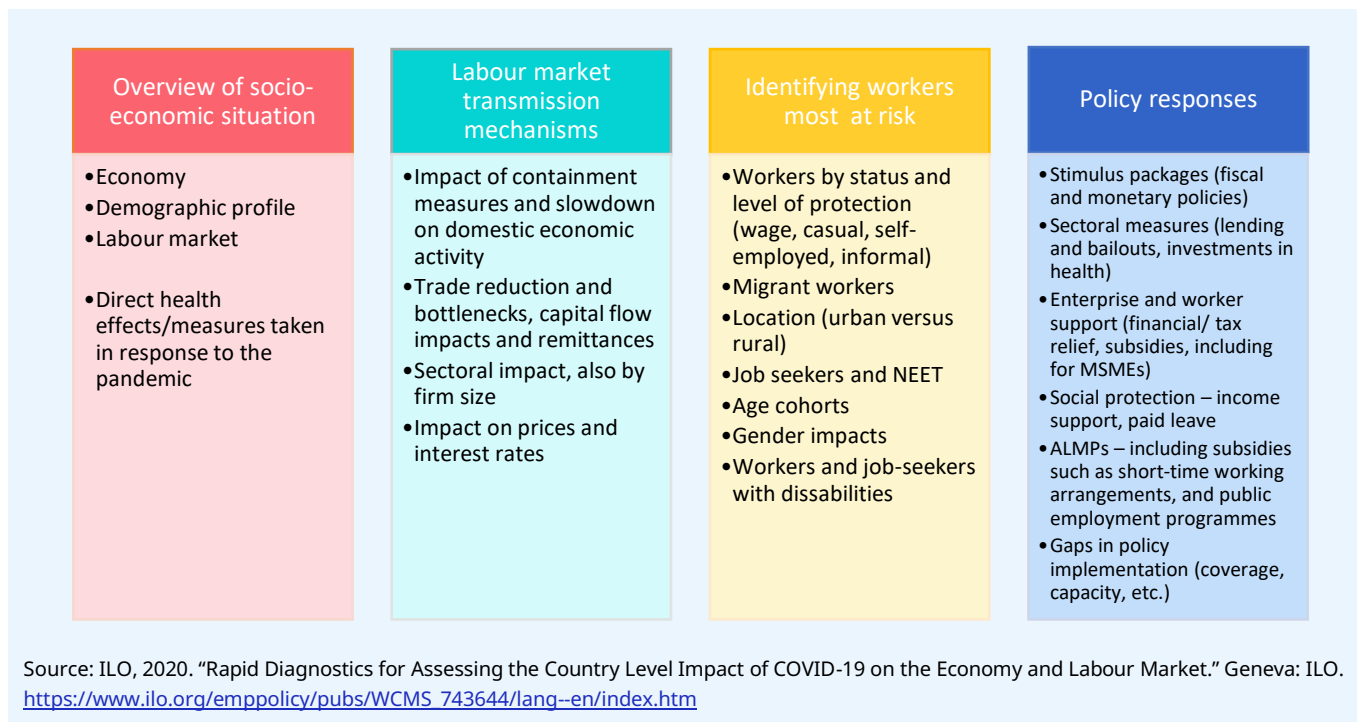
<sup>10</sup> Deshpande, A. 15 June 2020, "The Covid-19 Pandemic and Lockdown: First Effects on Gender Gaps in Employment and Domestic Work in India" Ashoka University Discussion Paper in Economics N.30. In absolute terms, more Indian men lost employment than women (due to large pre-existing gender gaps in employment) but, in relative terms, women were more likely to have lost their job due to the lockdown.

<sup>11</sup> ILO, 2020. A gender-responsive employment recovery: Building back fairer. Policy Brief. Geneva: ILO.

<sup>12</sup> The ISCO 53 occupation 'personal care workers' is the most female dominated occupation in the world (88 per cent of workers in this occupation are women as documented at <https://ilostat.ilo.org/these-occupations-are-dominated-by-women/>).

<sup>13</sup> ILO, 2020. "Rapid Diagnostics for Assessing the Country Level Impact of COVID-19 on the Economy and Labour Market." Geneva: ILO. [https://www.ilo.org/empolicy/pubs/WCMS\\_743644/lang-en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/empolicy/pubs/WCMS_743644/lang-en/index.htm)

► Figure 1. Four sections of a rapid diagnostics



In a first step, the socio-economic overview is intended to offer insights into the economic structure of a country and the demographic characteristics of its population, the extent of the pandemic and related immediate responses as well as key features of its health sector and its resilience. In a second step, the description of labour market transmission mechanisms identifies both direct and indirect channels, and aims to highlight sectors and occupations that have been especially affected either by the 'lockdown' directly or by disruptions in supply chains, travel, remittances and declining global demand. Ideally, this description would pay particular attention to the nature and extent of deterioration in working conditions and/or job availability by employment status, gender and age. The third step, involving identification of workers most at risk, goes further, by deepening our understanding of the specific vulnerabilities of, and challenges for, particular categories of workers, due for instance to their gender, migration status, disability and/or place of residence. Finally, the analysis of policy responses is meant to document the range of planned measures in the short to medium run— such as governments' overall support packages, targeted sectoral interventions, social protection and active labour market policies—and to identify gaps in policy design and implementation.

Building on this RDA, the gendered employment tool described in the following sections uses a similar framework to suggest additional analytical insights and questions to help further illuminate possible gender dimensions in each of these four areas.

### ► III. Assessing gendered employment impacts of COVID-19

Considering the economy as a gendered structure is a common starting point of feminist economic analysis. The concept of economies as gendered structures emphasises that economies comprise both a paid economy, the output of which is counted as contributing to economic growth as measured by GDP, and an unpaid economy, which supplies services directly concerned with the daily and intergenerational reproduction of people, through their care, socialisation, and

education.<sup>14</sup> **The statistical picture of the economy as a gendered structure, if appropriately disaggregated in terms of production sectors and workers' characteristics, can provide a useful baseline from which to understand the gender direct and indirect employment effects of the COVID-19 crisis.** By highlighting pre-existing inequalities in labour markets, it can help assess whether proposed policy responses are contributing to redress gender-based bottlenecks to women's access to decent work opportunities, and identify remaining gaps.

**Special attention needs to be paid to gender differentials in jobs and conditions of work in sectors affected by different types and degrees of disruption.** For example, there are sectors that had to shut down or significantly slow down, due to direct or indirect causes (i.e. the sectors that the ILO COVID-19 Monitor rates as high-risk in terms of job losses such as the hospitality sector). Of these sectors that had to shut down, some might be able to recover more easily than others (e.g., some predicts that tourism and the arts will be negatively affected for a long time, whereas other subsectors might be more agile in adjusting). Other sectors have continued to function because they are deemed essential, but now operate under difficult conditions and greater exposure to infections (most notably the health and care sectors). Yet other sectors are emerging in new forms as people and economies adjust to the new circumstances (e.g., manufacturing of specific products such as hand sanitizers and face masks, food retail, on-line shopping).

**Women and men working in each of these sectors are likely to experience different risks related to: i. employment loss, ii. physical and mental health, and iii. erosion of labour rights and deterioration of working conditions.** These gender differences need to be traced and documented. The unpaid domestic sphere is experiencing significant disruption as well, with different effects on women and men, and different implications for their ability to **remain in the labour force and engage in paid employment.** It is therefore useful to also **document changes in both overall levels of unpaid work and its gender distribution, taking account of variation across family circumstances.**

This section shows how to build the foundations of this baseline in four main steps: Step 1. Building the 'pre-existing' gendered employment structure of an economy, Step 2. Identifying gendered employment impacts of COVID-19 by type of risk, Step 3. Considering interactions between paid and unpaid work, and Step 4. Including the most vulnerable workers.

## a. Step 1: Using available statistics to build the gendered employment structure of an economy

The concept of economies as gendered structures emphasises that economies comprise both a paid economy, the output of which is counted as contributing to economic growth as measured by GDP, and an unpaid economy, which supplies services directly concerned with the daily and intergenerational reproduction of people, through their care, socialisation, and education.<sup>15</sup> Unpaid care work is not counted as contributing to economic growth, but, as noted by Elson, it clearly makes an indirect unmeasured contribution, since, without this work, there would be no people to produce economic growth. Both the paid and the unpaid economy are characterised by gender inequalities, such as are manifest in the division of labour. Women have more limited access to paid jobs and occupations compared to men in the labour market and bear disproportionate responsibility for unpaid care and domestic work. Large businesses are often led by men, with few women also in decision making positions.<sup>16</sup> Households are subject to internal gender inequalities in income, consumption, asset ownership and decision-making.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>14</sup> UN Women, 2016. *Towards Gender Equality in Vietnam. Making Inclusive Growth Work for Women*, Hanoi: UN Women Viet Nam; Elson, D. and Fontana, M., 2019. 'Conceptualizing Gender-Equitable Inclusive Growth' Chapter 1 in *Gender Equality and Inclusive Growth: economic policies to achieve sustainable development*, D. Elson and A. Seth (eds). New York: UN Women.

<sup>15</sup> UN Women, 2016. *Towards Gender Equality in Vietnam. Making Inclusive Growth Work for Women*, Hanoi: UN Women Viet Nam; Elson, D. and Fontana, M., 2019. 'Conceptualizing Gender-Equitable Inclusive Growth' Chapter 1 in *Gender Equality and Inclusive Growth: economic policies to achieve sustainable development*, D. Elson and A. Seth (eds). New York: UN Women.

<sup>16</sup> ILO. 2019. Women in business and management: the business case for change / International Labour Office. - Geneva: ILO. [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/---publ/documents/publication/wcms\\_700953.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/---publ/documents/publication/wcms_700953.pdf)

<sup>17</sup> UN Women. 2019. *Progress of the World's Women 2019-20: Families in a changing world*. New York: UN Women.

**Building the statistical picture of a specific economy with attention to its gendered employment structure requires collecting and analysing data on several dimensions.** With regard to the paid economy, it requires sex-disaggregated data, not just on the quantity of employment, but also its quality. This would involve measuring the extent of gender-based occupational and sectoral segregation, types of employment contract, hours of work, workplace safety, gender earnings gaps as well as level of earnings. **As a general rule, it is preferable to choose statistics that capture terms of inclusion and give some indication of women's capacity to achieve goals rather than merely count how many women are in work.**

For instance, when the information is available, it is important to report not only employment to population ratios but also employment status (e.g., how many women relative to men are 'employers' vs. how many women relative to men are 'unpaid contributing family workers'). There is consensus in the literature regarding the heightened vulnerability of women who work as contributing family workers. Undertaking unpaid work on the family farm or enterprise does not provide women with direct access to either income or employment-related benefits and is unlikely to challenge their subordinate position within the family. On the other hand, being an 'employer' often denotes management and decision-making power and greater entitlements and is an employment status rarely held by women. Importantly, sectoral analysis requires a focus on the proportion of women and men in each sector (the degree of sectoral feminization) as well as the position that women (and men) hold in the occupational hierarchy within each sub-sector.<sup>18</sup> Ideally, both occupations and sectors would be reported at a fine level of detail (e.g., at least two digit-level ISCO/ISIC code, preferably a higher digit-level).

Disaggregated data on financial governance and financial inclusion would also be critical for gender analysis, and it would be preferable to report the average size of loans women-led SMEs are able to borrow (and the interest rate they must pay), for example, rather than simply the 'proportion of small-scale industries headed by women with a loan or line of credit' (as in SDG 9.3.2).

Whenever possible, **data should be disaggregated not only by sex but also by other factors such as stage in the life cycle, place of residence (rural vs. urban), educational attainment and migration status of workers, to capture how gender intersects with other sources of disadvantage.** For example, it is widely documented that mothers of young children face a severe penalty in accessing quality jobs and earnings.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, globally, more than 30 per cent of all young women were not in employment, education or training (NEET) before the crisis, compared to about 14 per cent of young men. Women aged 15-24 face particularly high NEET rates in lower-middle income countries.<sup>20</sup> When in employment, women in this age range are overrepresented in less protected forms of work such as temporary and gig employment, which means greater exposure to the negative consequences of economic crises compared to other labour market participants. Fresh evidence from a few high-income countries indicate young women were indeed hardest hit by redundancies in the first stage of the COVID-19 response, when female-dominated sectors such as retail, hotels and hairdressing salons shut overnight.<sup>21</sup> Evidence from a number of low-income countries also documents the vulnerability of those women who, after retirement age, need to continue taking up (precarious) paid work, to avoid poverty, and simultaneously care for their older relatives. Older women are often among the caregivers responding to the pandemic, especially in contexts where health systems and long-term care provision are weak. Their vulnerability is therefore now exacerbated by their greater health risks from contracting the virus.<sup>22</sup>

Being an international migrant with low levels of formal education poses particular challenges for a woman, and often exposes her to occupational risks and stigma. The lower legal status often accorded to migrant women in hosting

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<sup>18</sup> Calculating aggregate indices of segregation such as the Duncan Index has limitations when women's employment is significantly lower than men's, as is the case in many countries. If the overall number of women working is small relative to the number of men, the Index would not accurately capture the degree of sectoral feminization.

<sup>19</sup> Addati, L., Cattaneo, U., Esquivel, V., Valarino, I., 2018. *Care work and care jobs for the future of decent work*. Geneva: ILO.

<sup>20</sup> ILO, 2020. "Preventing Exclusion from the Labour Market: Tackling the COVID-19 Youth Unemployment Crisis." ILO Policy Brief. [https://www.ilo.org/emppolicy/pubs/WCMS\\_746031/lang-en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/emppolicy/pubs/WCMS_746031/lang-en/index.htm)

<sup>21</sup> ILO, August 2020. "Youth & COVID-19: Impacts on jobs, education, rights and mental well-being". [https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/youth-employment/publications/WCMS\\_753026/lang-en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/youth-employment/publications/WCMS_753026/lang-en/index.htm)

<sup>22</sup> United Nations. May 2020 "The impact of COVID-19 on older persons" Policy Brief. New York: United Nations. <https://www.un.org/development/desa/ageing/wp-content/uploads/sites/24/2020/05/COVID-Older-persons.pdf>

countries in turn limits the claims they can make as workers, in terms of both their labour rights and access to public services. In Jordan, for instance, international migrants working in garment factories are entitled to a lower legal minimum wage than local workers and, in recent years, have often been subjected to violations in their workplace such as bullying and confiscation of passports and work permits.<sup>23</sup> Recent reports from factories manufacturing medical gloves in Malaysia seem to suggest increased exploitation of migrant workers while trying to meet production targets in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Violations of labour rights exposed by these investigations include low wages, excessive overtime, illegal deductions from workers' salaries, poor living conditions and lack of social distancing arrangements.<sup>24</sup> Ongoing accounts of the impact of COVID-19 on domestic workers in developing regions, many of whom are international migrants, report of many migrant domestic workers and cleaners trapped in host countries, with no income, no recourse to public funds and nowhere to go.<sup>25</sup> And the list goes on.

**With regard to the unpaid economy, statistics are required on unequal patterns of time spent on unpaid domestic and care work, as well as usage of services that can reduce such work, like electricity, water (in those countries that lack basic infrastructure) and care services.** These require time-use data, disaggregated by household income, place of residence and family composition whenever possible. Time-use surveys are the main source of these data, and countries are increasingly collecting them.<sup>26</sup> Data on public spending on social services, ideally combined with gender-disaggregated beneficiary assessments, can help in capturing the extent to which responsibility for care provision is distributed between families, the State and other institutions, and the extent of care deficits. Both the unequal gender division of unpaid domestic and care work and the availability of services to alleviate it are changing under COVID-19, mainly to the detriment of low-income women. **It is important to document the main factors that underlie the current intensification of unpaid work for women, and to monitor whether decisions over social spending allocations that are included in recovery measures are guided by gender equality and inclusiveness criteria.**<sup>27</sup>

Assembling all these data at the country level requires examining many sources and surveys. Labour Force Surveys, Household and Living Standards Surveys, Enterprise Surveys, Time Use Surveys, other surveys on more specialized issues (such as water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) or childcare provision) when available, and administrative data from relevant ministries, are all potential sources of sex-disaggregated data. Ideally, they should be used in combination with each other as well as other (non sex-disaggregated) data such as national accounts. Whenever possible, preference should be given to surveys that are conducted regularly and enable frequent updates. It is also good practice to supplement statistical snapshots with studies that examine the evolution and determinants of unequal gender patterns over time, when these are available. Rapid assessment surveys to corroborate initial findings and/or fill gaps on aspects not sufficiently explored in existing surveys should also be used.

The quality of statistical data is likely to vary considerably: some data are likely to be under-reported (e.g., the extent of informal employment) and some of the breakdowns (e.g., by migration status or disability) will be invariably difficult to obtain. It is therefore essential to complement and corroborate findings through a variety of other sources such as phone-based rapid surveys, broad-based stakeholder consultations and tripartite dialogue. In the longer term, it will be important to strengthen data collection efforts to better identify the nature of the impact of the crisis on the gendered structure of labour markets over time. It is also important to resist concluding there is no gender effect if it is not possible to quantify it. Even where they cannot be measured, qualitative arguments about such effects need to be taken into consideration.

<sup>23</sup> ILO, 2017. Jordan Decent Work Country Diagnostics. Beirut: ILO. For an update on the impact on COVID on women migrants working in garment factories see for example BetterWork Jordan blog ' BetterWork Jordan creates a lifeline for quarantined migrant workers. <https://betterwork.org/2020/04/30/better-work-jordan-creates-a-lifeline-for-quarantined-migrant-workers/>

<sup>24</sup> [https://www.business-humanrights.org/en/malaysia-top-glove-denies-migrant-workers-producing-ppe-are-exposed-to-abusive-labour-practices-covid-19-risk-incl-responses-from-auditing-firms?mc\\_cid=de441bc99f&mc\\_eid=a524409cfc](https://www.business-humanrights.org/en/malaysia-top-glove-denies-migrant-workers-producing-ppe-are-exposed-to-abusive-labour-practices-covid-19-risk-incl-responses-from-auditing-firms?mc_cid=de441bc99f&mc_eid=a524409cfc)

<sup>25</sup> WIEGO, 2020 "Domestic workers: Frontline care workers face COVID-19 challenges" WIEGO. <https://www.wiego.org/domestic-workers-frontline-care-workers-face-covid-19-challenges>

<sup>26</sup> This in particular as part of the SDGs Monitoring Framework, as target 5.4 calls for countries to "recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies". Monitoring indicator 5.4.1: "Proportion of time spent on unpaid domestic and care work, by sex, age and location" can be calculated from time-use data.

<sup>27</sup> As noted earlier, preliminary analysis of current measures taken by governments across the world suggests limited attention to unpaid care work. <https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/womens-empowerment/COVID-19-Global-Gender-Response-Tracker.html>



The checklist below provides questions, indicators and potentially useful data sources. This list is not exhaustive, and each team of researchers can adapt it to better suit the gender and socio-economic situation of their own country.

## STEP 1. List of questions and indicators

### Main questions

- Where did women work prior to the COVID-19 crisis?
- What were the most glaring pre-existing gender inequalities in both paid and unpaid work?
- How were these inequalities exacerbated for specific groups of women such as migrants, ethnic minorities, and women in different stages of the life cycle?
- What their specific challenges and constraints?

### Key indicators

#### Quantity and Quality of Employment

- Number of the employed by economic sector, employment status, occupation, disaggregated by sex, age, migration and disability status
 

Both sectors and occupations to be reported at the two-digit level of ISIC/ISCO, or higher-digit when possible (e.g. a high-digit classification is needed to identify female intensive manufacturing sub-sectors such as wearing apparel)

Desirable to have some of these disaggregations simultaneously, to allow cross-tabulations (e.g. how many women/men work as contributing family workers/own-account workers/employees in agriculture and non-agricultural sectors, respectively? What is the proportion of women/men who are migrant, by occupation?)
- Extent of informal employment by sector, disaggregated by sex, age, migration and disability status
 

Differentiating workers by employment status can offer a first approximation, given that all contributing family workers and most own-account workers, especially in agriculture, are informal.

As for employees, informality can be operationalized as a lack of social insurance coverage or of written contract. An increasing number of Labour Force Surveys report these data (although this info is less frequently found in low-income countries).

Information on informal workers by migration status is important but likely to suffer from under-reporting. Hence sources other than official statistics should be sought.
- Prevalence of of new and diverse forms of work (temporary, on-call work, dependent self-employment, etc.) by sex, age range (at least differentiating between 15-24 and 25+ age groups) and economic sector
- Unemployment/under-employment disaggregated by sex and age
 

Unemployment rates more relevant indicators for countries with well-developed labour markets and adequate social protection. In many developing countries both women and men cannot afford to be 'unemployed'. In such contexts, other indicators of labour underutilization (e.g. involuntary part-time work) more appropriate. In all cases, it is good practice to analyse sex-disaggregated statistics on unemployment/underemployment alongside other labour market indicators.

**Data sources:** Labour force surveys are the preferred source of data, but other household surveys may be useful too. Some household surveys have rich sets of questions on workers' access to resources and household characteristics that can provide more comprehensive information on the socioeconomic profile of workers.

**Other suggestions:** Use additional modules in LFS or other household surveys to better investigate challenges of those women who are under-employed and/or working poor (economic resources, formal education and skills, family circumstances including living conditions and caring responsibilities).

Complement statistical data with studies examining evolution and determinants of unequal gender patterns over time, when available

Analysing indicators alongside each other helps to shed light on key gender patterns and interdependencies.

### Earnings

- Hourly earnings by sex, occupation (and other disaggregations when the available data allow it).
- Both levels and gaps. This indicator can only be calculated for employees. Measuring gender differentials in earnings/profits for the self-employed more difficult, particularly for informal SMEs
- Average pay in female/male dominated occupations (e.g. cleaners/drivers)
- Proportion of women/men in any occupation, who are paid below two thirds (about 60 per cent) of the median hourly pay (this is the OECD definition for 'low pay')
- Relating female pay to the average cost of childcare can be a way of capturing the extent of options for working mothers when publicly subsidized childcare or free options do not exist

### Access to resources and opportunities

- For employees: access to on-the-job training and to opportunities for promotion by sex, age, migration and disability status
- For own-account workers and employers: proportion of women-headed SMEs with a loan and their average loan size; access to entrepreneurship skills and type of training (e.g. STEMS subjects? Or is training available to women entrepreneurs in stereotypically female fields such as hair dressing or sewing?)

**Data sources:** In addition to standard Labour Force Surveys and other household surveys, workers surveys and enterprise surveys can be a good source of data for both earnings and opportunities on the job. Surveys such as BetterWork worker surveys, for example, collect data not only on objective job characteristics but also on self-reported assessments regarding promotion prospects, quality of workplace facilities, working conditions and channels for communicating work-related concerns. Their drawback is that they are limited to one particular sector (e.g., garments) and based on small and not-representative firm samples. Establishment surveys are the most common source for the self-employed but likely to exclude small firms and informal sector firms. Therefore, gathering additional information from informal business networks or other organizations may be valuable.

### Distribution of unpaid work

- Hours spent on different unpaid domestic work and care activities (e.g. cooking, cleaning, person care) by sex and household type (e.g. what does existing literature say on policies or household circumstances that might change existing gender patterns of time use? what socio-economic household characteristics might be associated with more equal sharing between parents?)

### Access to services and infrastructure

- Access to water and sanitation infrastructure by income group and geographical location
- Access to childcare services by income group and geographical location, and by employment status of the mother if information available
- Access and use of health services by income group and geographical location
- Distance from health clinic by income group and geographical location
- Ownership as well as uses of mobile phones by sex

**Note:** These are selected examples; the choice of indicators will be highly dependent on a country income level and stage of development (e.g. access to physical infrastructure and safe transport are of greater relevance for low-income countries). Some of this information is available at the household level, not individual level, but still useful to understand gender dynamics.

### Linking data on time-use with access to infrastructure

Relating sex-disaggregated data on time-use with socio-economic characteristics of the people surveyed (in particular, their employment status), is useful for linking findings from TUSs to concrete spheres of policy action (e.g. enabling analyses of the correlation between availability/affordability of childcare and type of paid employment that mothers of young children can take on – if at all).

In low-income countries, reliable access to electricity, roads, and water infrastructure important not only to reduce the drudgery of unpaid work but also to ensure viability of small home-based enterprises

**Data sources:** Time use surveys alongside other household surveys. When it is possible, link them together.

## b. Step 2: Direct and indirect employment impacts: distinguishing sectors and occupations by kind of disruption

For the specific task of documenting the gendered employment effects of the COVID-19 containment measures and ensuing disruption in supply chains and global demand, the sectoral categorization used in the ILO COVID-19 Monitor constitutes a useful starting point.<sup>28</sup> This categorization ranks sectors by risk of closure, and hence job losses.<sup>29</sup> **It would need to be extended to take account other kinds of risk and the heterogeneity of workers within each broad economic sector.**

**Of particular gender significance is the question of whether women are at high risk of losing their job not only when they are over-represented in sectors suffering from drastic output decline, but also when they work in other sectors.** Women may be at higher risk than men of being dismissed also in sectors which are ranked by the ILO Monitor as medium or low risk, due to them being overcrowded in specific low status occupations. Women's higher risk of livelihood loss in any sector is related to the nature of their employment contract (more likely to be a temporary one with limited protections, than is the case for men) for those who are in wage work, and to gender-intensified barriers to finance and other productive assets for the self-employed.

At the other end of the spectrum, many of those women and men who continue to work in sectors ranked 'low-risk' are likely to be in jobs that directly involve dealing with diseases and infections and/or bring them into close contact with other people. They hence face other kinds of heightened risks. These dynamics too have gender connotations, as demonstrated by the examples from India and the UK cited in earlier sections.

### High-risk and medium-risk sectors

The ILO rated four sectors as being at high risk of severe impact in terms of job losses and declining working hours: accommodation and food services; real estate, business and administrative activities; manufacturing and the wholesale

<sup>28</sup> ILO, 2020. ILO Monitor: COVID 19 and the World of Work: updated estimates and analysis. Geneva: ILO There have been 6 editions of the ILO Monitor since April 2020.

<sup>29</sup> Specifically, the ILO COVID-19 Monitor ranks sectors based on expected decline in their output and activities using real-time economic and financial data. The sectors identified as suffering from a drastic fall in output, and hence at high risk, are: Accommodation and Food Services, Real estate, Manufacturing and Wholesale and retail Trade; Transport, storage and communication and Arts, entertainment and Other services are ranked as at medium-high risk; Construction, Financial and insurance and Mining are ranked as medium risk; Agriculture as low-medium risk; Utilities, Public administration and defence, Human health and social work activities, and Education are defined as low risk. It is acknowledged that sub-sectors within each of these broad sectors may have been affected to a greater or lesser extent. Further details on the methodology are provided in ILO Monitor: COVID 19 and the World of Work: updated estimates and analysis. 2nd edition. [https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/coronavirus/impacts-and-responses/WCMS\\_740877/lang-en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/coronavirus/impacts-and-responses/WCMS_740877/lang-en/index.htm)

and retail trade. The ILO Monitor reports that, globally, 40 per cent of total female workers are employed in these sectors, compared to 37 per cent of total male employment and that the proportion of women working in hard-hit sectors is particularly high in Central America (60 per cent), South-Eastern Asia (49 per cent), Southern Europe and South America.<sup>30</sup> At the country level, it would be useful to add more granularity to the analysis, by reporting employment data at the 2 or 3-digit level code. **It is possible for example that women do not constitute a high proportion of employment in manufacturing as a whole, but are heavily concentrated in a particularly hard-hit sub-sector such as export-oriented ready-made garments**, and have fewer alternatives in other sectors and occupations than men due either to social stigma or a lack of re-training opportunities.

**It is also possible that, in a particular country, women are not disproportionately employed in sectors which are classified at high risk of closure, but are still the workers likely to be first dismissed in such sectors because of greater precariousness in their job situation**—they may be employed in lower status occupations, have more tenuous contractual arrangements and/or be subject to employers' prejudice. This is an important piece of information, which could help in predicting the likelihood of women workers being included in job retention schemes and/or returning to work once existing job retention schemes end.

In some cases, women may be disproportionately employed in sectors ranked as low-medium risk, such as agriculture, but still be more at risk of hardship and job losses than men because of a lack of coverage from labour regulations (i.e., casual agricultural daily labourers) or gender-intensified restrictions to productive assets and trading networks. The issue of women cultivators is especially relevant to low- and medium-income countries with a significant agriculture base and is further discussed in the next section.

**A good way of gaining insights into these aspects involves monitoring changes in gender employment patterns (and working hours) by occupational hierarchy and/or type of contract alongside sectoral composition, based on the framework and disaggregations built in Step 1.** It would be useful to record whether, in each of these broad economic sectors, women work as wage workers or own-account workers (or contributing family workers), since, as noted, their employment status is another dimension likely to shape the terms and conditions of their participation and the different challenges they may face during the crisis. A point made by Elson et al. (2007) with reference to international trade is that gender inequality positions women as sources of competitive advantage (as cheap wage labour) rather than achievers of competitive advantage (as small entrepreneurs). This argument highlights that female business owners and own-account producers need more than just their own labour to weather the storm of the COVID-19 crisis, they also need access to finance, technology, social networks, markets, and support for their care responsibilities, all of which is structured by social and gender inequalities. On the other hand, wage workers who remain in work might disproportionately suffer from an erosion in their labour rights. It would be useful to trace changes in these aspects by sex and other factors, for example by conducting on-line rapid assessment sample surveys or phone interviews.

**Finally, it would be useful to gauge how many of the women who have lost their jobs are withdrawing altogether from the labour force, or postponing their entry without engaging in education or training, and what are the reasons for this.** This would involve measuring gender differentials not just in unemployment levels in the aftermath of the pandemic but also in employment-to-population ratios, in the NEETs rate for young people and in other measures of labour under-utilization such as numbers of 'available potential job seekers who did not actively seek out employment in a recent period, but would want employment'. Informant interviews could complement statistical data to help to identify what measures on the supply side are needed to facilitate the re-entry of women who feel discouraged from returning to paid work. Consultations should also aim to identify sectors and businesses where decent employment opportunities might be available for these women in the medium term. This issue is more relevant for a high-income country setting, whilst indicators such as time-related underemployment measured as 'persons working fewer hours than they would like to', or reliance on multiple jobs for survival,<sup>31</sup> might be more appropriate for capturing gender differences in distress and

<sup>30</sup> ILO, 2020. ILO Monitor: COVID 19 and the World of Work: updated estimates and analysis. Briefing Note. Second Edition and Fifth Edition.

<sup>31</sup> Typically, Labour Force Surveys report only the main occupation, but an increasing number of LFSs ask questions on whether the person has had additional jobs during a particular reference period.

hardship in a low-income country context. For example, a gender economic assessment of Viet Nam<sup>32</sup> found that, due to low productivity, poor earnings and seasonality, a higher share of women than men must rely on multiple jobs for survival. This share was highest in the poorest regions and for those women whose primary job was in agriculture.

**As real time data on ongoing worker-related emergency measures, such as job retention schemes and income support for the self-employed, become available, disaggregations by sex and economic sector could be used to document uptake of these measures.** As this whole discussion demonstrates, it would be vital to ensure that employers report the numbers of people they make redundant with breakdowns by sex and other protected characteristics. The extent to which the most disadvantaged workers are able to benefit from these first-cut assistance programmes is an important policy question and further discussed in later sections.

### Sectors at low risk of employment loss but with other risks

The ILO Monitor lists also sectors that are at low risk of closure such as human health and social work, education, public administration and defence and utilities. But workers in these sectors, especially in the health and social care sectors, face the highest risks in terms of exposure to the virus and their own mental and physical health. Many of these roles are categorised as ‘essential worker’ occupations, which means most workers in this group still have to work even in a ‘lockdown’ situation. **Regarding gender-employment effects in these sectors, it would be especially salient to document deterioration in any aspect of working conditions and whether any potential erosion of employment rights affects women more than men.** For example, it is possible that women encounter greater hostility, or indifference, from their employers when they raise concerns about safety at work. Although women constitute the majority of the total health and social workforce in many countries, they usually occupy positions of lesser authority than men (e.g., in South-East Asia, 79 percent of nurses are female but only 39 percent of physicians are female) and hence might be more hesitant in voicing their demands.

A ‘Jobs at Risk’ Index (JARI) has been developed by a UK-based think-tank to rank occupations that put workers most at risk of exposure to the virus. The index includes 273 different UK-based occupations according to numbers employed in each, the level of physical proximity that each job requires and the exposure to diseases or infections that each job entails.<sup>33</sup> It finds that women are the majority of workers with highest exposure to COVID-19 and ‘Nurses’ is by far the most at risk occupation. More specifically, of the 3 million workers in ‘high risk’ roles in the UK, 77 per cent are women.<sup>34</sup> Astonishingly, over a million of these workers are paid below 60 per cent median wages– what constitutes ‘low pay’ according to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) definition. **Women are 98 percent of these ‘essential’ workers on a low pay. This is a good example of the sort of indicators and analysis needed to expose gaps in decent work deficits and to inform a re-valuation of skills, occupational hierarchies and fair remuneration from a gender perspective in the recovery phase.**<sup>35</sup>

## STEP 2. List of questions and indicators

### Main questions

- Use the dashboard of indicators created in Step 1 as baseline
- Group data by sectors at risk according to the ILO COVID-19 Monitor ranking and monitor changes in selected indicators with special attention to:
  - Heterogeneity of risks and workers within each COVID-19 Monitor-ranked sector

<sup>32</sup> UN Women, 2016. *Towards Gender Equality in Vietnam. Making Inclusive Growth Work for Women*, Hanoi: UN Women Viet Nam.

<sup>33</sup> For example, Sales Assistants have a high proximity to others (scoring 69), but a low exposure to disease or infections (scoring 19). Nurses score high on both fronts: they involve high physical proximity (94) and a high exposure to diseases and infections (95).

<sup>34</sup> The Jobs at Risk Index (JARI): which occupations expose workers to COVID-19 the most? *Autonomy*, March 2020. <https://bit.ly/2wVsCVH>

<sup>35</sup> Grimshaw, D. and Rubery, J., 2009. “Undervaluing Women’s Work”. Working Paper Series 53 University of Manchester. [http://www.njl.nu/uploads/Paper\\_2007\\_Jill\\_Rubery.pdf](http://www.njl.nu/uploads/Paper_2007_Jill_Rubery.pdf)

- How are different risks gendered?

### Indicators by type of risk

#### Risk of employment loss and reduced working hours (apply to all sectors, not just high-risk sectors)

Indicators of special relevance could include (to be reported for each broad economic sector):

- Share of women in specific sub-sectors (e.g. export-oriented sub-categories of wearing apparel, especially exposed to world demand fluctuations) further disaggregated by migration status if possible
- Share of women in different occupational categories, further disaggregated by migration status and age group, when possible
- Share of women in new and diverse forms of work further disaggregated by migration status and age group, when possible
- Uptake of COVID job support schemes (job retention for wage workers and income support for the self-employed) by sex

#### Risk of erosion of working conditions and of occupational safety and health (apply to all sectors, but especially to sectors at low risk of closure)

Indicators of special relevance could include:

- Non-compliance rates regarding: payment of overtime, paid and sick leave, availability of PPE
- Adequate sanitation and washing facilities in the work-place
- Assistance with child care
- Provision of safe public transport to work

#### Risk of physical and mental health (apply to all sectors but especially to sectors at low risk of closure)

Indicators of special relevance could include:

- Occupational safety and health indicators (e.g. number of non-fatal and fatal injuries by sex and migration status)
- Number of referrals to occupational health by sex
- Self-reported assessments of workers' own health and well-being by sex and migration status
- Increase in total working hours (both paid and unpaid) by sex

**Data sources:** Start from indicators commonly used in Labour Force Surveys and Labour Inspection Manuals. High frequency labour force surveys are helpful, but the relevant information is likely to be sparse for many developing countries. Key informant interviews and social dialogue with various workers and employers representatives therefore crucial. Reports and investigations from networks such as Clean Clothes Campaign or research centres such as Business and Human Rights Resource Centre can be helpful. Administrative data (e.g. national tax and revenue authorities) are possibly a good source for uptake of job support measures. Impact on own-account workers at the margin of survival and contributing family workers is likely to remain the most difficult to document with statistical data (hence see Step 4).

## c. Step 3: Considering interactions between paid and unpaid work

The COVID-19 pandemic has increased the need for home-based unpaid care work, not only because of the decline in both public and paid private provision of various kinds of care (e.g. reduced capacity of schools) but also because more people are sick and need care. At the same time more women than men are losing their paid jobs and many more people, both women and men, are working from home. Previous crises have shown that when women lose their jobs in greater numbers, traditional gender roles tend to be reinforced, and this is already happening in the present crisis. Growing

evidence from a number of countries confirms that it is women who are currently shouldering more of the housework, home schooling and childcare than men.<sup>36</sup> This remains the case even when women must continue to carry out their paid work from home. In addition, an increasing number of people have had to become unpaid carers for sick or disabled relatives. All these trends need to be carefully monitored, by distinguishing between different household configurations.

**Attention needs to be given to the implications of these trends for women’s paid work** (and related household power dynamics). For instance, how does the intensification of unpaid work affect women’s opportunities for stable and secure paid employment either as wage workers or own account workers? Which gender is more likely to be able to keep/return to their jobs, or have the time to search for new jobs, when/if economic activities resume? And what about the intensified ‘time poverty’<sup>37</sup> and stress levels of essential health workers with caring responsibilities at home? And what about the tensions experienced by women who are expected to telework and attend to caring responsibilities full-time? How is their experience different from men who telework? How are employers addressing workers’ needs as carers? Are care support measures available for women who are self-employed? Is public transport adequate and safe enough to permit access to both care-related facilities and workplaces? Broad-based consultations with workers’ representatives, women’s organizations, employers and relevant ministries are needed to identify how to best respond to these concerns.

### STEP 3. List of questions and indicators

- Use the dashboard of indicators created in Step 1. Focus especially on indicators related to distribution of unpaid work, and availability of services and infrastructure
- **Strive to document changes in both unpaid work burdens and total work burdens**
- By sex, household characteristics (e.g. number of children and other non-working family members) and employment status of both mothers and fathers
- Distinguish, if possible, by:
  - Women/men in ‘on-site’ paid employment (e.g. essential workers)
  - Women/men in home-based paid employment (e.g. teleworking)
  - Women/men no longer in paid employment
- Correlate time use patterns with availability/affordability of care and other infrastructure
  - E.g. are childcare facilities/schools COVID-safe? How many care workers feel safe to return? How many households are sending children back? How do these decisions relate to mothers’ and fathers’ employment status?
  - Is usage of non-COVID-related health services restored?
  - Is public transport COVID-safe and women friendly?
  - What kind of public infrastructure would best help women with both their unpaid and paid work under current circumstances?

**Data sources:** High frequency labour surveys; Phone-based rapid surveys and similar innovative data collection methods; Real-time administrative data. Reports and investigations from women’s networks such as WIEGO. Key informant interviews and social dialogue with various workers and employers’ representatives essential.

<sup>36</sup> ILO, 2020. “A gender-responsive employment recovery: Building back fairer”. ILO Policy Brief.

<sup>37</sup> Time poverty could be defined as not having enough time for rest and leisure after taking into account the time spent working, whether pay or in unpaid care work. Defining the “necessary” time to be devoted to work for paid or to unpaid care work is the challenge in these measures. See for example the work at the Levy Economics Institute of Bard College at <http://www.levyinstitute.org/topics/time-poverty>

## d. Step 4: Including the most vulnerable women workers

The analysis of sex-disaggregated labour market data and other statistics, as well as the collection of new data and indicators, constitute an essential component of a gendered employment impact assessment. However, to get a fuller picture, additional nuances, through in-depth studies, are needed. New research must also be strengthened by broad-based consultations—to capture various stakeholders' views on the challenges they face.

**Women in the most precarious forms of informal employment** faced significant and diverse challenges prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, which have been worsened by the crisis. These women face multiple disadvantage not only because of their gender but also because their ethnicity, a lack of officially recognised skills and various kinds of social stigma. This compound disadvantage relegates them to the most insecure kinds of livelihoods. These are women who may also find it more difficult to organize as workers, and are less likely to be counted in surveys, hence contributing to their invisibility in both statistics and political arenas. As a result, they are at higher risk of falling through the net when policy **responses are designed and implemented**.

For example, rapid assessments carried out by WIEGO between March and April 2020 (involving interviews with both local member-based organizations and informal workers networks), highlighted the severe impact that the immediate policy responses to COVID-19 has had on women engaged in domestic paid work, across all regions of the world. WIEGO reported that many live-out and part-time domestic workers in Africa, the Middle East, Asia as well as Latin America were dismissed, because they were seen as unclean, due to their use of public transport and living conditions in low-income communities, and/or because their employers were now at home or unemployed. WIEGO also reports that very rarely has severance pay been offered. On the other hand, live-in domestic workers are kept in their jobs and are given heavier workloads, but no preventive measures are taken to reduce their exposure to health risks.<sup>38</sup>

In India, Mahila Kisan Adhikaar Manch (MAKAAM), a network of marginalized women cultivators, women farmers' collectives, researchers and activists, conducted a survey of 500 women farmers from various districts of Maharashtra and found that single rural women and farm widows were the worst affected by the 'lockdown'.<sup>39</sup> This is because their main source of livelihood is either agricultural casual daily wage labour or vegetable vending in local markets, both of which stopped because of the 'lockdown'. The few women involved in cane cutting were still on field sites, as sugar production comes under essential commodities, but were given no extra-protection to carry out their work. It seems none of these women have been able to benefit from the various support schemes announced by the central and the state governments because a lack of individual ration card and/or cumbersome documentation requirements which they find difficult to handle.

These examples are good illustrations of the kind of investigations needed to further our understanding of the specific circumstances of different categories of informal women workers. Marginalized women cultivators and women working for wages in domestic paid work represent just two of many categories of informal workers, each facing different forms and degrees of precariousness. The main challenges faced by female farmers often relate to their limited ownership of productive assets as well as their restricted access to knowledge, technology, services and markets, whereas the main challenges faced by paid domestic workers relate to their limited enjoyment of labour rights and the lack of established mechanisms to enforce them. **The COVID-19 crisis is exacerbating the struggle for livelihoods of both groups.**

Evidently, which groups are most vulnerable among women workers will vary depending on a country's economic structure and gender configurations. The identification of the categories of vulnerable women workers to be included in the gendered employment assessment must draw on broad-based consultations with women's organizations, worker organizations (where they exist), other civil society, representatives of relevant ministries and sectoral experts, giving special space to the voice of those women who are usually least represented.

<sup>38</sup> WIEGO, 2020. Informal Workers in the COVID-19 Crisis: A global picture of sudden impact and long-term risk. [https://www.wiego.org/sites/default/files/resources/file/Impact\\_on\\_livelihoods\\_COVID-19\\_final\\_EN\\_1.pdf](https://www.wiego.org/sites/default/files/resources/file/Impact_on_livelihoods_COVID-19_final_EN_1.pdf)

<sup>39</sup> Seema Kulkarni 'Locked in a crisis: concerns of rural women' *Economic & Political Weekly Commentary*, June 6, 2020 vol IV no 23.



## STEP 4. List of questions

- Which categories of women workers are most marginalized and vulnerable? Which women workers are most at risk (of job loss, disease exposure, or both)?
- How do factors such as migration status or disability intensify the challenges faced by particular categories of women informal workers during COVID-19?
- Do these groups have the ability to organize and mobilize?
- What are their main demands regarding jobs and working conditions? How best can they be supported by policy?

**Data sources:** Social dialogue with women’s networks such as WIEGO. Key informant interviews with civil society organizations. Phone-based rapid assessments.

## ▶ IV. Identifying policy priorities

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The assessment of the gendered employment effects brought about by the COVID-19 crisis (to be developed along the lines described in earlier sections) can be used to identify appropriate policy responses in both the short and medium term.

As the crisis evolves, so do measures taken by governments to tackle it. Some measures are ongoing, some may end soon, and some new ones will be planned, with considerable variation in both size and coverage of economic policy packages across countries’ income groups and economic structures. Governments’ emergency response since the start of the pandemic has largely involved adapting social assistance programmes and supporting enterprises and job retention. While this response has been vital to mitigate income losses in the immediate aftermath of the crisis, it is increasingly recognised that several own-account workers, temporary wage workers, and others with precarious entitlements (many of whom, as highlighted in previous pages, are women) have experienced difficulty in accessing assistance.<sup>40</sup> **In the short term, policies need therefore to address this gap in inclusion**, respond to emerging demands voiced by organizations of informal workers and informal business associations, and better protect the safety and rights of those women (and men) who continue to be in work or are asked to return to work. **Short-term measures should not be treated simply as ‘ambulance work’<sup>41</sup> but rather be conceived as building blocks towards gender equitable paths of structural transformation and decent jobs generation in the longer term.** Short-term measures are discussed in section IV.a. while policy priorities for the longer term are outlined in section IV.b. The optimal mix of policies will necessarily vary by socio-economic context. To help identification of policy responses tailored to specific gendered employment structures, section IV.c presents a summary of suggested measures by level of policy action and country typologies.

### a. Short-term policy responses

#### Improve safety and strengthen rights of essential workers, and other workers who are in work/returning to work

For those women who still have a paid job, their working conditions should not be eroded as a result of this crisis. As noted in earlier sections, since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, the erosion of working conditions and of occupational safety and health has been reported both in essential sectors such as health and social care, and in other sectors such as

<sup>40</sup> See for example the evidence reviewed in Section III under Step 4. Also, UNDP and UN Women, September 2020, *COVID-19 Global gender Tracker*. Factsheets. <http://UNDP-UNWomen-COVID19-Global-Regional-Factsheet-2020.pdf>

<sup>41</sup> M.Mazzucato and R.Skidelsky, July 2020 “Towards a new fiscal constitution” Project Syndicate. <https://www.project-syndicate.org/onpoint/new-fiscal-constitution-job-guarantee-by-mariana-mazzucato-and-robert-skidelsky-2020-07>

agriculture (e.g. seasonal vegetable and fruit pickers, many of whom are international migrants, on European farms)<sup>42</sup> and manufacturing (e.g. workers in factories producing medical gloves and other protective equipment in Asia). Recent investigations in a few high-income countries suggest that redundancies have been higher for those who were shielding or had care responsibilities.<sup>43</sup> Among informal workers in developing countries, many live-in domestic workers are often being given heavier workloads, but without protective equipment or preventive measures in their employers' homes.<sup>44</sup> There have also been reports of police harassment of street vendors and market traders, resulting in confiscation of goods, forced evictions and dismantling of street vending infrastructure in both Sub-Saharan Africa (Ghana, Kenya, South Africa, Zimbabwe) and India.<sup>45</sup>

There is clearly an urgent need to provide all these workers with adequate PPE and ensure safe workplaces and market infrastructure where good hygiene standards and principles of social distancing are applied. Workplaces need also to be free from harassment. Women may be particularly concerned about safety in the workplace and reluctant to return to work (e.g., in those instances in which businesses are gradually resuming) particularly if they have the additional responsibility of caring for family members at home.

In the face of these risks, informal worker organizations are mobilizing to provide support to their members.<sup>46</sup> This has included, for example, developing health and hygiene guidelines tailored to the needs of specific groups of women workers and translated in many languages, as well as providing masks, soap and water points. Moreover, member-based organizations such as Women in Self Employment (WISE) in Ethiopia and El Sindicato Único de la Aguja (SUA) in Uruguay are helping home-based workers to make masks and medical gowns themselves and to access orders from the public health system and other NGOs.

These are good examples of workers' own efforts, but it is evidently not enough. Governments and private companies' involvement is much needed to scale up these initiatives. Governments and the private sector, in consultation with women's groups, must also promote extra measures to protect all workers from health risks and any form of violence. Moreover, channels for reporting complaints and labour inspection mechanisms require strengthening by adapting procedures to meet the new COVID-19 realities.<sup>47</sup>

The plight of women migrant workers is particularly concerning. For this reason, initiatives such as the decision by the Portuguese government to grant foreign nationals with pending immigration applications the same rights to health care, social security and employment as permanent residents, are welcome.<sup>48</sup>

Finally, the needs of women who have converted to working remotely from home also require attention. Emerging evidence points to significant challenges related to the expansion of telework in many countries, which are pronounced for women and single-parent families. Surveys show that telework is often performed with young children at home and with a lack of adequate space, and this is a particularly stressful experience for mothers who also juggle greater burdens of housework and childcare.<sup>49</sup> This issue is more relevant to high-income countries given that, as the IMF puts it, "...It is much easier to telework in Norway and Singapore than in Turkey, Chile, Mexico, Ecuador, and Peru, simply because more

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<sup>42</sup> <https://theconversation.com/coronavirus-flying-in-fruit-pickers-from-countries-in-lockdown-is-dangerous-for-everyone-136551>

<sup>43</sup> Citizens Advice UK. 6 August 2020 "Parents, carers and disabled people at least twice as likely to face redundancies". Press Release. <https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/about-us/how-citizens-advice-works/media/press-releases/parents-carers-and-disabled-people-at-least-twice-as-likely-to-face-redundancy-warns-citizens-advice/>

<sup>44</sup> WIEGO July 2020 'Informal Workers in the COVID19 Crisis: a global picture of sudden impact and long-term risk'.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> The ILO BetterWork website offers examples of how the BetterWork Programme is supporting workers, employers and government partners in the garment sector of specific countries, by helping them to adapt to the new challenges of the crisis. BetterWork, October 2020. Country responses to COVID-19. <https://betterwork.org/1-better-work-response-to-covid19/>.

<sup>48</sup> ILO Country Study, June 2020. Rapid assessment of the impact of COVID-19 on the economy and labour market. Geneva: ILO. [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/--ed\\_emp/documents/publication/wcms\\_749191.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/--ed_emp/documents/publication/wcms_749191.pdf)

<sup>49</sup> See evidence reviewed in ILO, 2020. "A gender-responsive employment recovery: Building back fairer". ILO Policy Brief. To address these issues the ILO has developed a new guidance on teleworking 'Teleworking during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond: a practical guide' 2020. [https://www.ilo.org/travail/whatwedo/publications/WCMS\\_751232/lang-en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/travail/whatwedo/publications/WCMS_751232/lang-en/index.htm)

than half the households in most emerging and developing countries don't even have a computer at home".<sup>50</sup> These difficulties in accessing digital technologies are exacerbated for women, particularly where the digital gender divide is large. Nonetheless, efforts everywhere should be directed at improving the regulation of telework to ensure it complies with principles of work-family balance and gender equality. Greater consideration of the gender dimension of telework and digitalization is important because these processes are being accelerated by COVID-19, but are likely to remain a feature of the way of working in the future.

### Continue job retention and income support schemes but in a more targeted way

There is indication that some countries both in the global North and the global South are considering to phase out their emergency measures. While economy-wide income support and employment retention schemes may not be financially sustainable for long periods of time, it is important that these measures continue to sustain at least some sectors, with a more targeted approach. This could involve, for example, targeting sectors which disproportionately employ low-income women and are predicted to recover more slowly, such as tourism and hospitality. In countries where job retention schemes for formal businesses and/or income support for small businesses can continue, it is essential that their design is improved to ensure greater inclusion and protection of women workers.

In a number of countries from the global South, WIEGO members have reported difficulties in collecting income support because they do not have digital bank accounts and/or access to mobile money transfers. Others, usually the most disadvantaged women working in the lowest segments of the informal sector, are simply not eligible or not even aware of the existence of such schemes. Some countries have taken steps to reach out to marginal informal workers. For example, the government of Burkina Faso has suspended fees charged on informal vendors in urban markets, and the government of South Africa has allocated additional funds to SMEs and other informal business.<sup>51</sup> It is not yet known, however, how many women are among the qualifying beneficiaries who have been able to apply.

Job retention schemes have been extensively used in the early stages of the pandemic, mostly in high-income countries. As reported by the OECD, these schemes too would need better targeting.<sup>52</sup> A study of the job retention scheme adopted in the United Kingdom since last April, for example, notes that "... not all workers are furloughed equally...", with women significantly more likely to be furloughed than men doing the same type of job.<sup>53</sup> In addition, the study finds that about 75 per cent of furloughed men had their wages topped up beyond the 80 per cent provided by the government, whereas less than 65 per cent of furloughed women enjoyed this financial benefit. It is crucial to understand the factors explaining these differences, and to avoid reproducing gender bias in job retention schemes.

A good example of effective targeting through an integrated package of support for both wage workers and own-account workers is provided by Argentina's emergency response.<sup>54</sup> Measures involve, among others, an Emergency Labour and Production Assistance Programme (ATP), which includes reductions in employer contributions, subsidies for workers' wages and zero-rate loans for own-account workers. A strong package of social protection measures including a consolidation of existing social transfers schemes as well as new measures that address paid and unpaid care work, has also been introduced. For example, paid leave has been extended to domestic workers in private homes, adults older than 60 years, pregnant women and those with dependents requiring care. Regarding social transfers, an emergency family

<sup>50</sup> Brussevich, M., Dabla-Norris, E. and Khalid, S. June 2020 "Who will bear the brunt of lockdown policies? Evidence from tele-workability measures across countries" IMF Working Paper WP/20/88. IMF Asia and Pacific Department.

<sup>51</sup> Ewinyu, Arabo; David Francis, Kamal Ramburuth-Hurt and Imraan Valodia. "COVID-19: Gender impacts in South Africa. Working Paper, SCIS, Wits University cited in ILO, 2020. "A gender-responsive employment recovery: Building back fairer".

<sup>52</sup> OECD, August 2020. Job retention schemes during the COVID-19 lockdown and beyond. Paris: OECD [https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/view/?ref=135\\_135415-6bardplc5q&title=job-retention-schemes-during-the-COVID-19-lockdown-and-beyond](https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/view/?ref=135_135415-6bardplc5q&title=job-retention-schemes-during-the-COVID-19-lockdown-and-beyond)

<sup>53</sup> Adams-Prassl, Boneva, Golin and Rauh. August 2020. "Furloughing" Universities of Oxford, Cambridge and Zurich Working paper. The Observer, 9th August "Two-thirds of UK's furloughed workers continued job in Covid\_19 lockdown".

<sup>54</sup> ILO, 2020. "A gender-responsive employment recovery: Building back fairer". ILO Policy Brief.

income (IFE: Ingreso Familiar de Emergencia), has been provided once every two months since the beginning of the pandemic. IFE prioritizes women as cash recipients and has managed to reach large numbers of beneficiaries.<sup>55</sup>

### Ensure gender awareness in the design and implementation of active labour market policies

Active labour market policies can be an important tool for facilitating women's return to work and job-seeking in the face of the job uncertainty and changing demands for skills triggered by COVID-19. It is important to avoid labour market biases that result in men being prioritized in recruitment and training when overall jobs are scarce, as has been the case in past economic crises.<sup>56</sup> Public employment services (PES) of the 'joined-up' kind<sup>57</sup> that offer integrated packages combining job-matching with provision of short-term training, and similar forms of assistance, can be particularly helpful. However, special care needs to be put in the design of these policies to ensure they equally benefit women and men.

The Republic of Korea offers a useful example of how an existing PES programme can be effectively adapted to address women's specific needs in the context of the new COVID-19 circumstances. The Korean PES had already been using an integrated approach involving a range of specialist organizations to target women who have interrupted their career for family reasons. Their approach is firmly grounded in principles of inclusion. It takes into account that many of these women lack access to childcare. It also strives to reach out to migrant women who may not have formal qualifications and/or fluency in Korean. Currently, the PES is working closely with occupational centres in various locations. They provide maternity leave allowance and childcare subsidies to women who are registered with them. In addition, they offer incentives to those employers who commit to grant maternity or childcare leave to their female employees and retain them once they return.<sup>58</sup>

Another relevant policy area relates to the need to redress persistent gender gaps in apprenticeships. Gender differences in apprenticeships remain striking in many countries, including high-income countries, and take the form of gender segregation in the type of apprenticeships women and men do, gender pay gaps, and limited availability especially for young women in STEM-related fields.<sup>59</sup> Thus, especially appropriate measures in the context of the current crisis could include funding apprenticeship initiatives aimed specifically at young women in the early stages of their working lives as well as targeting retraining initiatives at sectors where women are heavily represented.

The measures discussed above are of greater relevance to high-income countries with well-developed labour market infrastructure. In low-income developing country contexts, measures such as public procurement with special provisions for contracting women-owned SMEs and gender-aware public works may offer more suitable short-term solutions to help poor rural women survive the crisis and possibly enable them to develop skills and networks for the longer term. Public food procurement with preferential access to marginal women farmers has been advocated for some time as an instrument to promote synergies between different development objectives by improving women's access to fair markets for their produce as well as food security. In the current circumstances, some authors are recommending to link COVID-related food assistance programmes with procurement at the village level from local small-scale women cultivators, for example in the context of Public Distribution Systems in India.<sup>60</sup> While there is no indication that these measures are being considered at the state level, a few examples of local initiatives exist.

<sup>55</sup> UNDP and UN Women, September 2020, *COVID-19 Global gender Tracker*. Factsheets. Annex II. Countries in Focus: Argentina. <http://UNDP-UNWomen-COVID19-Global-Regional-Factsheet-2020.pdf>

<sup>56</sup> ILO, 2020. "A gender-responsive employment recovery: Building back fairer". ILO Policy Brief.

<sup>57</sup> PES engage in joined-up service provision with other government agencies and specialist providers, including unemployment insurance funds, social protection systems, private employment agencies and training services. See ILO, 2020. 'COVID-19 Public Employment Services and labour market policy responses' Policy Brief. [https://www.ilo.org/emppolicy/areas/covid/WCMS\\_753404/lang--en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/emppolicy/areas/covid/WCMS_753404/lang--en/index.htm)

<sup>58</sup> Avila, Z., 2018. Public employment services: *Joined-up services for people facing labour market disadvantage*, Geneva: ILO. Reported in ILO, 2020. "A gender-responsive employment recovery: Building back fairer."

<sup>59</sup> ILO, 2020. "Quality apprenticeship and gender" in *ILO Toolkit for Quality Apprenticeship*. [https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/apprenticeships/publications/toolkit/WCMS\\_748751/lang--en/](https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/apprenticeships/publications/toolkit/WCMS_748751/lang--en/)

<sup>60</sup> Kulkarni, S. 2020. 'Locked in a crisis: concerns of rural women' Commentary, June 6, 2020 Economic & Political Weekly vol IV no 23.

In Ahmedabad, India, the Self Employed Women’s Association (SEWA) collaborated with the municipality to develop an innovative food delivery programme involving street vendors and rickshaw drivers.<sup>61</sup> In Senegal, the government is delivering basic food baskets to vulnerable households, sourcing products from women’s cooperatives.<sup>62</sup>

As for public works programmes, there is a long tradition of using them to create jobs and generate income for people in vulnerable situations during crises. Many governments in low-income countries have already been implementing public works programmes, some of which are supported by the ILO. Provided appropriate additional COVID-19 related precautions are introduced, these schemes could be repositioned to address emerging needs resulting from the economic impact of COVID-19, with particular attention to the immediate needs of poor women who tend to rely on casual work for their livelihoods.<sup>63</sup> As ever, it is crucial that these programmes are designed and implemented in a gender-aware manner. This would mean removing gender-specific obstacles to women’s participation (e.g. by providing safe transport and childcare on site) and involving women in decisions over the assets and infrastructure to be constructed or maintained by the programme (e.g. priority to sanitation infrastructure or health centres over other kinds of construction works). A rich policy literature has developed in recent years on approaches to make public works gender responsive,<sup>64</sup> but the evidence on the ground remains mixed.

### Provide adequate and affordable childcare and ensure safe use of public transport

Across-the-board there is an urgent need for measures to support reliable childcare provision and the safe re-opening of schools. Many of the examples described in this section demonstrate this is a key condition for enabling women to protect mental and physical strength whilst keeping their job, or to find the time for searching for new employment. In the short term, this could take the form of additional funds to childcare service providers (both private and non-profit ones) to ensure they can retain staff and make care centres and similar infrastructure COVID-secure, in combination with childcare subsidies for low-income families. Sustained investment in care-related infrastructure (including both childcare and adult care) must constitute a core pillar of any gender responsive recovery in the longer term and is further discussed in the next section.

COVID-safe, regular and reliable public transport is also essential to facilitate women’s return to work and search for work, particularly in developing countries where women are less likely to own and/or drive a private vehicle.

## b. The longer term: policy options for gender-equitable structural transformation

Looking ahead, strategies for the longer term need to promote a just transition to a gender-equitable, job-rich and environmentally sustainable economy. The COVID-19 crisis has initiated new conversations about care, essential workers, fair pay, migration, protecting the environment, health and well-being. There is a widespread sentiment that returning to the ‘old normal’ is not an option and many in policy circles are calling for transformational responses. There is a long-standing body of feminist literature on gender, economic crises and alternative models of economic development on which policy formulation can draw. The following paragraphs set out some ideas.

<sup>61</sup> WIEGO, 2020. Informal Workers in the COVID-19 Crisis: A global picture of sudden impact and long-term risk [https://www.wiego.org/sites/default/files/resources/file/Impact\\_on\\_livelihoods\\_COVID-19\\_final\\_EN\\_1.pdf](https://www.wiego.org/sites/default/files/resources/file/Impact_on_livelihoods_COVID-19_final_EN_1.pdf)

<sup>62</sup> Senegal example cited in UN Women, 2020. “Addressing the economic fallout of COVID-19: pathways and policy options for a gender-responsive recovery”. Policy Brief N.15. New York: UN Women. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2020/06/policy-brief-addressing-the-economic-fallout-of-covid-19>

<sup>63</sup> ILO. 2020. “The role of public employment programmes and employment guarantee schemes in COVID-19 policy responses” Policy Brief. [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed\\_emp/documents/publication/wcms\\_746368.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_emp/documents/publication/wcms_746368.pdf)

<sup>64</sup> Ameratunga Kring, S. 2017. ‘Gender in employment policies and programmes: what works for women?’ Employment Department Working Paper 235 Geneva: ILO.

## Significant fiscal support must continue

Stimulus packages to boost aggregate demand and employment generation, as well as sectoral measures to support hardest hit sectors with a focus on women's employment, must be further strengthened. Sustaining public spending and prioritizing it to support gender-egalitarian outcomes is essential to avoid further damage to women's job prospects and the deepening of inequalities. It is important not to introduce premature fiscal consolidation measures to pay for the cost of the crisis. This would repeat past mistakes and impact poor and disadvantaged women the most.

A sound body of evidence demonstrates that macroeconomic policies characterised by high public expenditure and high tax revenues are more conducive to inclusive paths of economic development.<sup>65</sup> Well targeted public investments that reduce inequality can be self-sustaining, generating jobs and raising the productive capacity of the economy.<sup>66</sup> In contrast, fiscal policies that emphasise cutting expenditure instead of expanding make it harder to prioritize budgets towards improving the lives of the poor, and particularly poor women.<sup>67</sup> In a recent address to advise on the management of the COVID-19 crisis, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) urged governments and Ministries of Finance of all countries to step up efforts to address increasing poverty and unemployment, despite record public debts.<sup>68</sup> While high-income countries can continue to borrow cheaply, low-income countries may have already reached their borrowing limits, and must therefore be supported through long-term debt restructuring.

In the medium term, ways to pay for the economic measures needed for a full recovery from COVID-19 could include investment in social infrastructure to boost the economy, increased taxes on wealth as well as tackling tax evasion and havens. In developing countries, the focus should also be on increasing taxation by expanding tax bases and formalising economies. A comprehensive programme of debt relief involving all bilateral creditors and the private as well as the public sectors is much needed for the poorest countries.<sup>69</sup>

## Transform structures of production to achieve decent work and gender equality objectives

If economies after the crisis are to meet goals of gender equality, social justice and environmental sustainability, consideration must be given to policies that help to rebalance the structure of production, in terms of both the kinds of goods and services that are produced and the ways in which production is organized. **Production needs to be organized around principles of decent work and respect for worker's rights, paying special attention to the terms of women's inclusion in the labour force. Patterns of output need to be oriented to generate a job-rich and inclusive recovery, without causing further degradation of natural resources and the environment.**

Gender-responsive policies would ensure that in any country, emphasis is given to domestic production of essential goods (particularly food) and public services. **This would require increased investment to support production of food, medicines, affordable housing, and public provision of clean water and sanitation, clean energy, improved transport infrastructure, health and education. Investment decisions would need to prioritize the sectors with greatest potential for job creation, with emphasis on making jobs equally accessible to women and men.** Gender-responsive policies would also ensure that women and men workers involved in the production of these goods and services receive a remuneration reflecting the value of their contribution to society.

The right mix of policies to foster gender-equitable and productivity-enhancing paths of structural change and decent job generation will evidently vary depending on a country's existing gender economic structure and stage of development.

<sup>65</sup> For example, Cornia, G. A., (2012), *Inequality trends and their determinants. Latin America over 1990-2010*, UNU-WIDER working paper No. 2012/09 and DAC Network on Gender Equality, (2010), *Gender Equality, Women's Empowerment and the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness: Issues Brief 6, Integrating Gender Equality Dimensions into Public Financial Management Reforms*, Paris: OECD.

<sup>66</sup> Addati, L., Cattaneo, U., Esquivel, V., Valarino, I., 2018. *Care work and care jobs for the future of decent work*. Geneva: ILO

<sup>67</sup> Ortiz, I. and Cummins, M., (2013) 'Austerity Measures in Developing Countries: Public Expenditure Trends and the Risks to Children and Women', *Feminist Economics* 19:3: 55-81.

<sup>68</sup> *The Guardian*, 14th October 2020 (Phillip Inman) "IMF urges governments to borrow to fight impact of COVID-19".

<sup>69</sup> ILO 2021. COVID-19 - Tackling the jobs crisis in the Least Developed Countries, Geneva: ILO. [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed\\_emp/documents/publication/wcms\\_766463.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_emp/documents/publication/wcms_766463.pdf)

For example, for countries with a sizeable share of rural population relying on agriculture as their main source of livelihood, gender equitable structural transformation would require implementing policies that better recognize women farmers in their own right, to promote agricultural production which is environmentally sustainable and oriented towards food security. It would involve promoting expansion of small-scale production, and using public investment to enable poor rural women to improve the productivity of both their labour and their land. It would also involve strengthening women's participation along food supply chains, including food distribution and sustainable food processing using locally grown produce.

As for sectoral measures to foster gender-equitable manufacturing in early industrializing countries, these could entail re-orienting industrial production towards domestic demand, in order to reduce a country's vulnerability to changes in the global economy, and at the same time promoting stronger mechanisms to ensure better working conditions and worker rights for women in global manufacturing supply chains (GSCs). Special attention must be paid to those self-employed home-based women who concentrate in the lowest tiers of the value chains, with very few benefits and rights.

In all country contexts, industrial policies should enable both women and men to equally benefit from the creation of jobs in new green industries and in STEM fields.

Strategies for gender equitable structural transformations must not just encompass market sectors but also have at their heart a concern for the unpaid care economy. **Policies must be in place to ensure that both women and men are equally recognised as earners and as carers.**

### Invest in Care

Sustainable and stable systems of health care and education, staffed with well-paid and well trained permanent workers, and universally provided, must constitute a core element of any economy. The current pandemic has reminded us of the value of care and has exposed the stark care inequalities experienced by different communities and individuals around the globe. Policymakers need to fully acknowledge that **public investment in all range of care services is critical for the twin objectives of gender equality in the world of work and sustainable economic development.**

Almost everywhere, investment in care services, by employing more health workers, personal carers and teachers, tends to (directly) generate relatively more jobs for women. Improving working conditions, wages and representation for workers in these sectors is crucial, as argued by many in recent years, including forcefully by UN Women and the ILO.<sup>70</sup> The COVID-19 crisis seems to be contributing to a positive change in public narratives about the value of conventionally female occupations such as nursing and teaching. It is important that this is followed up with concrete policy actions aimed at promoting and professionalising the general status of care occupations. Better working conditions and pay in these professions might have the added benefit of also attracting more men, thus contributing to breaking gender-based segregation.

Many studies demonstrate that expansion of care services not only has the potential to directly generate jobs particularly for women, but is also important for the goal of equalizing responsibility for unpaid domestic work and promoting women's ability to participate in other types of paid work, community decision-making and training activities.<sup>71</sup>

### Disrupt traditional gendered patterns of work

A worrying trend repeatedly highlighted in labour statistics is the persistence of gender based sectoral and occupational segregation in many countries, despite considerable reductions of gender gaps in education and in labour force participation over time. The prevalence of working women and men in particular occupations (which classify jobs by type and skill), and in particular sectors of the economy, is remarkably stubborn and is even increasing in selected developing

<sup>70</sup> Addati, L., Cattaneo, U., Esquivel, V., Valarino, I., 2018. *Care work and care jobs for the future of decent work*. Geneva: ILO.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

economies.<sup>72</sup> Gender-based segregation is considered one of the major contributors to gender wage gaps and economic inequalities for women. Without action, these gender inequalities risk becoming even greater as a result of the COVID-19 crisis. For example, if the recovery were to focus on traditionally male-dominated sectors, without conscious policy effort to facilitate women's greater access to new employment opportunities, both sectoral and occupational segregation would risk intensifying. The latter could also happen if services sectors that predominantly employ women were to be permanently downsized.<sup>73</sup>

Much of the gender-aware economic literature points to the fact that even though progress has been made in closing gender gaps at all educational levels, fields of study remain highly gender stratified. Moreover, stereotypes about what jobs are suitable for women are widespread, both among employers and the wider public, including sometimes among women themselves. Policies to address gender differences in technical skills, and to help women develop skills that match emerging labour market needs, are therefore essential. Targeted interventions aimed at removing the underlying causes of women's low participation in technical subjects and vocational training are needed at every stage– from schools, to further and higher education, entry into the labour market and labour market retention. These could include: programmes aimed at challenging gender-stereotypical attitudes and building girls' confidence in technical fields; trainings designed in more gender-sensitive ways (e.g. better curricula as well training modalities that are compatible with women's caring responsibilities); and initiatives to challenge male employers' prejudices.<sup>74</sup>

Women's lack of training prior to joining the labour market is a factor undermining women's equal participation in high-tech jobs, but so is employers' reluctance to hire them and/or offer them training to further their technical skills, once they are hired.<sup>75</sup> This suggests that greater policy effort is needed towards not only making technical fields of education more welcoming for women but also offering employers incentives to hire more women and offer them on-the-job training equivalent to that received by men.

Stereotypes about men being unsuitable for caring jobs also need to be challenged. As well as promoting women's inclusion in high-technology occupations and sectors, measures must also be promoted to encourage more men to train to work in care sectors. Male care workers could provide new role models for boys and girls. Examples of policy measures that reflect this philosophy are rarely found, and currently limited to a few Nordic countries.<sup>76</sup>

### **Harness technological advancements for decent work and gender equality**

The potential of automation, digitalization, artificial intelligence and other emerging technologies to transform the production landscape and open up new ways of organizing work was widely debated even before the COVID-19 pandemic. These processes are expected to accelerate after the recovery. The role that the new technologies will play in the post-COVID world of work will likely vary by a country's resource capacity and overall economic strategies. The outcomes in terms of inclusiveness and opportunities for decent jobs are not pre-determined and will ultimately reflect political decisions.

The undoubted benefits that might result from digital technologies need to be carefully weighed against the risk of exacerbating marginality and exclusion. This has particular gender significance since women in many developing countries, for example, are still less likely to own a mobile phone, use mobile internet or simply have money to pay for Internet access. Public investments are therefore needed to extend digital infrastructure to remote areas and to grant

<sup>72</sup> Confirmed by robust cross-country econometric analyses of data from developing countries over the 1980s-2010s period in Mary Borrowman & Stephan Klasen. 2020. "Drivers of Gendered Sectoral and Occupational Segregation in Developing Countries" *Feminist Economics*, 26:2, 62-94. 10.1080/13545701.2019.1649708.

<sup>73</sup> For further elaboration on these possible dynamics see ILO, 2020. "A gender-responsive employment recovery: Building back fairer". ILO Policy.

<sup>74</sup> For example, ILO, 2020. "The gender divide in skills development: progress, challenges and policy options for empowering women" Policy Brief. [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/--ed\\_emp/--ifp\\_skills/documents/publication/wcms\\_244380.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/--ed_emp/--ifp_skills/documents/publication/wcms_244380.pdf)

<sup>75</sup> Seguino, S. and Braunstein, E. 2017. "The Costs of Exclusion: Gender Job Segregation, Structural Change and the Labor Share of Income" *PERI Working Paper*. Political Economy Research Institute, University of Massachusetts Amherst.

<sup>76</sup> Addati, L., Cattaneo, U., Esquivel, V., Valarino, I., 2018. *Care work and care jobs for the future of decent work*. Geneva: ILO ; Marzia Fontana & Diane Elson. 2014. "Public policies on water provision and early childhood education and care (ECEC): do they reduce and redistribute unpaid work?" *Gender & Development*, 22:3, 459-474, DOI: 10.1080/13552074.2014.



poor women new training opportunities and free data allowances. Moreover, appropriate laws and policies are needed to regulate digital platforms and to protect all platform workers from potential abuses from business clients and deteriorating working conditions.

A related aspect concerns the implications of teleworking for gendered experiences of work and family. Both optimistic and pessimistic views can be found in the gender-aware literature. Optimistic perspectives view telework as the solution to problems of balancing work and family, particularly for women, and stress its advantages, usually framed in terms of the potential to provide access to work to people for whom care responsibilities would restrict participation in on-site work. Other perspectives caution against home-based telework and describe it as a form of employment that might contribute to women being exploited, socially isolated and subject to demands from both family and employers.<sup>77</sup> Policies must be formulated to counteract these possible negative consequences.<sup>78</sup>

### c. An integrated gender-responsive employment policy framework

As the previous two sub-sections highlight, promoting a gender-responsive job-rich recovery requires a broad range of measures across different policy levels and dimensions, and a holistic approach to employment policy. Recognizing that employment outcomes depend on a wide array of factors, the ILO has long advocated for comprehensive employment policy frameworks covering macro, meso and micro policy areas, to address both the demand and supply side of the labour market, and covering both quantity and quality dimensions.

For ease of reference and as a way to sum up, this final section organizes key measures discussed in the previous paragraphs according to policy areas, similar to those that structure the current ILO national employment policy (NEP) framework.<sup>79</sup> These include: 1. macroeconomic policies and stimulus; 2. sectoral policies; 3. income support for workers and households; 4. active labour market policies and public employment services (PES); 5. skills development; and 6. strengthened labour market institutions and respect for rights at work. The list presented in Table 1 is not exhaustive; it is simply meant to offer a menu of options to facilitate identification of the appropriate mix of policy interventions for promoting decent jobs, equally for women and men, in the recovery from the COVID-19 crisis.

► **Table 1 Suggested measures for a gender-responsive job-rich recovery, by level of policy action**

Policy area	Suggested Measures
Macroeconomic policies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continue stimulus packages, especially for hardest hit sectors</li> <li>• In the recovery phase, avoid premature fiscal consolidation and sustain public spending on well-being-enhancing infrastructure to stimulate aggregate demand</li> <li>• Increase public investments and support private investment to rebalance the structure of production towards sectors that have strong employment potential and produce essential goods and public services for all</li> <li>• Broaden the tax base through formalization and tax wealth, tackling tax evasion and reducing the incidence of tax on poor women</li> <li>• Where national capacities are insufficient, international financial support is needed</li> <li>• Trade policies to reduce dependency on export-promotion strategies based on cheap female labour</li> </ul>
Sectoral policies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• During the emergency, continue job retention schemes and support businesses in severely affected sectors and occupations that disproportionately employ women. Better target these schemes to ensure inclusion of the most disadvantaged women workers</li> <li>• In the recovery phase, support traditionally female sectors and occupations but also identify promising sectors in line with long term policy goals of gender equitable structural transformation. For instance:                         <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Greater public investment in care sectors as a means of generating direct and indirect employment opportunities for women</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

<sup>77</sup> For instance Sullivan, C. and Lewis, 2001. "Home-based Telework, Gender, and the Synchronization of Work and Family: Perspectives of Teleworkers and their Co-residents" *Gender, Work and Organization* Vol.8 Issue 2: 123-145. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-0432.00125>

<sup>78</sup> See for instance ILO,2020. Practical Guide on Teleworking during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond. [https://www.ilo.org/travail/whatwedo/publications/WCMS\\_751232/lang--en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/travail/whatwedo/publications/WCMS_751232/lang--en/index.htm) and ILO, 2020. Working from Home: Estimating the worldwide potential. [https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/non-standard-employment/publications/WCMS\\_743447/lang--en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/non-standard-employment/publications/WCMS_743447/lang--en/index.htm)

<sup>79</sup> ILO, 2020. "National employment policies for an inclusive, job-rich recovery from the COVID-19 crisis" Policy Brief. [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/--ed\\_emp/documents/publication/wcms\\_756676.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/--ed_emp/documents/publication/wcms_756676.pdf)

Policy area	Suggested Measures
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Financial and technical support to women-managed informal SMEs (e.g., e-commerce)<sup>80</sup></li> <li>○ Extend digital infrastructure and reduce gender gaps in access</li> <li>○ Design and implement policies related to land, agricultural extension services and technology in gender-sensitive ways and ensure women farmers are not left behind in efforts to promote commercially-oriented agriculture</li> </ul>
Income support for workers and households	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● During the emergency, maintain exceptional measures to protect household incomes and consumption, particularly for the hardest hit groups (e.g. women who lost their job, single-working parent in low-income households)</li> <li>● Provide paid sick and care leave, especially to vulnerable categories of workers (e.g., women and men workers with family responsibilities, paid domestic workers in private homes)</li> <li>● Design and implement social transfers in gender-responsive ways</li> <li>● Strengthen and extend social protection to uncovered groups (e.g., informal workers and migrants), through social dialogue and giving priority to the most disadvantaged women</li> </ul>
Active labour market policies and PES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Hiring and wage subsidies, to encourage recruitment of young women and women who have withdrawn from the labour force, in particular</li> <li>● Utilize public work programmes to especially support poor women dependent on casual work for survival. Enable them to develop skills through such schemes for the longer term</li> <li>● Public procurement as a means of generating employment for women in sectors where they are likely to predominate (e.g., food production and preparation)</li> <li>● Promote integrated public employment services that acknowledge women's specific care needs</li> </ul>
Skills development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Reshape skills development in line with post-COVID labour demand and ensure equal participation of women and men in new fields of study</li> <li>● Encourage and support women and girls' education and training in STEM fields</li> <li>● Encourage more men to train and work in care sectors</li> <li>● Reduce gender bias in apprenticeships and on-the job training</li> <li>● Facilitate shift to online work and learning and reduce gender digital gaps</li> </ul>
Labour market institutions and rights at work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Strengthen OSH measures with emphasis on sectors/occupations that employ predominantly women (e.g. nursing)</li> <li>● Strengthen telework policies and regulations with special attention to work-family balance</li> <li>● Improve working conditions and rights of platform workers</li> <li>● Eliminate discriminatory practices related to pregnancy and/or maternity, where they exist</li> <li>● Better protect women from violence and harassment in the world of work<sup>81</sup></li> <li>● Fairer and broader coverage of labour market institutions including minimum wages and employment protection, independently of employment status or migration status</li> <li>● Strengthen women's voice by promoting the organization of women workers</li> </ul>

As the range of suggested policies listed here makes clear, an effective national employment policy framework (NEP) will necessitate a great deal of coordination between different ministries, not only ministries of labour and employment, but also finance, planning, women, statistical offices and other government agencies. The involvement of workers' representatives, employers, women's organizations and other relevant civil society groups is essential to ensure that gender equality objectives are made explicit and are upheld in both the formulation and implementation of the measures required.

Gender-responsive employment policies, grounded in gender equality principles, share a number of common characteristics across countries at a broad level (e.g. emphasis on public investment in care-related infrastructure and improving the quality of women's jobs), but they also need to respond to specific structural conditions and gender configurations, as the variety of country examples provided throughout this policy tool demonstrates. It might therefore be useful to conclude this section by identifying a taxonomy of countries based on gender characteristics of the labour market and stage of development, to help prioritize policies depending on a country's socio-economic context. Such taxonomy could include the following five categories: 1. low-income agriculture-based economies (LIAEs); 2. industrializing export-oriented economies (IEOs); 3. dualistic middle-income economies (DMIEs) in the MENA region; 4. dualistic middle-income economies in the LAC region; and 5. high-income economies (HIEs).

<sup>80</sup> For further information, see ILO'S Sustaining Competitive and Responsible Enterprises (SCORE) <https://www.ilo.org/empent/Projects/score/lang-en/index.htm>

<sup>81</sup> ILO Convention 190, on Violence and Harassment in the World of Work, 2019. [https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100\\_ILO\\_CODE:C190](https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100_ILO_CODE:C190)

**Low-income agricultural economies (LIAEs)** are countries found largely in sub-Saharan Africa and parts of South Asia. Women's work in these regions is concentrated in the agricultural sector. Most of this agricultural work is informal, with women participating in production mostly as contributing family workers, casual wage workers or, at best, smallholders. In sub-Saharan Africa, women's labour force participation rates are overall high and gender gaps in labour force participation usually smaller than in other regions. Gender gaps in vulnerable employment remain significant, however. In South Asia, women's participation rates are low and employment opportunities for them are very limited. Unlike sub-Saharan Africa, where similar shares of female and male employment are in agriculture, South Asia has been experiencing a feminization of agriculture, which some authors more accurately characterize as 'feminization of agrarian distress'.<sup>82</sup> Physical infrastructure and social infrastructure are patchy and limited in both regions, particularly in remote rural areas, and there is heavy reliance on traditional family provisioning of care, which is highly gendered. Social protection coverage tends to be low. In these contexts, sectoral policies that prioritize public investments in agriculture with emphasis on recognizing women cultivators in their own right and improving their productivity would be most relevant. This would involve, among other things, reducing their unpaid time burdens and strengthening their participation in food supply chains and green agricultural projects. Addressing women's specific needs in infrastructural development such as water, sanitation, electricity and transportation would be as important as expansion of care services for generating decent jobs for women and diversifying their employment opportunities. Measures to reduce gender gaps in digital literacy and access to digital technologies would also be important. Efforts to extend employment protection legislation, particularly in rural areas, would be crucial to strengthen women's workers rights.

The **industrializing export-oriented economies (IEOs)** label could be used to loosely denote low-middle- and middle-income countries that are mostly relying on export-oriented industrial development strategies. Many of them are in South-East Asia, but there is considerable variation in terms of income level, geographical location and gender norms within this group. For example, Malaysia and Thailand have higher income levels, more diversified economies with a larger services sector, and more developed social infrastructure and social protection systems than Viet Nam, Cambodia or China. In these latter countries, a significant share of women's employment continues to be in agriculture. High female labour force participation rates tend to be high by global standards but gender-based wage inequality is pronounced. Greater export-orientation may have led over time to a modest reduction in gender-based sectoral segregation (e.g. female employment shifting away from agriculture towards garments or even electronics), but it seems to have had no positive effect on occupational segregation, which might have actually increased. Care provision in this group has sometimes been described as following a 'familialistic male breadwinner' model with a traditional gender division of labour. In the more advanced countries of the IEOs group, public provisioning and investments in education and health have considerably expanded in response to population ageing and the push for greater gender equality at work and at home. Care services, however, are largely privately provided, do not always offer decent work opportunities for women (e.g. informal paid domestic workers, many of whom are migrant), and can only be afforded by relatively well-off women.<sup>83</sup> Within this typology of countries, a policy approach aimed at re-balancing the structure of production towards meeting the domestic needs of low-income women and men, and at the same time improving women workers' situation, not only in relation to traditionally female sectors but also in new promising sectors (e.g. green industries) with good potential for decent job creation, would seem most appropriate. Measures to address gender gaps in technical skills and specialized technical training opportunities would be paramount. Reducing differences in access to social and physical infrastructure between rural and urban areas would also be important for the goal of equalizing responsibility for unpaid domestic work and promoting the participation of women from disadvantaged backgrounds in paid work and training. Emphasis would also need to be placed on more effective mechanisms for enforcing labour standards and legislation as well as extending social protection to uncovered groups, with attention to workers' categories such as paid domestic carers.

<sup>82</sup> Pattnaik, Kuntala Lahiri-Dutt, Stewart Lockie & Bill Pritchard .2018. 'The feminization of agriculture or the feminization of agrarian distress? Tracking the trajectory of women in agriculture in India', *Journal of the Asia Pacific Economy*, 23:1, 138-155, DOI: 10.1080/13547860.2017.1394569.

<sup>83</sup> ILO, 2018. *Ibid.*; UNRISD, 2010. *Combating poverty and inequality: structural change, social policy and politics*. Geneva: UNRISD.

A number of countries in Latin America and in the MENA (Middle East and Northern Africa) region could be described as **dualistic middle-income economies** characterized by high income inequality, relatively low levels of female labour force participation and significant gender gaps in a number of labour market indicators. These characteristics are often exacerbated in those countries that depend on natural resources and rely on mineral rents. This dualism is reflected in a labour market that is often constituted of a small formal sector, with high wages and good working conditions and benefits, which coexists with a large informal sector characterized by insecurity, low wages and limited opportunities for upward mobility. Formal wage work in the public sector is the preferred form of employment of many educated women. Poorly paid domestic services and agriculture are main sources of employment for low income women. In both regions, female unemployment rates tend to be higher than male rates, and this is a particularly difficult problem for young women. However, these two regions differ in important respects. LAC women's participation rates are higher than in MENA countries and have been consistently increasing in the last few decades. On the other hand, in many MENA countries, female labour force participation has stagnated at very low levels. Many economies in the LAC region are richer and more diversified than economies in the MENA region.

Social protection systems, institutionalized childcare provision and gender equality legislation tend to be well-developed in Latin American countries. Several gender-responsive policy reforms over the last few decades have encouraged higher female labour force participation. Thus in this region, measures to further strengthen women's position in the labour market during the recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic could emphasize supporting women in informal businesses in their transition to formality as well as promoting equal participation of women and men in STEM fields of study and occupations. Evidently, investment in care services must continue. Gender-aware integrated public employment services will be especially important for reshaping women's skills development in line with post-COVID labour demand, especially among younger cohorts. Better enforcement of labour legislation such as minimum wages could also contribute to reduce gender wage gaps, since these are usually wider in the lowest percentiles of the wage distribution.

The MENA region has the highest level of gender-based occupational and sectoral segregation globally. Legal restrictions relevant to women's economic opportunities as well as restrictions on women's time and mobility continue to be a concern in a number of countries.<sup>84</sup> Hence in this context, an emphasis on higher investment in social and physical infrastructure that addresses women's needs as well as on revising labour legislation and other related policies to support gender equality would seem appropriate. In countries that emphasize policies for agricultural development, better targeting of women cultivators would be paramount. Encouraging employers in the private sector to hire women, through incentives and other measures, also deserves priority.

**High-income economies (HIEs)** are generally characterized by high female labour force participation rates and a prevalence of women in wage and salaried employment. Service sectors are the largest source of employment for both women and men, though there is extensive gender segregation within services, with women's jobs concentrated in education, health and social care, reflecting patterns found in other parts of the world. Because of significant variation within high-income economies in their approach to care provisioning and social welfare, the literature usually further distinguishes three groups:<sup>85</sup> liberal countries, which rely largely on market provisioning of social welfare with a limited role of the state (e.g. United States and United Kingdom); conservative-corporatist countries, where the welfare state is well-developed but access to benefits tend to be conditional on employment status and class position (e.g. Southern Europe); and social democratic countries, which are characterized by strong welfare states with universal coverage and widespread public provision of services for children, the elderly and disabled people (e.g. Scandinavian countries). The care provision regime in the latter group (the Scandinavian model) is the most effective at enabling high rates of female labour force participation, wage equality and gender equitable labour market outcomes, more broadly.

<sup>84</sup> Kabeer, N., Deshpande, A. and R. Assaad. 2019. "Women's access to market opportunities in South Asia and the Middle East & North Africa: barriers, opportunities and policy challenges" London: LSE, Department of International Development.

<sup>85</sup> Braunstein, E. 2015. "Economic Growth and Social Reproduction: Gender Inequality as Cause and Consequence" *UN Women Discussion Paper No. 5*. New York: United Nations.

It should be emphasized that there is heterogeneity within each of these countries groupings and any individual country may not fall neatly in one category or the other. Hence these categories should simply be treated as a heuristic device. Moreover, many of the suggested measures apply in principle to all five groups, and Table 2 simply highlights where specific measures are more urgent and/or feasible (under existing configurations).

► Table 2. Suggested measures for a gender-responsive job-rich recovery, by type of country and level of policy action

Country Group	LIAEs	IEOs	DMIEs (MENA)	DIMIEs (LAC)	HIEs
<b>Policy area</b>					
Macroeconomic policies	<p>Priority to rural women's needs in expanding both physical and social infrastructure spending</p> <p>Debt restructuring to strengthen fiscal capacity in the long term</p>	<p>Boost domestic demand and employment generation</p> <p>Expand social infrastructure to address care needs of both wage workers and self-employed women</p> <p>Include women in strategies for export competitiveness based on skills and technological development</p>	<p>Expand investment in physical infrastructure to reduce rural-urban differences and gender gaps</p> <p>Expand investment in social infrastructure</p> <p>Use revenue from natural resources extraction to finance investment in social and physical infrastructure, when relevant</p>	<p>Continue stimulus packages especially for sectors that disproportionately employ women</p> <p>Maintain high levels of public investment in care provision</p> <p>Invest to reduce rural-urban inequalities</p>	<p>Sustain public investment in care, health and education and prioritize it in support of gender equality outcomes</p> <p>Ensure adequate funding of care services at all levels of government</p> <p>Tackle tax evasion and increase taxes on wealth</p>
Sectoral policies	<p>Emphasis on improving women farmers' terms of inclusion in food supply chains and green agriculture</p> <p>Include women in economic diversification strategies</p>	<p>Promote economic diversification and ensure women's inclusion in emerging sectors (e.g. green industries)</p> <p>Provide professionalization and training to care workers</p> <p>Pay attention to women's terms of inclusion in agriculture, when relevant</p>	<p>Promote greater diversification of the economy and women's inclusion in new sectors</p> <p>Ensure women-safe transport</p> <p>Provide professionalization and training to care workers</p> <p>Promote women's inclusion on better terms in commercialized agriculture</p>	<p>Continue expansion of care services as means of generating direct and indirect employment for women</p> <p>Financial and technical assistance for informal women-managed SMEs</p> <p>Support women's inclusion in technical and scientific occupations</p>	<p>Greater investment in care sectors, including not only childcare but also social and elderly care</p> <p>Establish universal childcare</p> <p>Include more women in green industries and other reemerging sectors</p>
Income support for workers and households	<p>Strengthen social transfers to support the most disadvantaged women, especially in rural areas</p>	<p>Maintain exceptional social assistance measures until needed, with attention to women in informal businesses</p> <p>Extend social protection to uncovered groups</p>	<p>Strengthen and extend social protection</p> <p>Public provision of care services on a generalized basis (not attached to employment status)</p>	<p>Build on current social assistance programmes and strengthen their gender perspective in design and implementation</p>	<p>Ensure women and men equally benefit from job retention schemes and income support to enterprises</p> <p>Extend social protection to international migrants</p>

Assessing the gendered employment impacts of COVID-19 and supporting a gender-responsive recovery

Country Group	LIAEs	IEOs	DMIEs (MENA)	DIMIEs (LAC)	HIEs
Active labour market policies and PES	Utilize public procurement and public works to secure women's reliable access to jobs	Subsidies to encourage hiring of women and similar measures to challenge employers' stereotypes Apprenticeship placements for women in emerging sectors Integrated packages of skill development and marketing support for women-managed SMEs	Subsidies to encourage hiring of women and other measures to challenge employers' stereotypes Promote integrated public employment services that address women's needs Integrated packages of skill development and marketing support for women-managed SMEs	Promote integrated public employment services that address women's needs Address skill mismatches with special attention to younger women	Integrated public employment services that address women's needs, with emphasis on promoting their inclusion in new emerging sectors
Skills development	Design and implement agricultural extension services in gender sensitive ways Reduce gender gaps in formal education Reduce gender gaps in digital skills and access	Address gender gaps in technical skills (e.g. STEM) and specialized technical training	Reduce gender stratification in fields of study Include more women in specialized on-the-job training	Support women's and girls' education and training in STEM fields	Reshape skill development in line with post-COVID labour demand and ensure women's inclusion in new fields Encourage men to train and work in care professions
Labour market institutions and rights at work	Strengthen labour market institutions and improve enforcement, especially in rural areas Recognize women as cultivators in their own right Encourage women's rural cooperatives	Greater compliance with labour standards at every level of GVCs Better protection from sexual harassment Better enforcement of non-discrimination provisions and women's labour rights	Revise legislation and other policies to address gender equality in employment Better enforcement of labour legislation, particularly outside of the public sector Tackle exploitative conditions of women migrants in migrant-receiving countries	Facilitate transition to formality Improve compliance with minimum wage legislation Strengthen regulation of teleworking	Better protect workers in the gig economy Strengthen telework policies with special attention to work-family balance Strengthen leave policies (e.g. equal entitlements to paid care leave to support children, disabled or elderly family members)

## ▶ Summary

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This policy tool has been developed to provide guidance on how to assess the gendered employment effects of the COVID-19 crisis at the country level and identify policy options to promote a transition to job-rich, care-centred and gender-equitable economies in the longer term. The tool followed a step by step approach, starting from a checklist of questions, indicators and suggested data sources for building a comprehensive picture of pre-existing gender inequalities in the labour market of a particular country. The emphasis is put on using statistics that capture women's terms of inclusion in the paid labour force rather than merely count how many women are in work. The emphasis is also put on analysing interactions between different domains of work (e.g. paid work and unpaid care work) and different workers' characteristics (e.g. gender and migration status, age, ethnicity and so on).

In a second step, the policy tool explained how the initial mapping of the gendered employment structure of an economy can be used as the starting point for assessing how the COVID-19 crisis is impacting women's employment and working conditions relative to men, differentiating by kinds and degrees of risk. It provided a framework for thinking how women and men working in different economic sectors are affected by risks related to: employment loss; physical and mental health; erosion of labour rights and deterioration of working conditions. Concrete country examples were provided to corroborate main points. These steps constitute the core component of the diagnostic exercise aimed at documenting the extent to which gender inequalities in the labour market are being exacerbated by the pandemic.

The second part of the tool aimed to provide guidelines for thinking of policy options to support gender equitable employment outcomes during and after the crisis. It distinguished between short-term measures and medium-term measures but stressed that short-term measures should be conceived as building blocks towards gender equitable paths of structural transformation and decent jobs generation in the longer term. For ease of reference, the last section of the tool lists measures in matrix format and organizes them by level of policy action and country typology. Its principal aim is to help identification of policy responses tailored to specific gender employment structures and socio-economic contexts.

### Contact details

**International Labour Organization**  
Route des Morillons 4, CH-1211 Geneva 22  
Switzerland  
**Employment, Labour Markets and Youth  
Branch**  
E: [emplab@ilo.org](mailto:emplab@ilo.org)

**UN Women**  
220 East 42<sup>nd</sup> Street, New York, NY 10017  
USA  
**Economic Empowerment Section**  
E: [econem.section@unwomen.org](mailto:econem.section@unwomen.org)