

Guidance Note: Addressing the Gendered Impacts of COVID-19

Key Takeaways:

- Women and girls have been disproportionately affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, and this *gendered impact* affects the private sector's ability to support humanitarian response, recover, and "build forward better".
- Although the pandemic has severely impacted gender equality, it also presents an opportunity to achieve long-lasting positive changes on gender equality.
- Targeted actions by CBI Member Networks, companies, and other stakeholders can contribute positive change to gender equality that can benefit their operations, their communities, and society at large.

Women and girls are among the hardest-hit by the COVID-19 pandemic

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic is deeply gendered, which is to say that women and girls have experienced more negative consequences than men and boys. The pandemic has exacerbated existing gender inequalities, widening the poverty gap between women and men; it is estimated that COVID-19 will push 47 million more women and girls below the poverty line.

- **Female-dominated economic sectors, particularly small or informal businesses, have been hit hardest by the pandemic**, leaving millions of women unemployed.
- Internationally, **women provide over 76 percent of all unpaid care work**, and the pandemic has increased this workload, affecting women's abilities to work, study and run their businesses.
- **Women are more exposed to the virus** as they make up the majority of pandemic frontline workers and are overrepresented in informal work sectors and other highly exposed sectors like accommodation, domestic work and food services. In addition, in many countries, funding for sexual and reproductive health services has been redirected to addressing the pandemic.
- **The coping capacity of women-led businesses and women workers is severely affected** as women often lack access to financial mechanisms (such as credit) and digital technologies, which means that they cannot participate in remote work or learning activities.
- **Women are often excluded from decision-making processes related to COVID-19**, including pandemic-related security issues. As a result, their specific needs are often ignored.

'Building forward better' through gender-sensitive response and recovery

After a disaster, we should strive not just to restore the status quo but to *build forward better*, ensuring that recovery, rehabilitation and reconstruction enable a more sustainable future. Disasters often reveal the root causes of vulnerabilities, such as climate change, poverty, and gender inequalities, and these root causes should be addressed in the recovery phase to reduce the risk of future disasters.

In a private sector context, building forward better implies acknowledging the gendered impacts of the pandemic and taking targeted actions to address their root causes, better protecting employees, value chains, markets and livelihoods, strengthening and increasing the resilience of society as a whole.

The private sector has been a key actor in battling the pandemic over the past year, working with governments, the international community, and other stakeholders to secure critical supply chains, keep essential services working, avoid disruption to employees lives and livelihoods, and produce and distribute personal protective equipment (PPE).

Through these interventions and with ongoing recovery efforts, the private sector can actively address the gendered impacts of the pandemic in several ways.

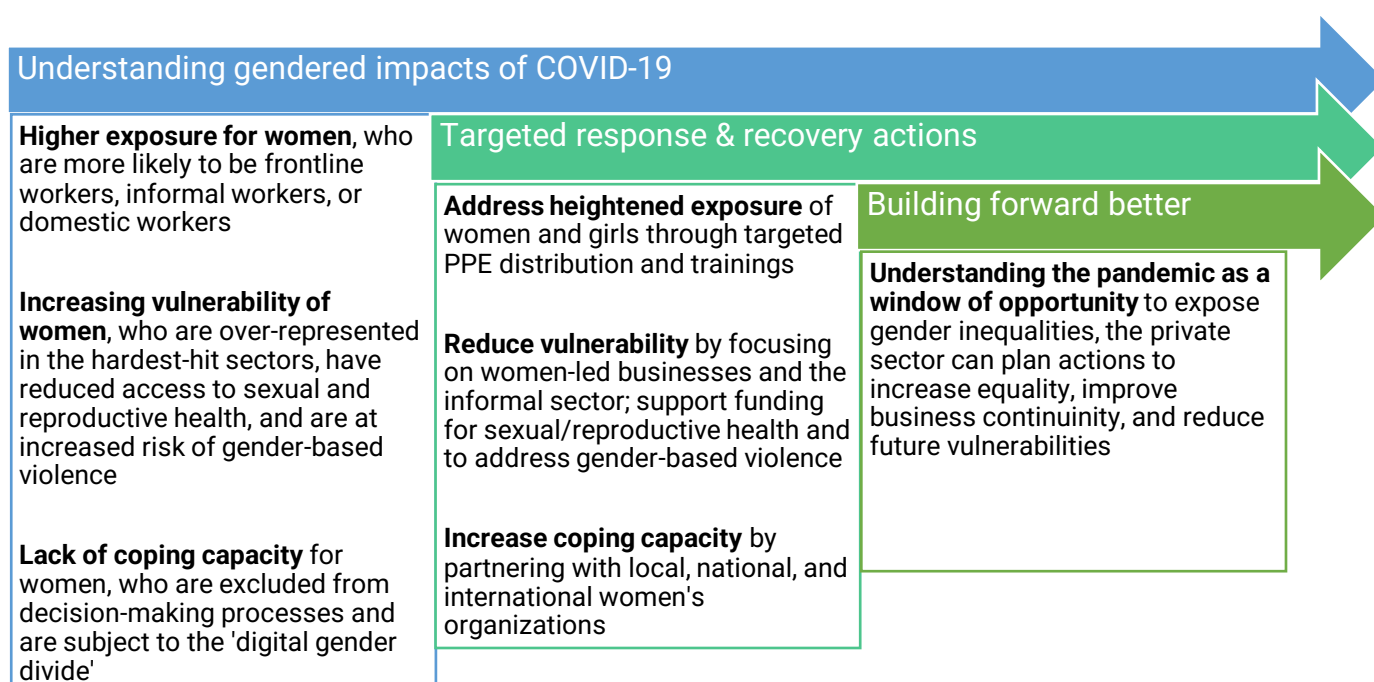
One of the most pressing issues is the considerable lack of **sex-disaggregated data** – that is, data that differentiates between men, women, boys, and girls. Disaggregating data helps to ensure that the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on women and girls are visible – consider the difference between “500 individuals lost their job” versus “480 women and 20 men lost their job”. Gender considerations should be built into any data collection exercise at the design phase to ensure that men and women are represented in data collection and that this data can be used to drive more targeted interventions. Similar disaggregation should also be done by age groups and disability. Businesses can help address this gap by integrating sex, age, and disability-disaggregation into their regular data collection and by disseminating any significant findings.

Companies can also protect their workers, their markets and their supply chains by **considering women’s realities**, as their care work and home-based work is often blurred. The **digital gender divide** is one crucial issue that can be addressed by private sector actors within their communities. Companies may, for example, react to this need by ensuring that employees, especially women, can access digital technologies to increase coping capacities throughout the pandemic.

Private sector interventions should **target the informal sector**, where women are overrepresented, as well **women-led micro-, small-, and medium-sized enterprises**, by increasing their coping capacities and supporting their business continuity planning. These actions can contribute to the private sector value chain and gender equality simultaneously.

Lastly, private sector actors can **connect with local, national, and international gender organizations**. These stakeholders have existing knowledge of the gendered needs in a given location and can help the private sector to pursue gender transformative actions where new, lateral thinking and long-term solutions can flourish, enhancing the empowerment of women and ensuring their greater participation.

The COVID-19 pandemic has revealed the effects of inequalities through its impact. But the pandemic also presents a window of opportunity for gender equality, if we can tackle root causes and change gender norms that may be harmful for people and businesses.



Recommended actions

Private sector actors are encouraged to consider the following actions as part of their operations:

- **Collect sex- and age-disaggregated data** as part of regular data collection procedures and market analyses. Analyze and disseminate any meaningful results to relevant stakeholders.
- **Involve women workers as part of business continuity committees and collect data on the needs and realities of female workers in the pandemic.** Analyze and react to these needs (for example, by providing access to affordable childcare).
- **Use the specialized knowledge of your company or industry to address gender inequalities in the pandemic.** For example, technology-focused companies can address the digital gender divide by offering solutions (working equipment, connectivity, mobile phones) tailored for the needs of women, and companies specialized in health products can address health needs of women in quarantine.
- **Develop and implement programs that aim to increase women's coping capacities during and after the pandemic,** for example by targeting women and women-led micro-, small-, and medium-sized enterprises in COVID-19 response and recovery actions.
- **Strengthen collaboration with the local, national, and international women's organizations** to use existing knowledge and better understand women's needs and capacities.
- **Raise awareness of and call for action within your business and business community about the gendered impacts of the pandemic,** and contribute to knowledge production around this topic by sharing data, survey results, best practices, etc.

Additional resources

The [Connecting Business initiative](#) (CBI) was established by the [United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs](#) (OCHA) and the [United Nations Development Programme](#) (UNDP) to strategically engage with the private sector before, during, and after an emergency. To learn more about CBI, or if you have any questions, comments, or suggestions about how to integrate gender considerations into disaster management, please contact us at connectingbusiness@un.org.

You can also learn more about integrating gender into humanitarian and development programming by referring to the following publications:

- CBI, [Gender, Disaster Management, and the Private Sector](#) (2021)
- Inter-Agency Standing Committee, [Briefing on the Impact of COVID-19 on Women and Girls](#) (webinar presentation) (2020)
- Inter-Agency Standing Committee, [Gender Alert for COVID-19](#) (webinar presentation) (2021)
- UN, [Policy Brief: The Impact of COVID-19 on Women](#) (2020)
- UNDP, [Gender Inequality and the COVID-19 Crisis: A Human Development Perspective](#) (2020)
- UNDP, [How to Integrate Gender into Socio-Economic Assessments](#) (2020)
- UNDP and Business for Gender Equality, [UNDP COVID-19 BIZ4GE: Business for Gender Equality Programme for a Gender Responsive COVID-19 Action](#) (2020)
- UN Women, [Guidance Note for Action: Supporting SMEs to Ensure the Economic COVID-19 Recovery is Gender-Responsive and Inclusive](#) (2020)
- UN Women, [From Insights to Action: Gender Equality in the Wake of COVID-19](#) (2020)
- UN Women, [The Philippines and COVID-19: Impact on the Private Sector](#) (2020)