



Women, peace and human security

a guidance note
on parliamentary engagement
during and post-Covid-19



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COVID-19 and the threat to human security

The spread of COVID-19 across the globe has been responsible for untold human misery, for those who have died or fallen gravely ill, for their families, and for everyone who has experienced its direct or indirect consequences. It is proving, moreover, to be a significant threat to human security globally, exposing and magnifying faults in the economic and social order. The global economic crisis that it has provoked is translating into mass unemployment, economic recession, disrupted supply chains, and food and resource insecurity. Fragility is already manifesting across a range of development settings, through increased authoritarianism; stigmatization; social unrest; the disruption of existing political processes; and the proliferation of misinformation.

Gendered impacts of the pandemic

The impact of the COVID-19 response is deeply gendered. There is a heightened risk of SGBV, exploitation, and abuse arising from movement restriction, financial loss and stress, and economic disempowerment. Services essential to the health, safety, protection and recovery of women and girls – such as sexual, reproductive, maternal and child health care; the police and justice sector response; social protection, including safe accommodation, emergency helplines and shelter, and counselling) are being deprioritized in many settings. Those already most vulnerable, including internally displaced women and migrant workers, are especially affected by these hardships and vulnerabilities. Peace and security gains are at stake. Crucially, in this 20th anniversary year of Security Council Resolution 1325, the gains most threatened include advances made on the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda.

Virtually every society and community depend on women for safety and resilience during the crisis, from essential care, childcare, domestic work, to maintaining other essential sectors such as retail and food supply. Women healthcare and community workers comprise more than 70 percent of the frontline pandemic workforce.¹ Women continue to be undervalued, systemically excluded from decision-making (including on the pandemic-related security challenges) and exposed to multiple forms of discrimination and violence in both the public and the private space. Their personal levels of agency and choice are severely restricted. In fragile settings, women are further marginalized to the periphery of peace and political solutions, and their decision-making power and access to information is further diminished.

WPS agenda as a blueprint for responding to and building back better from the crisis

The WPS agenda proposes a people-centric vision for human security through a gendered lens.² The principles of WPS apply equally to all societal shocks, to conflict, and to the COVID response. Efforts to contain the virus and to recover from the global shock to human security and development can only fully succeed if they integrate gender perspectives, effectively protect women from violence, and guarantee equal access to services, information and protection. Equally importantly, women must have equal opportunities to shape and influence every aspect of the response and recovery.

Parliamentary leadership for a WPS-aligned response and recovery

In the context of the vision articulated in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the WPS agenda highlights a critical forward pathway for parliaments in all development and peace settings. In systemic partnership with civil society, parliaments, by virtue of their responsibility for representation, are a democratic channel for articulating people's needs – including on what makes them safe and adequately provided for. Through their responsibility for oversight, parliaments should in turn assess the extent to which such needs are met by the government. Especially in fragile and conflict-affected contexts where justice and security concerns may be more at the forefront, providing civil society with meaningful opportunities for inclusive dialogue and engagement in the parliamentary process is key to advancing gender equality and social cohesion, while upholding human rights and the rule of law.

In the immediate term, this requires parliaments to analyze and oversee their government's COVID-19 response and recovery efforts with a view to assessing their evidence base; proportionality; effectiveness; efficiency; the adequacy of their protection of human rights; and the extent to which they meet the needs of those most at risk of being left behind. In the longer term, it calls for them to press their governments for a vision of building a more just, sustainable, and resilient society, translated into policies and programmes that demonstrate deep lessons learned from the pandemic.

¹ WHO, *Gender equity in the health workforce: Analysis of 104 countries*. Health Workforce Working Paper 1. Available at: https://www.who.int/hrh/resources/gender_equity-health_workforce_analysis/en/

² Sanam Naraghi Anderlini, *Women peace and security in the time of corona*. Available at: <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/wps/2020/03/25/women-peace-and-security-in-the-time-of-corona/>

Perhaps most importantly, there is an urgent need for parliaments to act to increase women's participation and leadership both during the recovery and beyond, on the path towards 2030. The stark gender gaps in COVID-19 decision-making and response are shown to result in response plans that do not consider the disproportionate impact of the pandemic on women and girls. By the same token, countries with higher levels of women in decision-making have responded better to the gendered impacts of COVID-19 on women and girls.³ In the long run, having more women in leadership⁴ will be critical to addressing systemic causes of exclusion, discrimination, and violence against them; and empowering their contribution to building society back better.

UNDP: building parliamentary capacity on Women, Peace and Security on the path beyond recovery, towards 2030

UNDP assists partners from across the governance landscape in laying the foundations for a fair and just transition to the future, beyond the recovery and towards 2030, with the SDGs as a compass. At the heart of its integrated post-COVID-19 governance offer are a renewed pursuit of peace and decisive moves to tackle gender inequalities and exclusion. UNDP supports parliaments to assume their role in reviving the social contract in a way that reflects women's agency, builds trust in institutions and closes the gap between people – women and men – and the state.⁵

The Global Project on Parliaments as Partners Supporting Women, Peace and Security, funded by the Government of Norway, supports members of parliament, female and male, to use the full arsenal of tools at their disposal, most notably the collaboration with civil society and the media, to advance the implementation of the WPS agenda. During the pandemic, the project has supported parliaments and civil society to engender their countries' COVID-19 response and recovery. The examples and outcomes of this support are presented in this note.

Parliaments and WPS-aligned immediate response and medium-term recovery

Parliamentary scrutiny

Although social distancing rules have forced parliaments the world over to adapt their methods of working, parliaments must hold the emergency response to scrutiny. Women and women-led civil society must be reassured that even during crisis and with the lack of face-to-face interaction, a system of democratic control is in place to ensure that special measures are designed and funded in a way that meet their and their communities' needs, and will not push them into precarious legal, economic, and social conditions.

Parliament should consult and engage with activists, organizations and experts in the area of women's rights, WPS and human security, including within constituencies, to analyze the content and adequacy of response proposals, and specifically:

→ Whether the gendered impacts of the implementation of emergency measures are being monitored and addressed, including their effect on the human rights and economic well-being of women; and whether such measures are rooted in conflict-sensitive gender analysis taking into account women's work, vision and local knowledge.

In Georgia, the Parliamentary Gender Equality Council is developing a gender analysis on the impact of the pandemic response on women and girls.

³ https://insights.careinternational.org.uk/media/k2/attachments/CARE_COVID-19-womens-leadership-report_June-2020.pdf

⁴ See e.g. UNDP's regional platform on women's parliamentary representation in Europe and Central Asia, including future projections, at <https://equalfuture.eurasia.undp.org/>

⁵ <https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/hiv-aids/beyond-recovery--towards-2030.html>

→ The level of inclusion of different groups of women, especially those at risk of being left behind, in response planning and crisis teams; deliberations and decisions of committees and task forces on the pandemic response.

In Singapore, during a parliamentary debate, MPs questioned the underrepresentation of women in the country's task force on the economic recovery from the impact of COVID-19, co-chaired by Minister for Social and Family Development. After the debate, an open letter has been published and signed by more representatives of 35 non-profit social enterprises, urging for more diverse representation of women, vulnerable segments of society, and climate-safe businesses in the task force.

→ Whether action against VAWG is an integral part of the immediate response; the extent to which VAWG survivors can access coordinated health, police and justice, and social services.

In Kyrgyzstan, the Forum of Women MPs, supported by UNDP, has proactively address and advocate GBV issues in the legislature. When the COVID-19 crises caused an abrupt 65% spike in reported GBV cases compared to the previous year. The MPs together with women's rights and gender equality community networks and movement have come together to call for an amendment to Code of Criminal Procedure on immediate detention of GBV abusers for the duration of up to 48 hours. The proposed amendment was signed by the President into law in June 2020. The implementation of the GBV legislation will be monitored by Gender Equality Council within Parliament, chaired by the champion of the project, Aida Kasymalieva MP.

→ Fitness for purpose of public health response, including recognition of the capacity, expertise, and need for protection of healthcare system and health workers; and protection of women's continuous access to healthcare, including sexual and reproductive health services

In Nepal, the Women and Social Committee of Federal Parliament, with UNDP's support, held expert consultations on the implications of COVID-19 response for those at risk of being left behind, including, among others, women, children and senior citizens. Provided with a more complete picture, the Committee issued a directive calling on the concerned ministries to guarantee access and continued provision of essential health services to such vulnerable groups, including in remote locations; to avoid deprioritisation of prenatal and maternal care; and to ensure that human rights guide the public health response. The Ministries of Health and Women have since pledged to address the Committee's concerns.

→ The degree to which social protection and economic relief measures reach women at risk of being left behind, including workers and entrepreneurs in the manufacturing sector, women in the informal sector, women with disabilities; and women-headed households.

In April 2020, the Argentine Congressional Budget Office published a detailed report on the impact of COVID-19 on the widening economic gender gap.⁶

→ Adequacy of policy solutions and measures for addressing the issues of unpaid care work during the immediate response and mid-term recovery plans (including through oversight of funds allocated to state-supported social care and childcare services and cash transfers for such care services; and of the fitness-for-purpose of strategies of continuity of care services).

The Parliamentary Assembly of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE PA) has published a report detailing the ways in which the gendered impacts of the pandemic, including on women's unpaid care work, as well as issues related to the women, peace and security agenda and women's political leadership.⁷ It calls for greater inter-parliamentary cooperation including via multilateral forums such as the OSCE PA to ensure that responses to the current crisis protect and advance gender equality.

6 Oficina de Presupuesto del Congreso, Efectos económicos de la crisis por COVID-19 sobre la desigualdad de género. Available at: <https://www.opc.gob.ar/informes/efectos-economicos-de-la-crisis-por-covid19-sobre-la-desigualdad-de-genero/>

7 OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, Gender Balance Report 2020: the Gendered Impacts of COVID-19. Available at: <https://www.oscepa.org/documents/special-representatives/gender-issues/report-17/4055-2020-report-by-the-special-representative-on-gender-issues-the-gendered-impacts-of-covid-19/file>

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- Whether and to what extent women have continued access other essential services such as transportation or IT.
 - The impact of new technologies launched in response to COVID-19 for women and girls, from security implications of surveillance technologies to accessibility of digital forms of participation.
 - Adequacy and geographical reach of emergency response; whether the appropriate support reaches the local women who will benefit most from it.

In Sri Lanka, UNDP has supported a stronger engagement between local elected representatives, district Secretariats and civil society to set priorities for the support to women most vulnerable during COVID-19 response, including victims of SGBV. In Myanmar, UNDP is delivering capacity development to MPs through an online platform, helping them assess the gendered impacts of COVID-19, identify the needs of hard-to-reach groups, and develop community-based projects that will help improve socio-economic conditions of constituents.

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- The extent to which girls have continued learning opportunities during school closures; whether the impacts of school closures on girls are being addressed during recovery, including a strategy for bringing girls back to school.

In Sierra Leone, the Parliament has taken cue from the Ebola epidemic which exacerbated existing gender inequalities, including increased early childbearing and permanently dropping out of education. UNDP is supporting the Parliamentary Female Caucus in engaging local radio stations to sensitize constituents on COVID-19 and its gendered implications; state institutions and traditional leaders on security concerns and implications for women and girls; and borders authorities on the safety and security of women trading along border communities.

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- Where the military is being used to enforce containment measures, the gendered impacts of such deployment on civic life.

In Chile, a Roundtable on Gender and COVID-19 was convened by the Speaker of the Senate, the Chairwomen of the Gender and Labour Committees of the Chamber of Deputies together with 80 civil society organisations. The Roundtable engaged in a dialogue to agree on common proposals that together would form an Agenda on COVID-19 and Gender, including on employment and livelihoods, GBV, health, access to water, education, migration and territorial impact. The objective has set the tone for collaborative policy-making and women's leadership post-COVID-19.

Standing with women-led civil society.

Parliaments can use their power of scrutiny to ensure recognition and protection of civil society actors during the emergency response, and to remove barriers to their efforts to protect the health and wellbeing of communities by:

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- Ensuring that emergency measures include support to community-led first response and civil society service providers, for example, through earmarked funding or provision of PPE and safety guidelines.

In South Africa, relief funds have been earmarked for assisting NGO service providers.

→ Liaising with constituencies to provide facts and dispel misinformation about COVID-19, its effects, the government-led response and available support; raise awareness of the essential role of women and women's organizations in emergency response and resilience; address GBV, gendered stigma and hate speech; and identify support required.

In Liberia, Sierra Leone and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the inclusion of women-led civil society in information dissemination and strengthening sub-national human security response was key in the fight against Ebola.⁸

→ Scrutinizing and debating the implications for emergency measures for fundamental human rights which keep the civic space open, including impact on freedom of association and peaceful assembly, freedom of speech or freedom of movement. It is also the role of parliament to review the proportionality, legality and justifiability of any measures banning or restricting work activities and occupations, as well as new surveillance technologies.

In the UK, the parliamentary Human Rights Committee is holding an inquiry on the human rights implications of the Government's response to COVID-19, welcoming civil society submissions. Following a call from a community of grassroots activists, the Open Rights Group, the committee issued a report advising against a roll-out of a government contact-tracing app until it meets privacy and data protections standards.

International cooperation and support to the immediate global response

Facing a threat to global security, the world can only contain and recover from the effects of the pandemic if all countries respond effectively and on a coordinated basis, which makes international cooperation and support needed more than ever.

The international community is failing to forge a global ceasefire which would enable safe passage of medical, sanitary and food supplies into conflict-affected areas, missing out on the chance to contain violent conflict. The devastating economic impacts of the pandemic, compounded by long-term adverse trends in development assistance, threaten not only lives and livelihoods but also hard-won SDG gains. Further and sharper decline in the flow of foreign assistance to the poorest, most fragile and most conflict-affected countries can cripple opportunities for entire generations of women, youth, children and others at risk of being left behind. Given the looming threat of escalating social unrest globally, now more than ever, there is a need for parliamentary oversight and diplomacy to foster assistance, accountability and coordination between countries:

⁸ See, for example, WHO, 'Women are key in Ebola response'. Available at <https://www.who.int/news-room/facts-in-pictures/detail/women-join-hands-to-oust-ebola-from-drc>; NDI, 'Learning from Ebola: Civil society and COVID-19'. Available at: <https://www.ndi.org/our-stories/learning-ebola-civil-society-and-covid-19>; Colby Pacheco, 'Rethinking the Ebola response: How Liberians helped themselves'. Available at <https://www.devex.com/news/rethinking-the-ebola-response-how-liberians-helped-themselves-87030>.

→ Through budgetary oversight, parliaments in donor countries should ensure their governments maintain or increase the level of ODA (including that targeting gender equality as a principal objective in conflict and post conflict countries), earmark funds for urgent assistance and hold them to account for their fulfilling their international commitments under WPS Agenda. Assistance promoting implementation partnerships and re-granting schemes can help ensure that support reaches civil society organizations.

In his response to the Parliament, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands has pledged an additional EUR 350 million in ODA despite the decline in GNI as a consequence of the pandemic. The assistance would support achievement of the SDGs during COVID-19 recovery, and target those most vulnerable, including women and girls.

The Sint Maarten Recovery, Reconstruction and Resilience Trust Fund is a single-donor trust fund, financed by the Government of the Netherlands. It has supported the Civil Society Partnership Facility for Resilience project which aims to improve the capacity and resources of Sint Maarten's Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) working on reconstruction and resilience at the community level.

→ In recipient countries, parliaments should engage in consultations with the government and donors to ensure gender- and conflict-sensitive recovery assistance; and scrutinize such funds to maximize accountability, transparency and aid effectiveness. In all contexts, MPs should work closely with their countries' accountability institutions, including Supreme Audit Institutions and anti-corruption bodies, and civil society, to hold their governments accountable to taxpayers for the effectiveness and impact of such assistance on women and girls.

In Sierra Leone, the Parliament tabled the Auditor General's Report on the Management of Ebola Funds An audit in Sierra Leone which found that 30% of funds for Ebola response had not been accounted for.

→ There is a role for parliaments to oversee the protection of migrant workers, refugees and displaced persons working in countries other than their own in COVID-19 response. This includes access to health services, social protection coverage and essential information, with particular attention to women migrant workers whose vulnerabilities in particular have been exacerbated during the pandemic. It is also important to probe whether the response effectively prevents migrants from lapsing into irregular status. Bilateral and regional cooperation that parliaments may influence can facilitate economic assistance and safe repatriation and reintegration of migrant workers. Whether the recovery plan seeks to stimulate the employment of returning women is an important area for parliamentary oversight in home countries.

In Nepal, UNDP's initiative N-Peace seeks to support the re-employment of women workers returning from India and Gulf countries. For example, in Nepal where migrants have returned from India and Gulf countries.

- In the fight against COVID-19, the world needs a vaccine and medicines developed as soon as safely possible. That these be available everywhere is a concern for all countries alike. There is a role for parliamentary diplomacy in guarding against the hoarding of the vaccine and medicines by a country that develops them first. Domestically, affordability and access for all, including those most vulnerable and marginalized, will be of concern for all countries, developed and developing, making the need for parliamentary oversight ever more pressing. There is also an immediate concern that poorer countries without a developed medical R&D base will be left behind or priced out of the market, making the need for dialogue, solidarity and international cooperation all the more pressing. Over the long term, with more health crises ahead, countries will need cost-effective ways of meeting their medication and vaccine needs and decrease dependence on global pharmaceutical business.
- Through parliamentary diplomacy, parliaments should support the calls and efforts for unconditional humanitarian ceasefire, respected by all parties.

In a joint statement, the Presidents of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), the North Atlantic Treaty Organization Parliamentary Assembly (NATO PA), and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE PA), urged governments and parliaments to encourage cooperation in the development and distribution of COVID-19 treatments and vaccines between all stakeholders, including the scientific community and pharmaceutical industries. They have also called for more international cooperation in ensuring safe access to medical care of those affected by conflict or living in refugee camps.⁹

Learning and applying lessons from the crisis

Societies have a collective responsibility to gather and use the lessons learned from the COVID-19 emergency for preparedness to future crises, including a full picture of the gendered impacts and responses. One of the most striking lessons learned from the Ebola and Zika crises has been how the response and subsequent analyses failed to integrate gender dynamics. Systematic failure to take stock of women's and girls' particular vulnerabilities and experiences, and of women-led resilience, risks aggravating existing gender inequalities and hamper inclusive and effective response during this and every future crisis to come. In the aftermath of a crisis, parliaments will have the opportunity to significantly contribute to the process of learning and applying the lessons from COVID-19 response to enhance future preparedness and resilience, including through:

- Commissioning, tabling and following up on reports by independent oversight institutions, regarding the use of funds, legality, efficiency and effectiveness of national responses; or through committee inquiries and reports which should provide opportunities and forum for representatives of actors and communities on the ground, including those most vulnerable and at increased risk, to meaningfully participate. This should include the assessment of the fitness-for-purpose of existing crisis response legislation, rules, powers, duties, and procedures - based on the Covid-19 experience - and enact changes as appropriate.
- Ensuring that such lessons learned inform policies, programmes, projects and budgets which give effect to the WPS agenda (such as WPS NAPs, gender equality strategies or relevant sectoral development planning).
- Establishing initiatives on community-monitoring and audit of the performance of national WPS-related programmes.

In 2016 in the UK, the Public Accounts Committee, on the basis of a report by the Comptroller and Auditor as well as evidence from CSOs that assist people affected by crises, investigated whether the response of the Department for International Development to the Ebola epidemic provided value-for-money to the taxpayer.

Areas for support

- new mechanisms for participation in oversight processes and for soliciting feedback on service delivery and policy implementation; innovative approaches to facilitate interaction with women including from rural, poor, and marginalized communities
- capacity building for women's CSOs, activists and rights advocates on effective collaboration with parliament and new and old media in the absence of face-to-face interaction

⁹ <http://assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/News/News-View-EN.asp?newsid=7854&lang=2>

- constructive relationship between parliament, independent oversight bodies and the media
- feedback loops and responsive relationships between MPs and constituents
- promotion of integrated WPS programming, bridging parliamentary development programmes with those supporting government-, civil society-, and local government-led response
- new technologies empowering communities with information, for example online platforms featuring COVID-19 response and public finance data; and interactive online transmissions of parliamentary debates and voting
- evidence base on gender-sensitive public health, social protection and economic relief responses and good practices from the current and past public health crises, including on the issue of unpaid care work
- evidence base on crisis response legislation, rules, powers, duties, and procedures, including the coordination of gender mainstreaming procedures
- exchange of knowledge and best practice among parliaments and civil society networks on WPS-driven COVID-19 response and recovery
- maintaining capacity in gender and LNOB analysis and the use of disaggregated data by parliamentary committees and units
- encouraging governments to set up digital platforms with gender- and age-disaggregated data to support inclusive and data-driven decision-making and oversight
- technological and analytical capacity and partnerships to access and analyze citizen data
- encouraging and supporting governments to produce impact assessments of adopted measures to enable better parliamentary and public scrutiny
- mapping of civil society leading on gender- and conflict-sensitive COVID-19 response, including community and women's groups; supporting parliamentary-civil society partnerships for healthcare and relief support in constituencies.
- constituency engagement in community-level monitoring and audit of WPS programmes

Building back better through parliamentary support to women's full and equal participation

Twenty years of the WPS agenda have shown us that more prosperous, peaceful and fair societies are those that identify and remove systemic barriers to women's equal participation in all areas of life. We also know that empowering women and girls is vital to recovering from shocks. In tandem with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the WPS agenda sets the course for parliaments to exercise stewardship over a democratic, collectively-owned and inclusive process of defining a more peaceful, secure, resilient and sustainable future, and the pathways to achieve it. The challenge and opportunity will be to ensure that decision-making processes start to break the mold of who is perceived as an 'expert', bringing new kinds of people, including a diverse representation of women, locally-sourced ideas, innovations, and solutions.

In April 2020, Hawai'i State Commission on the Status of Women launched a Feminist Economic Recovery Plan for COVID-19, designed to help women recover from the economic fallout from the pandemic and to change the way in which women's work is valued and compensated. The plan draws special attention to the needs of women from the most marginalized groups. Through the plan's recommendations, the Commission seeks to support the Senate Special Committee on COVID-19 and House Committee on COVID-19 Economic and Financial Preparedness and Recovery to devise recovery plans that advance gender equality.¹⁰

In many places, during the current crisis, civil society - from large NGOs to community-based women's organizations - has emerged as champions of effective crisis response, filling in for slow and unprepared governments or complementing the efforts to stem the spread of the virus; identifying and meeting the needs of communities; protecting democratic rights; and fostering innovation. However, the self-sufficiency of citizens cannot alone drive and institutionalize systemic, across-the-board change. Strong and well-capacitated parliaments can translate collective visions into legislation and budgets leading to a more resilient and sustainable future in which women and men enjoy equal rights to security, participation, decision-making and empowerment.

¹⁰ <https://humanservices.hawaii.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/4.13.20-Final-Cover-D2-Feminist-Economic-Recovery-D1.pdf>

Engaging a diverse representation of women in post-COVID-19 decision-making

Having in place a robust framework for women's rights and gender equality under national law, backed by adequate budgets and institutional mechanisms to enforce them, is key to entrenching WPS principles within the rule of law. A stronger resonance of WPS throughout the law can, moreover, provide a foothold for women leaders to challenge traditional power politics and demand more agency in building a resilient future. The COVID-19 crisis has exposed the shortcomings of such frameworks in many countries around the world; although there are visible discrepancies in how various groups have been affected by the pandemic, women have appeared as particularly vulnerable across the board. Decisive steps will need to be taken to protect women from violence. New future-proof laws should also inform a reactive rather than anticipatory future crisis response, leading to hastily-implemented interventions at inordinate human cost such as the closing down of shelters for GBV survivors in the absence of alternative support. Parliamentary committees should ensure that the voices of women leaders, activists and civil society are actively sought and reflected in the post-COVID-19 agenda-setting, law reform and budget process, for instance through:

- a gender-sensitive open-ended dialogue to identify post-COVID-19 policy needs to advance women, peace and (human) security domestically and internationally.

In April 2020 in France, a group of 60 MPs launched a consultative platform for citizens to share and debate ideas on post-COVID-19 future of, among others, health, employment, consumption, education, open democracy and solidarity. Most of the 11 consultation themes integrated a gender perspective.

- holding hearings with constituents, women-led civil society, national WPS focal point and implementing agencies to, based on the COVID-19 experience, identify and prioritize areas requiring most urgent action; and to gather information on whether the funded government programmes have been effective in advancing the WPS agenda and broader gender equality objectives.

In 2018 in Kyrgyzstan, members of the Parliamentary Women's Caucus supported by UNDP used their engaged local stakeholders and communities in identifying locally-specific WPS challenges. Faced with low awareness of the WPS agenda and the country's NAP at the local level, a group of women MPs organised local forums in all seven provinces of the country, well attended by local authorities, women's organisations and the media, to build a broad-based common understanding of the WPS agenda. Inputs from the forums subsequently informed the parliamentary road map on WPS endorsed by the Parliament's plenary in 2019.

In Brazil, the GBV law passed by the Parliament of in 2006 which originated as a private member's bill was informed by local public hearings throughout the country held by the parliamentary women's caucus.

- systematically developing user-friendly and context-sensitive tools and partnerships with local civil society, community networks, local authorities and the media for engaging different groups of women at risk of being left behind during future crisis response, including those in remote areas; without access to internet; traditionally less able or unable to participate in the decisions that impact them (e.g. the poorest, women, youth, ethnic groups, persons with disabilities, others); and those marginalized within the marginalized groups (e.g. women in minority groups).

UNDP's *Parliamentary Handbook on the Women, Peace and Security Agenda* provides a comprehensive overview of global good practice from parliaments on WPS oversight and implementation. It offers guidance on how parliaments can work with key stakeholders such as national and local governments, women-led civil society and advocates, community organizations, the UN system and development partners, to advance the WPS agenda.¹¹

¹¹ UNDP, 'Parliaments as Partners Supporting Women, Peace and Security: a Global Handbook'. Available at: <https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/crisis-prevention-and-recovery/parliament-as-partners-supporting-women-peace-and-security-agend.html>

Promoting women's voice and agency in the post-COVID-19 society

Emerging from the COVID-19 crisis into a more resilient, secure and sustainable economic model aligned with the planet's natural limits, respecting basic needs and leaving no one behind will require harnessing women's potential as leaders, peacebuilders, innovators and agents of change.¹² There is an international momentum around a greater role for women in building back from COVID-19 as well as a political opportunity to push women's agenda provided by the 20th anniversary of UNSCR 1325 and the 25th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform. Parliaments can promote women's voice and agency, including through support to:

- *civil society- and community-led efforts*: ensuring legal recognition and protection for women peacebuilders and women-led CSOs. Promoting their inclusion in decision-making processes, including through committee hearings, parliamentary women's caucuses or other cross-party structures, and local and community forums.
- *education, economic and technological empowerment*: ensuring a continuous and steady level of public financial resources allocated to girls' education, technical and vocational training to promote economic empowerment and decrease female workers' concentration in sectors most vulnerable to crises. Extending social protection policies to women in the informal sector and most vulnerable groups. Addressing the digital gender divide and exclusion.

The parliaments of France¹³ and Mexico¹⁴ are among the few that have investigated the gendered digital gap.

- *women's political participation*: promoting whole-of-electoral-cycle support to women's participation by reviewing electoral laws and constitutions, advocating towards political parties to promote women candidates and politicians, and securing the adoption of a common, minimum gender equality agenda all political parties. Conducting constituency outreach and communication on the importance of women in decision-making. Addressing violence against women candidates and MPs. Earmarking resources for increasing women's political participation at national and local level, including mentorship and internship programmes, and trainings for women leaders and candidates. Introducing gender equality requirements into regulations on the public funding of political parties. Oversight of the levels of women's participation in peace and security decision-making. Establishing systematic and formal interaction between parliamentary focal structure(s) on gender equality and civil society actors.

In Sri Lanka, where the parliament has been dissolved since early March 2020 ahead of elections, UNDP has supported women public and community leaders to raise awareness among communities of the impact of COVID-19 on women's safety, risk factors for GBV and support available from CSOs, including free legal and counselling services. UNDP has also facilitated a communications campaign with a series of short videos on the importance of women's leadership in the COVID-19 response and recovery, including political leadership.

Areas for support

systematic communication and collaboration between national parliamentary WPS and gender equality mechanisms, 15 local counterparts and civil society

- parliamentary outreach and civic education on its role in relation to WPS and gender equality agenda
- capacity strengthening for WPS and gender equality CSOs to advocate and provide various forms of input and expertise to parliament
- capacity building to political parties on the WPS agenda and encouraging greater collaboration with CSOs
- support to women candidates and MPs (e.g. through parliamentary mentoring network programmes, capacity building, facilitating participation)

¹² While the current crisis has provided countless examples of women's effective, practical and resourceful leadership from national to the grassroots level, there is already enough evidence in the world to see the positive effects of women's participation in decision-making on people's lives and societies as a whole. Gender-balanced representation, aside from being part and parcel of human rights and inclusion principles, is associated with less corruption and more equitable policy outcomes. See, for example, <https://www.unwomen.org/~media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2013/12/un%20women%20briefuswebrev2%20pdf.ashx> and https://www.transparency.org/files/content/corruptionqas/Topic_guide_gender_corruption_Final_2016.pdf

¹³ <http://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/14/rap-info/i3348.asp>

¹⁴ <http://www.diputados.gob.mx/sedia/sia/redipal/CRV-VII-17-14.pdf>

¹⁵ Parliamentary women's caucuses and councils play important roles in cultivating relationships with actors outside elected office. See e.g. <https://www.eurasia.undp.org/content/rbec/en/home/library/gender-equality/strengthening-womens-political-participation.html>

- outreach and media trainings on women's participation in elections
- international networking and good practice exchange among women parliamentarians on WPS and post-COVID-19 participative foresight
- integrated parliamentary, electoral and political party programming for enhancing women's political participation

Gender-sensitive parliament as a force for realizing WPS and gender equality agendas post-COVID-19

Only by integrating gender sensitivity into its own culture, structure, infrastructure and ways of working can parliament serve as a force for realizing the WPS and gender equality agendas beyond COVID-19 recovery, towards 2030.¹⁶ Addressing barriers to women MPs' fulfilling their mandate and ensuring their representation in parliamentary leadership and across committees; systematizing gender mainstreaming in legislative scrutiny and oversight; and securing shared responsibility for the WPS agenda and broader gender equality portfolio among women and men MPs alike, are among measures parliaments can take.

Areas for support

- integration of WPS into parliamentary gender-sensitivity self-assessment / audit; or integration of WP and gender-sensitivity component into the parliamentary SDG self-assessment to consider existing processes, mechanisms and rules from a gender perspective
- establishment and/or capacitation of WPS and gender equality parliamentary bodies (legislative chamber committee on gender, women's caucus) to promote and coordinate gender mainstreaming
- capacity building training for secretariat, committee and MP staff on gender research, analysis and mainstreaming, using sex disaggregated data and developing gender equality-focused recommendations
- systematization of WPS and gender mainstreaming in legislation (e.g. through checklists, guidelines, toolkits or development of law-making procedure for all bills to undergo gender analysis)
- establishment and/or capacitation of parliamentary mechanisms for reviewing discriminatory legislation
- professional development for WPS and gender equality champions within parliament;
- support to HeforShe initiatives to ensure that WPS and gender equality are the responsibility of men and women MPs alike

¹⁶ UNDP's parliamentary development work in Europe and Central Asia has shown that strengthening gender equality in parliamentary governance in turn makes the institution more inclusive, transparent and accountable in the spirit of SDG 16. See: <https://www.eurasia.undp.org/content/rbec/en/home/library/gender-equality/strengthening-womens-political-participation.html>