



COVID-19 and Global Peace, Security and Gender Equality Call to Action: Now and the Future

The impact of Covid-19 is deeply gendered. Gender must therefore be at the centre of global responses. This requires gendered analysis that is intersectional which assesses the virus's disproportionate impact on people, communities and countries based on their intersecting identities, including gender, race, ethnicity, disability, class, age and social-economic status. The Women, Peace and Security agenda provides an essential framework for analysing and responding to COVID-19. Through UNSCR 1325 and its associated resolutions the International Community, including governments, donors, multilateral institutions and INGOs, have already committed to a gendered approach to crises. April 2020 marks six months until the 20th anniversary of UNSCR 1325. This was due to be a global 'moment' where the world reflected on progress made and challenges that limited progress. Considering the importance of the upcoming anniversary, the world needs to work together to implement the Women, Peace and Security agenda globally and ensure the COVID-19 response is gendered and that peace is prioritised. While each country, region, city, town and rural area will be impacted differently, responses must acknowledge that no country is unaffected by the crisis and its long-term impacts. There is likely to be unequal access to any healthcare solutions that emerge in the next 12-18 months, from reliable testing to vaccines. That inequality will reflect in the impact of COVID-19 on women and girls' rights, peace and security. As a result, the Women, Peace and Security agenda should be applied to the COVID-19 response in the UK as well as internationally.

Immediate and Long-term Gender, Peace and Security Impacts

There are already immediate and long-term impacts of COVID-19 which require a gendered approach that accounts for the differential impact on women and girls, as well as peace and security:

- **Violence against Women and Girls (VAWG):** VAWG is already a global pandemic. Studies of crisis and conflict, such as Ebola show that VAWG increases during emergencies. Global increases in VAWG, particularly Intimate Partner Violence, are already increasing as a result of COVID-19. The social distancing, self-isolation, quarantining and lockdown measures in place in many countries will restrict mobility and put many women and girls at an increased risk. Protection services such as refuges are vital, these must be funded and accessible to account for the increases in VAWG and restricted mobility measures that are in place. Responses to the humanitarian crisis caused by COVID-19 must acknowledge that VAWG programming is lifesaving in the same way that WASH, shelter and food security are lifesaving.
- **Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR):** Access to, legislation restricting, and provision of SRHR services are already affected by COVID-19, including shortages in medications, such as contraceptives, antiretrovirals for HIV and AIDS and antibiotics, and diminished access to safe abortion care. Financial resources that would have otherwise been used for such health and rights programmes also face the risk of being diverted to COVID-19 response, as seen in the Ebola response in West Africa. These impacts must be understood in a context where SRHR are already at risk with the consistent pushback, as seen with the global "gag rule" that threatens the provisions of health services in "developing countries".
- **Women's Participation:** At a global and national level, women and girls are already being excluded from the decision-making in COVID-19 response, despite their active participation in the response itself. Only 29 Heads of State are women, yet women make up 70% of healthcare workers globally. Despite this only 25% occupy senior leadership positions. It is essential that women and girls' right to participate are met to ensure the response is gendered and meets women and girls' experiences, rights and needs.
- **Restrictive legislation:** As countries globally declare states of emergencies and enact legislation to respond to COVID-19, civil society space is being restricted by measures which also increase powers to security and justice sectors to stem the spread of the virus. In the short and long-term these laws can be used by states to restrict civil society space including women's rights organisations and movements which ultimately will intersect with long-term governance, peacebuilding and women and girls' rights and their participation in peace and security issues. Responses must address the restrictions on and impact of limiting civil society space by ensuring that governments do not abuse their power.
- **Peace and Security:** During COVID-19, peace is at even greater risk due to economic decline, global recession, job losses, health inequality, food insecurity, destabilisation, misuse of power and militarism. The impact of this on peace and on women and girls' rights risks increased instability and conflict. Immediately, a global ceasefire is essential as conflict, proxy wars and bombings are still ongoing as the virus continues to spread. In the longer-term, gender-conflict analysis must be integrated into all COVID-19 responses as peace and security will be

increasingly affected by the impact of the virus. The Women, Peace and Security agenda and commitments to the agenda demonstrate that that the impact will be gendered and that women and girls' have the right to participate in the response.

- **Livelihoods, Insecure Work and Women's Economic Empowerment:** Livelihoods are already being impacted by COVID-19. This particularly affects women in insecure work who are not given the protection of formal employment. Women's Economic Empowerment and Economic Justice should form part of the response to COVID-19 to ensure that the negative impacts on women's livelihoods and employment are mitigated during and post COVID-19.
- **Unpaid Care:** Globally women perform 76.2% of unpaid care work, three times more than men. With the stay at home measures and the closures of school there is a further increased burden on women and girls of caregiving and domestic responsibilities which can be either alongside or replace women and girls' paid work or education. Those with such care responsibilities who are self-employed and/or work in the informal economy will be severely affected by the pandemic. Unpaid care increases in conflict, it is essential that long-term responses to COVID-19 address the gendered impact of COVID-19, instability and women and girls' unpaid care.
- **Social Protection:** Social protection systems will be overstretched and likely to be underfunded in the long-term due to COVID-19. This will be further affected as insecurity and instability increases. The intersection of COVID-19 impacts, such as instability and conflict, will affect state support and protection given to the women and girls' who need it most. It is essential that such funding continues and acknowledges the gendered nature of social protection.
- **Militarism:** The current COVID-19 global rhetoric is highly militarised with references to 'war on the virus' regularly used. The response to COVID-19 needs to be comprehensive and acknowledge that its people, countries and communities that are affected. Weapons and international arms transfers should stop as it is in direct contradiction to calls for a global ceasefire by the UN Secretary General. In the face of a global pandemic, governments cannot continue to invest more in militarism than in their public healthcare infrastructure. This should feed into global learning where militarism cannot be the answer to Covid-19 or other crisis.

Recommendations:

1. **Gender Disaggregated Data:** Too often in crisis, gender disaggregated data is collected long after the crisis begins. Such data on virus contraction, deaths and programme responses (such as programme participants) is crucial to understanding its impact and should be collected immediately.
2. **Gender Analysis:** Rapid gender assessments should take place the short-term and intersectional gender-conflict analysis in the long-term to ensure adequate gendered responses which understand the different implications of COVID-19 on women, girls, men and boys, with close attention on differentials both within and between countries.
3. **Funding:** All COVID-19 response funding must have a budget line for gender to ensure that programmes effectively respond to women and girls' rights. Programming should ensure that women and girls' role in decision making is strengthened and that they are central to the responses.
4. **Lifesaving:** Gender programming, such as VAWG programming, must be considered lifesaving in the same way that other parts of humanitarian response are deemed lifesaving and thus essential.
5. **Women's Rights Organisations:** Women's Rights Organisations are providing essential roles in service delivery as well as holding governments and international institutions accountable, they should be funded with long-term, flexible funding for their self-defined priorities as their work changes to short and long-term COVID-19 response.
6. **Restrictive Legislation:** Legislation restricting freedom of movement and association may be necessary in the short-term to reduce the spread of COVID-19, however, such legislation and increased powers may remain in place for many years, these should be closely monitored and Women's Rights Organisations consulted on their use and misuse to ensure that they do not restrict civil society space, activism and advocacy.
7. **Prioritise Peace:** The responses to COVID-19 should prioritise peace. Gendered approaches to peacebuilding should be supported in the COVID-19 response.
8. **Covid-19 Equal Access:** Access to healthcare solutions such as testing, and vaccines should be universal. This should ensure that people based in fragile conflict affected states have as equal access to such healthcare solutions as those in "Donor States".

This paper is an immediate response to Gender Equality, Covid 19 and peace and security. The data and analysis to date is primarily anecdotal and as the pandemic and its impact develops increased resources will be available, this paper aims at ensuring responses are gendered and the Women, Peace and Security agenda applies.

(If you would like to add in your own orgs resources specific to Covid-19 then please do. Gaps will confirm if we publish a bibliography)

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