



ACTION BRIEF

# UN WOMEN ASIA AND THE PACIFIC AND COVID-19

July 2020

Photo: UN Women/Fahad Kaizer

## INFORMING THE RESPONSE

7

Countries where UN Women is supporting joint socio-economic assessments

10

Countries where UN Women conducted nationally representative rapid impact surveys

11

## CATALYZING GEWE ACTIONS

GiHA and/or Protection Working Groups co-chaired by UN Women, directly influencing response plans. Also co-chairing IBC on GE & HR

40+

## SETTING THE AGENDA

Knowledge products and guidelines that have informed CPRPs, HRPs, socio-economic frameworks, SG Brief on Southeast Asia

10

## CONVENING GENDER MACHINERIES

Gender machineries, including at ministerial level, convened

## Our collective response to a common crisis

Six months into the COVID-19 crisis, UN Women has played a central part in setting a course for Asia and the Pacific to make gender equality and women's empowerment central to the pandemic response.

We have led the way in providing gender analysis, data and expertise informing decisions about health care, the economy and safety.

We have drawn on our unique capacity to back a collective regional response as well as tailored national actions reflecting diverse needs and priorities.

In a fast-evolving crisis, we continuously collaborate and exchange what we know, sharing the best strategies within the region and from around the world.

## What is it going to take?

**Generating the right data and evidence.** UN Women leads efforts to generate sound evidence of COVID-19 impacts on women and girls. We have conducted rapid impact surveys in 10 countries, and socioeconomic impact assessments in 7 more.

**Making gender central to the United Nations response.** Every UN Women office in the region has advanced gender integration in United Nations socioeconomic or humanitarian frameworks, and some in health and preparedness plans as well.

**Influencing national policy responses.** We mobilize longstanding networks to support women leaders, civil society and national gender machineries to influence policy debates and decisions, making strides in 10 countries. Over 40 knowledge products sustain quick access to the latest breakthroughs on gender and COVID-19.

**Delivering on the ground.** UN Women supports COVID-19 prevention and response interventions that expressly meet the needs of women and girls. That may mean strengthening the response to gender-based violence. Or stepping up measures for women's leadership or economic empowerment. Most countries call for a combination of all three.

**Constant collaboration:** Across the region, our country offices regularly consult with each other to drive the fastest uptake of proven solutions, whether the issue is PPE production in Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Myanmar, or women's entrepreneurship in China, India, Indonesia, Thailand and Viet Nam.

**OUR IMPACT: Gender at the centre makes pandemic responses more effective for all**

When the COVID-19 crisis descended on Asia and the Pacific, UN Women quickly provided much of the region's – and the world's – earliest credible data and analysis on the fallout on women and girls.

Assessments, including fast-action surveys through mobile phones, showed the devastating toll of the disease on women's employment, wages, remittances and access to government relief, along with a steep increase in unpaid domestic and care work, and disparities in access to information and medical services. The assessments urged attention to the fact that gender discrimination had already left many women behind; the pandemic exacerbated these tendencies.

Findings have informed government and United Nations planning, such as in Bangladesh, where UN recommendations for the national five-year plan included issues such as expanding social protection to remedy women's income losses including from increase in unpaid care work. In Pakistan, an assessment led the Ministry of Human Rights to extend a helpline for survivors of gender-based violence.



Photo: UN Women/Fahad Abdullah Kaizer

Continuous innovation includes a plan in Indonesia to partner with a unicorn tech company in combining big data analytics and cost-effective data collection and analysis technologies. The aim: provide more precise measurement of COVID-19 impacts on women in informal work.

UN Women leads efforts to coordinate work on gender equality by United Nations development and humanitarian partners as well as donors of international assistance. New space to act on gender issues has opened with engagement of UN Women in the humanitarian coordination mechanism in Afghanistan and through the creation of a gender and protection working group in Timor Leste. Our leadership in humanitarian coordination has embedded gender in plans that guide the delivery of COVID-19 prevention and response actions, while also ensuring women and girls determine what the actions should be.

In the Rohingya refugee camps in Cox's Bazar in Bangladesh, UN Women has a Gender Hub in place with four full-time staff who provide expertise and help keep gender at the forefront of humanitarian attention. When COVID-19 hit, the Gender in Humanitarian Action Working Group, a consortium of humanitarian organizations, immediately mobilized with the Gender Hub to respond to concerns expressed by over 80 Rohingya women community volunteers and women in a series of focus groups. Women stressed, for instance, that the lack of gender separation in isolation and treatment centres would prevent women from coming forward for treatment, posing risks to their own lives and health and that of camp residents at large. The gender segregation of centres were assured as a result, and now protocols and checklists are used to keep operations gender aware – and responsive.

**OUR IMPACT: Gender-based violence is mitigated and minimized**

Across Asia and the Pacific, UN Women works closely with governments and civil society partners to stem the rising tide of gender-based violence attributed to COVID-19. Our programmes are comprehensive, integrating all essential components of programming to end violence – coordination, policies and tools, services and prevention.

We have been well placed to adapt existing work, which had already gone far in strengthening national systems and services so they have the capacity to flex and adapt when an emergency strikes. Many programmes in the region already straddle development and humanitarian work, given the region's ongoing vulnerability to disasters. And we build on global best practices and innovations, such as in enlisting religious and sports organizations to champion a stop to violence.

With every country in the region now facing some level of crisis from the pandemic, UN Women is assisting governments and national women's machineries to coordinate national plans and data collection to meet minimum standards for preventing and responding to gender-based violence in emergencies. Through our influence, COVID-19 surveys now apply principles of "do no harm" in collecting data on violence against women and girls.

In Timor-Leste, we joined United Nations and other partners to extend support services in quarantine facilities. Partnership with UNICEF developed a code of conduct on preventing sexual exploitation and abuse in quarantine centres in Viet Nam, a move quickly replicated in Cambodia, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan and Timor-Leste. A gender equality and social inclusion checklist guides quarantine sites in Nepal, and includes assessments linked to preventing gender-based violence.



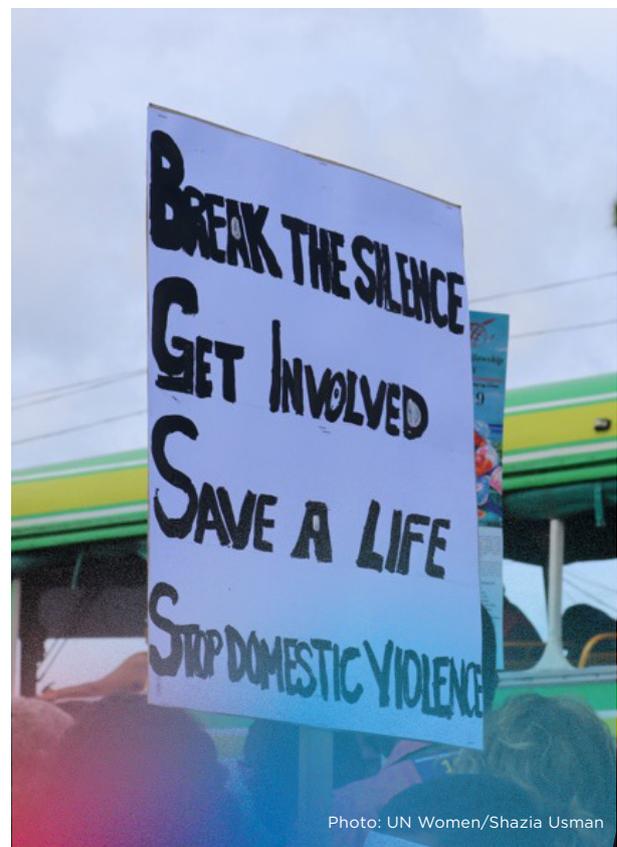
### OUR IMPACT: Social protection and economic stimulus packages serve women and girls

Economic fallout from COVID-19 has been severe for women and girls, and will continue into the future. Building on a strong foundation of existing programmes and widely respected expertise on women’s economic empowerment, UN Women has led regional advocacy for social protection that reaches women who are most vulnerable, particularly the large share working in the informal sector. Cash and cash-for-work initiatives have been developed in Bangladesh, Indonesia, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, the Philippines and Viet Nam. In Indonesia, UN Women supported a cash-for-work programme as integral to scaled-up social protection, and to better define eligibility, guided new vulnerability criteria that include gender.

To complement broader efforts by the Government of Nepal, UN Women put forward a comprehensive package of cash transfers and in-kind support for women from excluded groups, covering access to food, clean energy, essential supplies, information, health care, and financial and digital services. Community kitchens in slums and other marginalized areas are one strategy to meet urgent needs for food and employment. The programme also links women producing PPE to markets. Similar efforts in Myanmar for women affected by conflict and returnee women migrant workers have opened opportunities to produce masks, which are then procured by government and humanitarian agencies. In Pakistan, based on rapid assessments conducted by women’s rights organizations in 10 districts, UN Women distributed essential food items and hygiene supplies to home-based workers and other highly vulnerable women.

Since the start of the pandemic, UN Women has remained fully committed to ensuring that services for survivors of violence would not stop. We continue to directly fund counselling and lifesaving shelters, including in Afghanistan, Indonesia, Pakistan, Cambodia, Papua New Guinea and Viet Nam. Online technology has extended services in some cases, such as through WhatsApp chat bots and apps in India, an approach now being developed in Cambodia through apps specifically for women migrant workers. Mobile and online counselling services backed by online training tools support women in outlying communities in six Pacific island countries. Across the region, where Internet use remains low and online options are less feasible, UN Women has put PPE equipment in the hands of frontline responders to sustain services in person.

Multiple communications materials and campaigns have urged the prevention of violence. In Bangladesh, a network of 14 community radio stations is broadcasting regular public service announcements on prevention to an audience of 7 million people. Outreach via SMS to a registry of nearly 17,000 imams means prevention messages will also echo through sermons in local mosques. Timor-Leste’s efforts to prevent violence include whole-school programmes and gender-equitable parenting sessions, particularly in remote settings.



Among the Pacific island states, fast action by governments mostly averted the COVID-19 health crisis. But they have not escaped profound economic disruption. Times have been particularly hard for women market vendors, vulnerable and informal workers who have seen incomes fall by as much as 75 per cent – if they can even get to markets to sell their goods.

UN Women’s longstanding work with women market vendors has provided some immediate relief, catalysing donor and government attention. In Papua New Guinea, we raised emergency funds that doubled the number of women vendors accessing social protection assistance, easing the crisis for 26,000 women in 16 markets. National funds helped upgrade water and sanitation in large district markets across the country. A pre-crisis programme to revamp Gordons market, the largest market in the Pacific, paid new dividends in having enough space and hygiene and other facilities to continue operating safely during the pandemic.

Successful negotiation with the Government in Fiji kept markets open as essential services, with social distancing measures in place. Across the five Pacific countries where UN Women supports women vendors, we have distributed PPE and cleaning materials, and trained vendors and market managers on preventing infection.

In a number of countries, such as China, India, Indonesia, the Philippines and Viet Nam, UN Women’s growing ties with the business world catalysed private sector support for women. In China, funding from a local foundation assisted economic recovery in hard-hit Hubei and Tianjin, targeting women-led small and medium enterprises. A partnership with the Mulan Club, the country’s largest association of women-led businesses, orchestrated social media and other outreach mobilizing companies to respond to COVID-19 in line with the global Women’s Empowerment Principles.

### OUR IMPACT: Women and girls lead and participate in COVID-19 decision-making

Across Asia and the Pacific, UN Women partners with women’s advocates and civil society as leading advocates for COVID-19 responses that meet women’s needs and rights. In Timor-Leste, women’s groups are monitoring government social protection schemes, and spotlighting issues faced by LGBTI, persons with disabilities, domestic workers and other marginalized groups. Bangladesh’s Gender Monitoring Network calls for government and United Nations COVID-19 plans to actively address the diverse experiences of its women-led and gender equality-focused groups, which include those representing sex workers, women with disabilities and transgender women. In Myanmar, country-wide consultations with women civil society members led to exchanges with development partners on urgent areas of support, including specific sessions between LGBTIQI activists and the United Nations country team.

With immense and growing pressures on resources, UN Women will work through the EU-UN Spotlight Initiative to expand funding for the national disability association in Timor-Leste so that it can better assist and advocate for women with disabilities. In Afghanistan, we are issuing small grants of up to \$5,000 for civil society initiatives to keep their doors open and continue supporting women and girls. Daily Zoom outreach builds solidarity and tracks shifting priorities and needs.

In both Myanmar and the Philippines, UN Women has successfully mobilized funds for women, peace and security in the context of COVID-19, a large part of which will support civil society-led responses to the crisis. These resources will also shaped the future of work on women, peace and security, with a global event on the issue slated for the end of 2020 in Viet Nam. COVID-19 will be a cross-cutting topic in discussions on trends and escalating concerns such as climate security, cyber security and health security.

Far-reaching public campaigns have highlighted women’s leadership in the COVID-19 response. Afghanistan’s creative Salam for Safety campaign used images of women to asking all Afghans to use the traditional “salam” greeting with folded hands, rather than greetings with physical contact.

To engage a new “Generation Equality”, UN Women has joined 12 United Nations organizations and the Tencent Youth platform to kick off 11 livestreamed youth dialogues in China. They include one on how young people can drive creative solutions that advance gender equality and close gender gaps widening due to COVID-19.



Photo: UN Women/Ploy Phutpheng