



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Women in the COVID-19 Crisis: Disproportionately Affected and Protagonists of Regeneration

The pandemic has increased the vulnerability of countless women across the globe. There is a need to pay close attention to the experiences and struggles of women so they can fully participate and flourish in the regeneration of human systems and the creation of new development models that are more respectful of people and the earth.

Working Group 2

Situation, Analysis and Proposals
Ecology | Economics | Health | Security



COVID - 19
Vatican Commission

See: Situation

In the midst of the pandemic, discriminatory social norms compounded by other disadvantages (e.g. poverty, race, ethnicity, and religion) have increased the vulnerability of countless women across the globe. Despite this, many women have shown great resilience in balancing work and family life, and coping with the threat and reality of infection.

- *Women are leading the health response.* Women represent 70% of the global social and health care workforce, exposing them to a greater risk of infection.
- *Women are also shouldering much of the burden at home.* Women traditionally perform unpaid and unrecognized work, such as domestic services. The forced closures of schools in many countries during lockdowns has had a dramatic and immediate effect on women, who have become their children's teachers while often managing other roles. While unpaid care and domestic work were valued at approximately \$11 trillion in 2019, COVID-19 has significantly increased the amount of unpaid work done by women.
- *The economic impacts of COVID-19 fall disproportionately on women and girls.* As many as 60% of women work in the informal economy, in agriculture, in temporary work, and in services associated with low earnings with few, if any, legal and social protections.¹ Service sector jobs that are dominated by women (food, hospitality, and tourism) are suffering the harshest economic contractions²
- *Among the hardest hit are those who have the least.* The pandemic has exacerbated an already desperate situation for more than 80 million forcibly displaced persons worldwide. Women and girls make up around 50 percent of any refugee, internally displaced or stateless population.
- *Violence against women has increased during the pandemic.* Isolation, restricted movement and stay-at-home measures have led to increased levels of domestic violence globally, while reports from around the world reveal an increase in the global trafficking of women. Without the security provided by school (including food access), girls are more vulnerable to violence, sexual violence, and child marriage.
- *Compounded vulnerabilities due to environmental degradation:* The impacts of COVID-19 magnify the pressures of communities experiencing more extreme and frequent disasters due to climate change. Many are forced to temporarily or permanently leave their homes, which increases the risk of COVID-19 infection. Compounded vulnerabilities and stress caused by these two crises are putting women and girls at a greater risk of multiple forms of gender-based violence.

While women are bearing the brunt of the pandemic, they have been excluded from much of the Covid-19 decision-making in many countries, largely due to enduring underrepresentation in senior positions in key fields of medicine and politics. This may have contributed to the lack of explicit attention paid to the COVID-19 pandemic's negative impacts on women and girls. Countries with women leaders, however, have generally fared better overall during the pandemic. These leaders approached the crisis in a similar way: they consulted early with health experts and implemented containment measures early.

¹ See the Global Gender Gap Report 2020 from the World Economic Forum

² See the article, "COVID-19 and gender equality: Countering the regressive effect," from the McKinsey Global Institute

The Covid-19 pandemic has long-lasting implications for global human security. In general, women leaders invest more in human security. Women's participation in peace and security accords make peace more sustainable; such accords are 35% more likely to last at least 15 years, and 64% less likely to fail. The greater the role of women in a peace campaign, the larger the correlation with nonviolent methods, even in highly repressive contexts. On the occasion of International Women's Day for Peace and Disarmament in May 2020, 235 women leaders from around the world expressed deep concern about the pandemic and affirmed the value of their active participation in peace processes.

Judge: Analysis

Human dignity is intrinsic to every human person. It is the source of universal human rights and the foundation of Catholic Social Teaching, including the concept of Integral Ecology (LS 137-162).

The Church has acknowledged a fair share of historical male authoritarianism, domination, and sexist violence in its history (*Christus Vivit* 42). However, the Church's teaching has long recognized the **equal dignity of men and women** and criticized unjust discrimination against women as a violation of Catholic Social Teaching. *Gaudium et Spes* noted, "Where they have not yet won it, women claim for themselves an equity with men before the law and in fact." In a letter to the UN in 1995, Saint John Paul II underscored that "greater efforts are needed to eliminate discrimination against women in areas that include education, health care and employment."

The Church's recognition of women's equality extends to **roles in public life**. *Gaudium et Spes* called for "proper and necessary participation of women in the cultural life" (GS 60) and since then, the Magisterium has stressed the contribution of women in public life, and the need to increase the opportunities available to them (*Christifidelis Laici* 49; *Evangelii Gaudium* 103, 104; *Amoris Laetitia* 173). Pope Francis emphasized the importance of women's perspectives in the spheres of culture, politics, and economics (*Francis, 5 October 2017*; *Amoris Laetitia* 183), and drew attention to the importance of motherhood stating, "... we need those who generate and regenerate life with tenderness, because only gift, care and sharing keep the human family together" (*Francis, 24 October 2020*).

Special consideration needs to be given to how women can be protected and supported, but also to how women can play a full role in contributing to the common good. The leadership and contributions of women are indispensable to avoid the risk of "going back to normal" and to regenerate a more inclusive and sustainable economy and society.

- **Rethinking Economics: towards a collaborative economy.** The rising number of leading women economists is infusing the field with rich ideas, many pertaining to a more inclusive economy that is more attentive to relational dynamics and open to ecological concerns.³ Many leading female economists share a clear focus on the inclusive, circular, regenerative economy. Their work is helping to elucidate the interconnections between different facets of economic analysis (production, consumption, protection of the planet), which their male counterparts have tended to ignore.

³ Some examples: Elinor Ostrom received the Nobel Prize in 2009 for her work on the cooperative management of collective goods. In 2019, the Nobel prize was given to Esther Duflo, who continues to work on issues of poverty. Kate Raworth has advanced an innovative approach to the concept of development, which respects social and ecological boundaries to ensure that no one falls short on life's essentials (*Doughnut Economics*, 2017). Mariana Mazzucato proposes a new interpretation of economic value and a new role for the state in economic systems. Stephanie Kelton compares national and family budgets, offering valuable insights on debt and deficit issues. Carlota Perez contributes to the redefinition of lifestyles and economic growth. Jennifer Nedelsky proposes new rules for harmonizing work and care as two areas essential for the development of a good life.

- **Deepening an integral approach to peacebuilding.** Women could be easily presented as only victims or idealized as peacemakers. However, as Archbishop Azua explained in 2018, the role of women as peacebuilders, as human rights defenders should be expanded upon in coming years.⁴
- **Giving value to care.** Recognizing the importance of care in the public domain, not just in the private sphere, offers a much-needed alternative to the current human system of domination over creation, including over women. “A fragile world, entrusted by God to human care, challenges us to devise intelligent ways of directing, developing and limiting our power” (LS 78). With *Laudato Si'* added to the Church’s body of teaching, any theology, spirituality and action taken up by the Church must deeply listen to the feminine voices of creation and wisdom as sources of ecological conversion and integral praxis.

Act: Proposals

Reflections on the role of the Church and proposals to governments can address the situation and wellbeing of women disproportionately impacted by the pandemic as well as advance the contributions by women to public life, across sectors, for the common good.

To Governments

- Support for women in the most vulnerable situations. For example, providing safe spaces and services for those facing domestic violence.
- Support to ease the burden of care on women during the pandemic, such as child benefit supports and emergency welfare support.
- Increase awareness of the inequalities between men and women in economy and society. Governments should prioritize collecting data, disaggregated by gender and age and to analyze such data from the perspectives of equal dignity of men and women, boys and girls (i.e. access to studies, responsibilities and decisions, gender pay gap). If we don’t measure, we will not see progress or improvements.
- Monitor the labor market and address the issue of greater job insecurity among the female workforce, while accounting for the complexity of family management during and after COVID-19.
- Include more women in decision-making. For example, draft COVID-19 plans and other public policies through collaborative processes that seek advice and innovation from women and ensures that integrating their inputs becomes the norm.
- Identify and remove structural barriers to inclusion such as political funding requirements and other social and cultural obstacles to women's involvement in decision-making and leadership roles.
- Value women’s contributions to support transformative social and economic change.
- Rethink the economic and social models that perpetuate inequality between men and women, and shift the focus from profits and economic growth to social equity, human wellbeing and care for creation.

4. As [Archbishop Azua stated](#), “The Catholic Church will continue to engage women in their efforts in conflict prevention and resolution not only as a question of principle, but also because the lessons learned and best practices verified clearly show that women are effective agents for the achievement and maintenance of peace and security for all.”

Role of the Church

- Enhance the role of women in addressing the COVID-19 crisis and its aftermath. The UN Secretary General's calls for women and girls to be at the center of the pandemic response could be supported by the Church, through local churches' initiatives or even through its international network.
- Denounce direct and systemic violence against women, for example, by supporting the UN Secretary General's calls for a global ceasefire on violence against women and girls. The Church could continue to promote fraternity and harmony among human beings with special attention to women. For example, messages countering violence against women could be encouraged in homilies and in catechesis.
- Value and actively support the action of women of faith. Church peacebuilding efforts, should model best practices by including more women and supporting their capacity for compromise and reconciliation.



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Global Voices: The Impact of COVID-19 on Women

Bangladesh

In Kutupalong, the world's largest refugee camp, the virus is spreading among nearly one million Rohingya who fled persecution in Burma and are now living in crowded shelters in Bangladesh. With the camp on lockdown, only essential services like food distribution, sanitation and urgent health services are allowed. Caritas Bangladesh, has a network of mostly women volunteers who are going door-to-door to raise awareness about the pandemic and emphasize the importance of handwashing and physical distancing in the crowded camp, where water and space are scarce. These educators are among the few sources of reliable information because the Bangladeshi authorities have cut off Internet access in the camp. They dispel misinformation such as a rampant rumour that those seeking help for COVID-19-like symptoms are being isolated and possibly killed. ([Development and Peace, Caritas Canada](#))

Colombia

It's like a pandemic within a pandemic. Since the start of the health crisis in Colombia, red spots have appeared and then spread widely in the working-class neighborhoods of the country's main cities. "Like many families in the neighborhood, I hung a red rag on my window to express my distress and to challenge the government on the fact that I don't even have enough to eat," explains Maria Virgelina Bustamante, 63, who lives in a poor neighborhood in the suburbs of Medellin, the capital of the Antioquia department, in the northwest of the country. "Before the onset of the coronavirus, I was already struggling to earn a living making bread that I sold in the street, to neighborhood restaurants or associations. But here I am very worried. I don't know what I fear most: hunger or the virus." ([Development and Peace, Caritas Canada](#))

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Clara Ines Tavares Acevedo is one of those women. This 53-year-old farmer works with her husband on a piece of land in the village of Bolivar, 200 kilometers north of Medellin. "With the closure during the pandemic of the Anorí market, the nearest town, we can no longer sell our products," explains this 53-year-old woman who also owns about fifteen beehives. But at least we have enough to eat and sell and barter between neighbors." The situation is more worrying for the education of children. "As schools are closed, lessons are supposed to be given remotely, via the internet. Except that there is no connection here, so they are falling behind." ([CCFD-Terre Solidaire](#))

Gaza

Mona Shawa has lived all her life in Gaza and through many crises. “We have the Israeli occupation; the blockade and we have suffered three very hard military offensives in the last decade. But this experience of coronavirus is such a unique experience for all of us. COVID-19 has hit Gaza and we have now experienced the first cases of people dying due to this deadly virus. Restrictions and quarantine have so far been very effective in keeping the number of cases very low. However, once we started to ease restrictions, a second wave of infections has now hit with people arriving at the Egypt border... The refugee camps in Gaza are incredibly crowded. Everyone is very, very close to each other and in the same building you find many large families sharing. This is one of the most densely populated places on earth... the health sector has almost collapsed, and there is a shortage of medical supplies and equipment. Many professional doctors have emigrated and left Gaza.” ([Trocaire](#))

Ethiopia

“After I took on this responsibility, I felt what empowerment really means” says Alima Ali, a 25-year-old mother of two in Southern Ethiopia. “I was able to share important life-saving knowledge and skills to my community.” Alima is speaking of her women’s group, and how empowered she felt after she became a leader in this group. Before COVID-19, Alima’s support group met once a fortnight. They are encouraged to talk about their experiences in a supportive environment. For many of these women this has been the first time in their lives that they have been able to express themselves openly. They adopted new procedures to allow groups to meet and share important COVID-19 information with other community members. Alima says there was a lot of misinformation about the pandemic, saying that “some think the virus drops from the sky like rain.” ([Trocaire](#))

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Mali

The problems of inequality may increase among women and girls and aggravate their specific problems. For example, the closure of schools due to COVID-19 will mean that millions of girls and adolescents will not have the opportunity to receive the necessary training to obtain a decent job in the future. Janeth Aguirre believes that cases of sexual abuse of young women, unwanted pregnancies and early marriages will also increase. With weak health structures that do not normally reach the entire population, the concentration of resources in the coronavirus leaves women and girls without health care. Aguirre also notes, “We accompanied a woman to the clinic to give birth, but there was no doctor; all were in training or assigned to other services due to the coronavirus. Only a midwife could attend her. The delivery had complications and the woman died. Only the baby survived.” ([Manos Unidas](#))

United States

A Sister of Mercy in the United States, who is a family medicine physician, reflected on the dilemma she faced about possibly infecting patients she visited in their homes during the peak of the pandemic: “But still, I go! I don my protective gear and, in the tradition of the walking nuns who went out into the community during cholera, during Spanish influenza, during HIV, I go! And bring Mercy presence to those who are already so isolated and frightened. Am I fearful? Yes! God’s grace and the solidarity with all health-care workers, especially those working in hospitals, give me the inspiration and courage to not be paralyzed by fear.”

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Mercy Sisters from Mercy Hospital, Illigan City, in the Philippines, reflected on their service and described the mental and emotional stress, and burnout of working in healthcare: “We went to the hospital every day and spent most of our time there. At the start, there was a feeling of panic — fear that one or all of us would be afflicted with the virus and even fear of death. Our co-workers were scared to continue working. The doctors stopped their out-patient consultations. Everyone was afraid and giving up. In spite of all of these uncertainties, we did our very best to be their inspiration, to put on happy faces and be a hope to them.” ([Mercy International Association](#))

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<https://www.humandevlopment.va/en/vatican-covid-19.html>



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