

Beijing+25: Challenges to Gender Equality in the Current Pandemic

“Never forget that a political, economical or religious crisis will be enough to cast doubt on women's rights. These rights will never be vested. You'll have to stay vigilant your whole life.”
Simone de Beauvoir

In 2020, we honor the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Beijing Platform for Action. At the same time, the coronavirus pandemic is dramatically affecting political, economic and social life across the globe. The pandemic casts a shadow on achievements in the status of women, magnifying existing inequalities and vulnerabilities, making us painfully aware of gaps in social protection systems. Even before COVID-19, over one billion people were without access to basic human needs, and 700 million were living in extreme poverty, mostly women and children. In many countries, health and social protection systems are inadequate.

The COVID-19 pandemic amplifies fundamental inequalities, and exposes vulnerabilities in social, political and economic systems around the world. The limited gains on women's rights achieved in the 25 years since Beijing are at risk.

- On the frontlines of the pandemic, 70% of health care workers are women.
- Women perform three times as much unpaid work as men. This burden has increased dramatically as families stay at home, children must be home-schooled, older relatives may need care.
- The shadow pandemic of violence against women and girls is increasing as the pandemic forces women and children into lockdown with abusers during times of severe economic and social stress.
- Refugees and displaced women and girls living in inadequate, densely-populated conditions are at greatest risk.
- Women working in the informal sector face greater obstacles to economic recovery.

Women are under-represented in decision-making on responses to COVID-19 at national and global levels. COVID-19 responses and recovery plans must address the gender impacts of this pandemic by including women and women's organizations at the heart of responses; changing the distribution of unpaid care work into a care economy that works for everyone; and designing socio-economic recovery plans that can improve the lives of women and girls.

We representatives of international NGOs fear that while attention is focused on the global health crisis, efforts to achieve sustainable development and gender equality, address the climate crisis, protect human rights and promote peace are being neglected.

We will continue to work in partnerships to develop a global plan of action to address the multiple challenges we all face, while promoting gender equality, justice, peace and security, human rights, democracy, climate action and sustainable development. We are determined to emerge from this crisis and build back better for all.