

**44<sup>th</sup> session of the Human Rights Council**  
**Annual full-day discussion on the human rights of women**

**Panel 2: COVID-19 and women's rights**

*Concept note (draft as of 4 June 2020)*

<b>Date and venue:</b>	<b>TBD</b> (will be broadcast live and archived on <a href="http://webtv.un.org">http://webtv.un.org</a> )
<b>Objectives:</b>	To discuss how the COVID-19 epidemic has exposed and compounded gender-based discrimination and at the same time has offered new opportunities to build back more equal societies.
<b>Chair:</b>	<b>H.E. Ms. Elisabeth Tichy-Fisslberger</b> , President of the Human Rights Council - TBC
<b>Opening statement:</b>	<b>Ms. Michelle Bachelet</b> , United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights - TBC
<b>Moderator:</b>	<b>TBD</b>
<b>Panellists:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Speaker A (Ensuring health and freedom from violence):</b> to discuss how the COVID-19 pandemic threatened women's and girls' freedom from gender-based violence and their enjoyment of the right to health and good practices to uphold these rights and to build back better what?;</li><li>• <b>Speaker B (Protecting women's livelihood):</b> to discuss how pre-existing gender inequality has undermined women's livelihood during the COVID-19 pandemic, and what are the strategic opportunities to advance (and not regress) gender equality in economic participation and women's resilience against economic crises;</li><li>• <b>Speaker C (Participation in political and public life):</b> to discuss how women and girls have (not) been participating in decision-making to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic and how equal participation and strong leadership of women and girls in political and public life is crucial to ensure effective response to and recovery from the pandemic.</li></ul>
<b>Outcome:</b>	A summary report on the discussion will be prepared by OHCHR.
<b>Mandate:</b>	In its resolution 6/30, the Human Rights Council reaffirmed the principle of gender equality and the need for the full implementation of the human rights of women and decided to hold an annual full-day discussion on the human rights of women. The second panel of the 2020 annual discussion will address the impact of COVID-19 on women's rights.
<b>Format (to be confirmed):</b>	<p>The total duration of the annual full-day discussion on the human rights of women will be four hours, divided into two panels of two hours each. At this panel, the opening statements and initial presentations by the panellists, the latter guided by the moderator, will be followed by an interactive discussion divided into two slots and chaired by the President or Vice-President of the Human Rights Council. A maximum of one hour will be set aside for the podium, including the opening statement, moderator's introduction, panellists' presentations, their responses to questions and concluding remarks. The remaining hour will be reserved for two slots of interventions from the floor for States and observers (2x12), national human rights institutions (2x1) and non-governmental organizations (2x2).</p> <p>The list of speakers for the discussion will be established through the online inscription system and, as per practice, statements by high-level dignitaries and groups will be moved to the beginning of the list. Each speaker will have two minutes to raise issues and to ask panellists questions. Delegates who have not been able to take the floor due to time constraints will be able to upload their statements on the online system to be posted on the HRC Extranet. Interpretation will be provided in the six United Nations official languages (Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish).</p>
<b>Background:</b>	The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed and compounded gender inequalities and at the same time has offered new opportunities for gender equality and women's rights. Quarantines and other measures of movement restrictions to curb the spread of COVID-19 have contributed to the sharp increase in the rates of gender-based violence, in particular domestic and intimate partner violence, due to the combination of a number of factors, including increased levels of tension due to unavoidable closer coexistence, economic stress and the disruption of social and protective networks. Girls face heightened risks for the exposure to harmful practices, including child marriage, due to the disruption of support systems for children, in the context of school closures,

movement restrictions and economic constraints. Overloaded health systems, reallocation of resources, shortages of medical supplies and disruptions of global supply chains have undermined the sexual and reproductive health and rights of women and girls, including their access to maternal care, contraception and treatments for HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted infections.

Women are at the frontline of responding to the COVID-19 pandemic. Globally, women comprise 70 per cent of health workers, including on the frontlines as midwives, nurses, pharmacists and community health workers. Women are also playing key role in essential services, such as producing, processing and selling foods, cleaning and laundry, child care and other care facilities. And yet, many of them are working in low-wage and precarious conditions. In many countries women are concentrated in precarious employments and in the informal sector that are highly prone to disruption and with no or limited access to social protection. The livelihood of women in these professions has been severely affected by movement restrictions and lockdowns and may not have been covered by the recovery measures. In formal economy, women are also over-represented in hospitality (hotels, restaurants), manufacturing, retail and leisure and recreation industries that have been among the hardest hit by the response to COVID-19. Pre-existing gender inequality, such as gender pay gap and gross imbalances in the gender distribution of unpaid care and domestic work, is likely to lead women giving up participating in labour market during the pandemic and beyond. School closures, combined with increased domestic and care work and economic constraint, have been negatively affecting girls' continuation of education in many countries and such disruption will likely to undermine their access to employment and gainful livelihood in future.

Despite the critical needs for voices, expertise and experience of women and girls in the responses to and recovery measures from the pandemic, women and girls – and their respective women's networks and rights organizations – are not equally represented in local, national and global COVID-19 policy spaces and more broadly in decision-making in public life. Feminist movements and women human rights defenders are under threat. Emergency and other security measures to restrict movement and gathering have had an impact on civic space, including of women human rights defenders, whose civic space was already restricted before the crisis. Funding that was already severely limited is diverted away. In most countries, emergency task forces to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic have a limited representation of women.

However, responses to the pandemic have also created opportunities and a potential to transform the society in positive ways. The pandemic has shone a spotlight on the real value of care work. It has demonstrated the real risk of overlooking gender inequality and discriminatory gender norms. It demanded change of our lifestyles, including more flexible ways of work and re-thinking of distribution of work at home. The responses to it highlighted the value of women's leadership and acute need for solidarity and cooperation. Some promising practices for "building back better" have been emerging.

The panel discussion is a timely opportunity for States, United Nations entities, civil society and other stakeholders to reflect on how to build back better the society from the impact of covid-19, while protecting and promoting gender equality and women's rights.

**Background documents:**

- [Human Rights Council resolution 6/30](#) of 14 December 2007 on integrating the human rights of women throughout the United Nations system
- [Guidance Note on CEDAW and COVID-19](#), Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women
- Joint statement of special procedures mandate holders: "[Every worker is essential and must be protected from COVID-19, no matter what](#)", 18 May 2020
- Statement of the Independent Expert on Protection against violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity: "[States must include LGBT community in COVID-19 response](#)", 17 May 2020
- Joint statement of special procedures mandate holders: "[Responses to the COVID-19 could exacerbate pre-existing and deeply entrenched discrimination against women and girls](#)", 20 April 2020
- [OHCHR: COVID-19 and human rights dimensions](#), portal site, 2020
- [OHCHR Guidance on COVID-19 and women's human rights](#), 2020
- [OHCHR Guidance: COVID-19 and the human rights of LGBTI people](#), 2020

