

Disadvantaged groups in the pandemic

How to respond inclusively to COVID-19 in the interests of the common good

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The COVID-19 pandemic is affecting all of us, but to differing extents. Overstretched health care systems, curfews, unemployment and school closures are posing challenges and pushing people beyond their ability to cope. The consequences of the pandemic will be felt in both, the short and long term. However, the longer term health, economic and social impact can only be estimated at present. In order to make decisions on governing the pandemic that assist people in different circumstances, it is important to take into account various perspectives and consider alternative measures. Decisions on governing the pandemic must be inclusive and oriented to the global common good. However, it is questionable whether this criterion is always fulfilled.

The following trends have been observed in many countries in regard to gender as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic: while more men experience severe cases of the virus and are more likely to die, women bear the brunt of the economic and social consequences of the pandemic. At the global level, more women than men work in the informal sector – an area more heavily affected by the current crisis. Thus they are losing their livelihoods more often than their male counterparts. Additionally, the average number of women working in systematically important medical or care professions is higher than that of men. Women do more unpaid care work; they are the ones who in most cases currently are taking on the role of looking after the children. The risk of domestic violence is also increasing during the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly for the most vulnerable family members. Additionally, the UN Secretary-General has expressed in this context his concern regarding the situation of the LGBTI community. All of these factors reveal problem areas which existed before the pandemic, but which are now most likely being intensified – interestingly, without any obvious differences between the global South and the global North.

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UN Women for instance, made explicit reference in a recently published Policy Brief to the fact that the pandemic has created a risk for equality being reversed globally and existing inequalities being exacerbated further. Take, for example, the global gender pay gap, which stands at 16 per cent (unweighted). The fact that more women are giving up their work or reducing their hours to look after their children runs the risk of their economic security deteriorating further. These

“retraditionalisation trends”, could result in enormous steps backwards in terms of achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), in particular SDG 1 (No Poverty), 4 (Quality Education), 5 (Gender Equality) and 10 (Reduced Inequalities).

The perspectives of women and other disadvantaged groups often fail to be used sufficiently to inform specialist public discussions and (political) decision-making processes. This can also be seen in current discussion forums and opinions on questions concerning the impact of the pandemic worldwide. The discussion is primarily of a general medical and economic nature, though little attention is given to addressing the social and gender-specific impacts. It is therefore no surprise that topics primarily affecting the female population and other disadvantaged groups are being reduced to just a few aspects that fail to do justice to the complexity of the problem.

Collection of gender-specific information is also a key instrument for research and evidence-based policy advice. This data concerns such elements as time spent on unpaid care work, share of women among owners or rights-bearers of agricultural land and the number of women in leadership positions. While such statistics are a prerequisite in the monitoring of the SDGs (first and foremost SDG 5), they are often unavailable. In two thirds of African countries, for example, there is insufficient data on unpaid care work, and yet such data is vital for developing effective packages of measures for women and their families. In the absence of this information, there is a risk that it will not be possible to draw consequences on an inclusive basis.

The 2030 Agenda aims to build equitable, inclusive and resilient societies. This sense of social cohesion is also fundamentally shaped by the role of women, disadvantaged groups and minorities. The only way to achieve equality, inclusivity and resilience during the COVID-19 pandemic and the time that follows is to incorporate a range of perspectives and a more comprehensive set of data into the knowledge transfer process and policy advisory work. This will ensure that consideration is given to the voices and needs of *everyone* in the interests of the common good. The German Development Institute / Deutsches Institut für Entwicklungspolitik (DIE) is making every effort as part of its knowledge-transfer and advisory activities to involve precisely these voices: female, male, young and old, from the global South and the global North. We should all be guided by a recognition that knowledge that we cannot see, hear and of which we are unaware of, cannot inform our work and our actions.