COVID-19 GLOBAL GENDER RESPONSE TRACKER

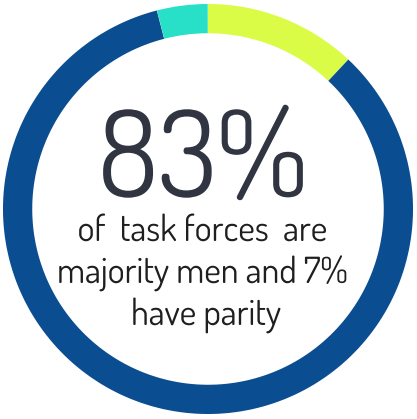
Women remain absent: COVID-19 task force participation

Version 2 (November 11, 2021)

As the COVID-19 pandemic spread throughout the globe, governments rushed to create governing and advisory institutions to help tackle the epidemic and its socio-economic consequences. Women have been at the center of COVID-19 response, occupying crucial positions as frontline medical workers, researchers, and educators. Yet, women remain significantly underrepresented in COVID-19 governance across the globe.

To monitor the extent to which governments have included women in their COVID-19 response, the UNDP/UN Women COVID-19 Global Gender Response Tracker, in partnership with the Gender Inequality Research Lab (GIRL) at the University of Pittsburgh and research support from UN Online Volunteers, developed a unique dataset that monitors women's participation and leadership in COVID-19 task forces. The dataset contains gender-disaggregated data on 431 task forces in 187 countries, including data on task force composition in 130 countries and leadership in 184 countries.

What is a COVID-19 task force?
A COVID-19 task force is any executive branch institution (temporary or permanent) created by a national government in response to COVID-19. The tracker includes all task forces for which gender-disaggregated data on leadership or composition was found, regardless of task force composition or function. It excludes international or subnational task forces, as well as agencies that were created prior to COVID-19 (new COVID-19 specific subcommittees within pre-existing institutions are included in the dataset)(1).



Global overview

Overall, the data reveals that women are significantly underrepresented in both membership and leadership of COVID-19 task forces. Of the 262 task forces with membership data, women make up only 24% of members and are absent from 10% of all task forces(2). Women are excluded from leadership at even higher rates, leading only 18% of 414 task forces across 186 countries. In total, just 7% of task forces achieve gender parity while 83% of task forces are dominated by men(3). Countries with highest average levels of women's representation include Ireland (57%), Saint Lucia (50%), and Ethiopia (38%). Only eight countries have gender parity in composition and at least one woman-led or co-led task force (Canada, Chile, Estonia, Ethiopia, Finland, St. Lucia, Switzerland, and the United States).

A full list of countries and their overall share of women's participation in COVID-19 task forces can be found in the Appendix.

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Regional trends:

Women's level of participation in COVID-19 task forces varies significantly by region, with women best represented in Europe, North America, Australia and New Zealand (33%), Latin America and the Caribbean (28%) and Sub-Saharan Africa (20%). Rates of women's leadership on COVID-19 task forces is even lower – ranging from 8-25%. Europe, North America, Australia, and New Zealand register the highest proportion of female leads.

Region	Total task forces identified	Task forces with composition data	Task forces with leadership data	Average proportion of women's membership	Proportion of woman leaders
Central Asia and Southern Asia (13 of 14 countries and territories)	38	19	37	12%	8%
East Asia, South-East Asia and Oceania (28 of 45 countries and territories)	41	23	41	15%	20%
Europe, North America, Australia and New Zealand (47 of 58 countries and territories)	137	93	132	33%	25%
Latin America and the Caribbean (40 of 52 countries and territories)	101	64	94	28%	18%
Northern Africa and Western Asia (22 of 25 countries and territories)	45	25	43	17%	18%
Sub-Saharan Africa (37 of 53 countries and territories)	69	38	67	20%	15%
Global Average (187 of 247 countries and territories)	431	262	414	24%	18%

Despite the overall trends, many task forces have been well-designed and prioritize the experiences of women and diverse populations. The following task forces are such positive examples:

Chile created two task forces with an explicit mandate to address women's economic security. The Board of Economic Reactivation for Women targets sectors that have been impacted by COVID-19 and promotes women's entrepreneurship. The Technical Working Group on Women and Construction promotes the integration of women into the construction industry, a historically male-dominated field.

The Women for the New Renaissance Task Force in **Italy** was created by the Minister for Equal Opportunities and Family and is composed entirely of women. The Task Force developed a report with policy proposals that aim to increase women's labor market participation and change social norms that act as barriers to women's inclusion. The recommendations became part of the country's first National Strategy on Gender Equality.

Saint Lucia created two task forces to advise on economic recovery, both of which achieve gender parity in membership and have women co-leads. The Economic Recovery Multi-Stakeholder Committee brought together government, private sector, and civil society to develop a recovery plan to provide policy recommendations on economic growth, reaching vulnerable populations, and improving public health outcomes. This Committee was supervised by the Economic Recovery Technical Planning Team, which was also gender balanced.

Several countries, including **Belgium, Fiji, Iceland, Liberia, Maldives, and the United States**, have created task forces designed to promote a more inclusive COVID-19 response. These task forces aim to address the specific needs of vulnerable populations, such as women and girls facing domestic violence, persons with disabilities, migrant workers, indigenous populations, or youth.

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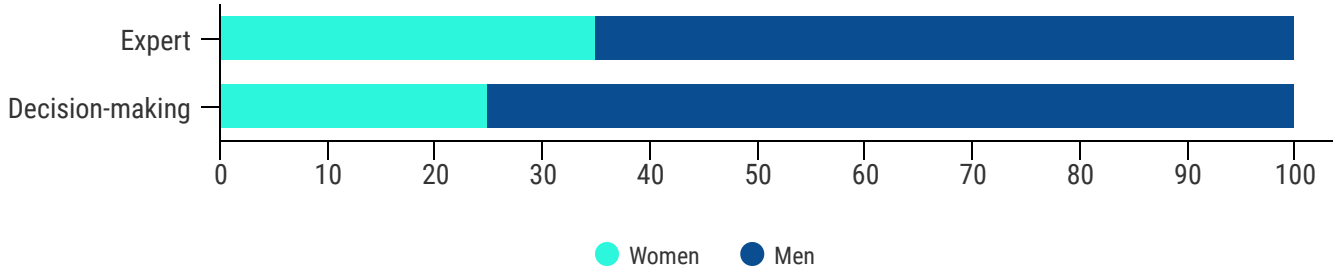
Task force type and sectoral focus

The data shows that women are better represented on task forces that provide expert advice (35%) compared to those with decision-making authority (25%). In fact, women are completely absent from 13% of COVID-19 decision-making task forces globally. This constitutes a substantial gap in the global pandemic response to consider voices of women. While women have been at forefront of fighting the pandemic, they have been relegated to the backseat when it comes to pandemic decision-making.



Task forces in the dataset cover three main thematic areas: public health (45%), economic (12%), and multi-sector (37%)(4). Women make up 32% of public health task force membership compared to just 25% of economic and 23% of multi-sectoral task forces. Women lead 20% of public health task forces, 19% of multi-sectoral and only 10% of economic task forces. While women's relatively higher rate of representation on public health task forces is a good sign, it still falls significantly short given that women make up 70% of healthcare workers worldwide (5).

What are the implications?

Across the board, women are being left-out of high-level discussions on COVID-19 response and recovery. Given the low rates of women's participation in COVID-19 governance, it is not surprising that the UNDP/UN Women COVID-19 Global Gender Response Tracker has found that only 64 out of 226 countries and territories (28%) have a holistic gender-sensitive policy response, addressing women's economic security, unpaid care work, and violence against women and girls. To ensure that women's health and socio-economic needs are being met, it is crucial that governments actively promote equal participation in decision-making institutions, particularly in times of crisis, as a pre-condition to equitable and sustainable democracy and development.

(1) The methodological guidelines for data collection on COVID-19 Task Forces were established by Gender Inequality Research Lab (GIRL) at the University of Pittsburgh, through their ongoing partnership with UNDP on Gender Equality in Public Administration. The data were compiled by GIRL and UN Online Volunteers, with coordination by the tracker team, and validated by UNDP/UN Women with the support of country offices. Findings should be interpreted with caution. This is a living dataset with task forces being regularly added and updated. There may be data gaps or biases due to lack of available information or underreporting. The existence of COVID-19 task forces does not necessarily correspond to the quality of government response, as many countries have pre-existing institutions that oversee pandemic response. Additional details on the methodology can be found in our methodological note here: https://data.undp.org/gendertracker/. To provide information on new task forces to be included in the UNDP/UN Women COVID-19 Global Gender Response Tracker please contact covid.gender.helpdesk@undp.org.
(2) Country and regional averages are based on a simple average of all task forces in a country. The number of task forces included in the dataset per country ranges from 1 to 14 and includes 137 countries. Data disaggregated by gender is not available for all countries.
(3) These figures are based on the UN Secretary General's System-Wide Strategy on Gender Parity, which considers parity to be within the 47%-53% margin, recognizing that this should not be a ceiling for women's representation given their historical discrimination in decision-making positions. Task forces dominated by men are those with less than 47% women.
(4) The remaining 6% of task forces focus on education, public health enforcement, anti-corruption, or other.
(5) World Health Organization, "Gender Equity in the health workforce: Analysis of 104 countries."

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Appendix: Country-level task force composition data

	Total task forces identified	Task forces with composition data	Task forces with leadership data	Average proportion of women's membership (%)	Does the country have at least one woman lead or co-lead?
Central Asia and Southern Asia					
Afghanistan	2	0	2	...	No
Bangladesh	3	1	3	12.50	No
Bhutan	10	8	10	32.68	Yes
India	1	1	1	12.50	No
Iran (Islamic Republic of)	1	0	1	...	No
Kazakhstan	2	1	2	0.00	No
Maldives	2	0	2	...	Yes
Nepal	5	2	4	0.00	No
Pakistan	1	1	1	8.33	No
Sri Lanka	5	4	5	17.12	No
Tajikistan	3	1	3	9.38	Yes
Turkmenistan	1	0	1	...	No
Uzbekistan	2	0	2	...	No
East Asia, South-East Asia and Oceania					
American Samoa	3	3	3	31.03	No
Cambodia	3	3	3	11.58	Yes
China	3	2	3	13.89	Yes
China, Hong Kong Special Administrative Region	2	1	2	40.00	Yes
China, Macao Special Administrative Region	1	0	1	...	No
Cook Islands	1	0	1	...	Yes
Fiji	3	1	3	0.00	Yes
Guam	1	1	1	33.33	No
Indonesia	1	0	1	...	No

Women remain absent: COVID-19 task force participation

Appendix: Country-level task force composition data (continued)

	Total task forces identified	Task forces with composition data	Task forces with leadership data	Average proportion of women's membership (%)	Does the country have at least one woman lead or co-lead?
East Asia, South-East Asia and Oceania					
Japan	1	1	1	16.67	No
Lao People's Democratic Republic	1	1	1	0.00	No
Malaysia	1	0	1	...	No
Myanmar	2	2	2	9.09	Yes
Nauru	1	0	1	...	No
Northern Mariana Islands	1	0	1	...	No
Palau	1	0	1	...	No
Papua New Guinea	1	1	1	0.00	No
Philippines	1	1	1	0.00	No
Republic of Korea	3	1	3	15.79	No
Singapore	2	2	2	21.21	No
Solomon Islands	1	0	1	...	No
Taiwan	1	0	1	...	No
Thailand	1	1	1	0.00	No
Timor-Leste	1	1	1	42.86	No
Tonga	1	0	1	...	Yes
Tuvalu	1	0	1	...	No
Vanuatu	1	0	1	...	No
Viet Nam	1	1	1	7.14	No
Europe, North America, Australia and New Zealand					
Albania	1	0	1	...	Yes
Andorra	2	0	2	...	Yes

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Appendix: Country-level task force composition data (continued)

	Total number of task forces in dataset	Task forces with composition data	Task forces with leadership data	Average share of women's membership (%)	Does the country have at least one woman lead or co-lead?
Europe, North America, Australia and New Zealand					
Australia	3	3	3	39.39	No
Austria	5	4	5	43.91	No
Belarus	1	1	1	9.09	No
Belgium	9	2	9	40.00	Yes
Bermuda	1	1	1	33.33	No
Bulgaria	2	1	2	33.33	No
Canada	6	6	6	50.37	Yes
Croatia	1	0	1	...	No
Czechia	6	4	6	39.33	Yes
Estonia	2	2	2	55.00	Yes
Finland	10	10	9	47.51	Yes
France	4	2	4	35.54	Yes
Germany	5	2	4	36.43	Yes
Gibraltar	4	0	4	...	No
Greece	1	1	1	30.77	No
Guernsey	1	1	0	0.00	...
Holy See	1	1	1	0.00	No
Hungary	1	1	1	6.67	No
Iceland	1	1	1	100.00	Yes
Ireland	3	3	3	56.63	Yes
Isle of Man	1	1	1	0.00	No

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Appendix: Country-level task force composition data (continued)

	Total task forces identified	Task forces with composition data	Task forces with leadership data	Average proportion of women's membership (%)	Does the country have at least one woman lead or co-lead?
Europe, North America, Australia and New Zealand					
Italy	7	6	7	42.52	Yes
Jersey	3	2	3	11.54	Yes
Latvia	2	2	2	36.11	Yes
Liechtenstein	1	0	1	...	No
Luxembourg	1	1	0	37.50	...
Republic of Moldova	1	1	1	35.71	Yes
Monaco	1	0	1	...	No
Montenegro	1	1	1	31.58	No
Netherlands	3	2	3	34.13	No
New Zealand	9	9	9	40.31	Yes
Poland	4	3	4	35.36	Yes
Portugal	3	2	3	41.33	Yes
Romania	2	1	2	30.00	No
Russian Federation	2	2	2	22.14	Yes
San Marino	2	0	2	...	No
Sark	1	0	1	...	No
Serbia	1	1	1	28.13	Yes
Slovakia	1	0	1	...	No
Slovenia	3	0	3	...	Yes
Spain	1	0	1	...	No
Switzerland	3	3	2	29.37	Yes
Ukraine	1	1	1	0.00	No

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Appendix: Country-level task force composition data (continued)

	Total task forces identified	Task forces with composition data	Task forces with leadership data	Average proportion of women's membership (%)	Does the country have at least one woman lead or co-lead?
Europe, North America, Australia and New Zealand					
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	8	5	8	35.43	No
United States of America	5	4	5	35.79	Yes
Latin America and the Caribbean					
Antigua and Barbuda	3	2	3	42.86	Yes
Argentina	4	4	2	29.91	No
Aruba	1	0	1	...	Yes
Bahamas	2	2	2	35.29	No
Barbados	2	1	2	37.50	No
Belize	3	0	3	...	Yes
Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	2	2	2	20.19	No
Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and Saba	1	0	1	...	No
Brazil	4	2	4	10.10	No
British Virgin Islands	4	0	4	...	Yes
Chile	8	7	6	29.23	Yes
Colombia	5	3	5	29.43	No
Costa Rica	1	0	1	...	No
Cuba	1	1	1	33.33	No
Dominica	1	0	1		No
Dominican Republic	2	1	2	14.29	Yes
Ecuador	2	2	0	12.90	...
El Salvador	1	0	1		Yes
French Guiana	2	1	2	38.46	No
Grenada	1	1	1	28.57	No

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Appendix: Country-level task force composition data (continued)

	Total task forces identified	Task forces with composition data	Task forces with leadership data	Average proportion of women's membership (%)	Does the country have at least one woman lead or co-lead?
Latin America and the Caribbean					
Guatemala	2	1	2	71.43	Yes
Guyana	3	2	3	35.86	No
Haiti	3	2	3	11.69	No
Honduras	1	0	1	...	No
Jamaica	14	14	14	24.32	Yes
Martinique	1	1	1	28.57	Yes
Mexico	1	0	1	...	No
Panama	3	1	3	16.67	No
Paraguay	3	3	3	30.90	No
Peru	5	3	4	23.61	Yes
Puerto Rico	1	0	1	...	No
Saint Lucia	2	2	2	50.00	Yes
Sint Maarten (Dutch part)	1	0	1	...	Yes
St. Kitts and Nevis	2	1	2	14.29	Yes
Suriname	1	1	1	37.50	No
Trinidad and Tobago	1	1	1	13.64	No
Turks and Caicos Islands	1	0	1	...	Yes
United States Virgin Islands	1	0	1	...	Yes
Uruguay	3	3	3	17.26	No
Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)	2	0	2	...	Yes
Northern Africa and Western Asia					
Algeria	1	1	1	13.33	No

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Appendix: Country-level task force composition data (continued)

	Total task forces identified	Task forces with composition data	Task forces with leadership data	Average proportion of women's membership (%)	Does the country have at least one woman lead or co-lead?
Northern Africa and Western Asia					
Armenia	2	2	1	14.29	No
Azerbaijan	1	1	1	2.94	No
Bahrain	1	0	1	...	No
Cyprus	1	1	1	30.77	No
Egypt	3	2	3	24.26	Yes
Georgia	2	2	2	32.47	Yes
Iraq	2	1	2	4.00	Yes
Israel	4	3	3	26.19	No
Jordan	1	1	1	9.09	No
Kuwait	1	1	1	0.00	No
Lebanon	4	2	4	18.25	No
Libya	2	2	2	21.59	Yes
Morocco	4	1	4	20.00	No
Oman	3	1	3	10.00	Yes
State of Palestine	1	0	1	...	No
Qatar	3	1	3	6.25	Yes
Saudi Arabia	3	0	3	...	No
Sudan	1	0	1	...	No
Tunisia	2	1	2	19.05	No
Turkey	2	2	2	28.76	No
United Arab Emirates	1	0	1	...	No

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Appendix: Country-level task force composition data (continued)

	Total task forces identified	Task forces with composition data	Task forces with leadership data	Average proportion of women's membership (%)	Does the country have at least one woman lead or co-lead?
Sub-Saharan Africa					
Angola	2	1	2	10.00	No
Benin	1	1	1	0.00	No
Botswana	1	1	1	0.00	No
Burkina Faso	2	2	2	26.32	No
Burundi	1	1	1	0.00	No
Central African Republic	1	1	1	20.00	No
Chad	2	1	2	10.81	No
Comoros	1	1	1	8.57	No
Congo	3	2	3	23.21	No
Côte d'Ivoire	2	1	1	20.00	No
Democratic Republic of the Congo	3	2	3	18.31	No
Djibouti	2	2	2	17.50	No
Equatorial Guinea	1	0	1	...	No
Eswatini	2	2	2	19.44	No
Ethiopia	3	2	3	38.04	Yes
Gabon	3	1	3	12.50	Yes
Guinea	2	2	2	17.16	Yes
Guinea-Bissau	1	0	1	...	Yes
Kenya	1	1	1	19.05	No
Lesotho	2	1	2	74.14	No
Liberia	2	0	2	...	Yes
Madagascar	1	0	1	...	No

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Appendix: Country-level task force composition data (continued)

	Total task forces identified	Task forces with composition data	Task forces with leadership data	Average proportion of women's membership (%)	Does the country have at least one woman lead or co-lead?
Sub-Saharan Africa					
Malawi	2	2	2	17.70	No
Mauritania	1	1	1	16.67	No
Mauritius	2	0	2	...	No
Namibia	2	1	2	40.00	No
Niger	1	1	1	7.69	No
Nigeria	1	1	1	16.67	No
Rwanda	1	0	1	...	No
Seychelles	1	0	1	...	No
Sierra Leone	2	0	2	...	No
South Africa	5	4	5	38.10	Yes
South Sudan	2	0	2	...	No
Togo	1	1	1	18.18	Yes
Uganda	3	1	3	20.00	No
United Republic of Tanzania	4	0	4	...	No
Zimbabwe	2	1	1	27.27	Yes