# GLOBAL FACTSHEET: GENDER — EQUALITY AND ENVIRONMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS IN COVID-19 RESPONSE AND RECOVERY

## INSIGHTS FROM THE COVID-19 GLOBAL GENDER RESPONSE TRACKER WITH A GREEN LENS

#### 1. Introduction

The global pandemic revealed how underprepared the world is for systemic shocks, including the rapidly escalating environmental crises. Even before COVID-19, the world was already off-track to meet global commitments to a greener and fairer future. And the pandemic, alongside spiralling levels of conflict, triggered major setbacks in key gender equality indicators. Globally, women have lost their jobs at higher rates than men and are recovering them more slowly, while gender gaps in extreme poverty have grown wider.1 At the same time, the world continues to be far behind in urgent efforts to limit the increase in the global average temperature to below 1.5 degrees Celsius, while also struggling in the present to prioritize environmental conservation and adequately respond to one climate-related disaster after another.<sup>2</sup> The Aichi targets were also not reached, failing to protect or conserve 17 per cent of all land and inland waters and 10 per cent of the ocean by 2020.3

Now, with the world approaching irreversible climate tipping points, the most relevant question facing the international community is whether decisive action will be taken to transition the global economy to more sustainable and equitable models that prevent environmental breakdown and promote social equality, including women's rights.<sup>4</sup> With these stakes in mind, to what extent have governments' COVID-19 response and recovery measures been harnessed to put the world on the path to a more sustainable, genderjust future?

To answer this question, UNDP, UN Women and OECD joined forces to integrate a green lens into the COVID-19 Global Gender Response Tracker, identifying how governments responded to the pandemic in ways that supported this essential green and gender-sensitive transition. Announced as a collective commitment under the Feminist Action for Climate Justice Action Coalition at









the Generation Equality Forum in July 2021,<sup>5</sup> this collaboration combines data from the UNDP-UN Women COVID-19 Global Gender Response Tracker and the OECD Green Recovery Database. It maps gender-sensitive and green measures from nearly 200 countries and territories (see Box 1). In doing so, this work identifies gaps and opportunities for policymaking in these areas, while highlighting innovative practices that governments have already taken to inspire further action.

Overall, the findings provide a sobering picture. So far, response and recovery efforts have largely missed the opportunity to tackle problems at the intersection of gender and environment. However, innovative and promising policies that promote both environmental objectives and gender equality have been introduced in a variety of countries and contexts, signalling the opportunity and necessity for policy learning and uptake across settings. This factsheet highlights the scope of gendersensitive and green policymaking during COVID-19 response and provides some concrete examples of policies that are leading the way.

#### **BOX 1:**

#### The COVID-19 Global Gender Response Tracker with a Green Lens

The analysis in this factsheet is based on a collaboration of the UNDP-UN Women COVID-19 Global Gender Response Tracker and the OECD Green Recovery Database. From these two datasets, the three organizations in partnership reviewed over 6,000 emergency measures across 226 countries and territories that were adopted by governments between March 2020 and August 2021 in response to COVID-19. Using a methodology adapted from both databases, the measures were assessed for their gender-sensitive and environmentally friendly design. In total, 2,079 measures were identified, based on their design, as having the potential to reduce the risks that women and girls faced during the pandemic or as likely to have a positive impact on the environment. The measures that are gendersensitive, environmentally positive, or both, are included in the COVID-19 Global Gender Response Tracker with a Green Lens.

Like all policy monitors, this dataset may have gaps or biases due to a lack of available information, underreporting of measures being announced, overreporting of measures that have been suspended, or the lack of data on the gender or environmental components of existing measures, including budgetary allocations. Information was more readily available for some countries and territories or policy areas than for others. Hence, findings should be interpreted with caution. The analysis of measures for their green and gender objectives was conducted based on policy design, with no assessment of implementation or impact. Still, there is great potential for countries to learn from one another ways to adopt an integrated approach and improve their policy responses. More information about the classification of policies, the definition of gender-sensitive and green measures and the data collection and analysis process can be found in the methodological note.

#### 1.1 What are gender-sensitive and green measures?

The COVID-19 Global Gender Response Tracker with a Green Lens identifies three subsets of policy

measures taken by national governments as part of COVID-19 stimulus packages and recovery efforts:

- Environmentally positive, or "green," measures aim to have a positive impact on one or more environmental issues such as climate mitigation or adaptation, air quality and pollution, water resources, waste and recycling, biodiversity and ecosystem services, or plastics. Green measures also include those that address environmental or climate disaster risk management and recovery.
- Gender-sensitive measures seek to reduce the specific risks and challenges that women and girls face as a result of the pandemic, including violence against women and girls (VAWG), unpaid care work, and economic insecurity.
- Gender-sensitive and green measures, or measures at the "gender-environment nexus," pursue both aims simultaneously: to protect the environment and jointly attend to the risks

and vulnerabilities faced by women during the pandemic.

Even though achieving gender equality and environmental sustainability are key priorities for the international community and countries across the globe, analysis of the synergies and tradeoffs between these two priorities are scarce and often limited to a small set of countries. Examining policymaking at the gender-environment nexus during the COVID-19 response provides a unique opportunity to fill this gap. The global picture it reveals will allow policymakers to recognize the extent to which slow progress on achieving environmental policy priorities may hamper women's livelihoods and opportunities, and at the same time, how gender equality and women's empowerment can also deliver positive impacts on climate resilience and the environment.7

### 1.2 The COVID-19 policy response: Has it tackled gender equality or environment goals?

The pandemic response and recovery efforts side-lined women's needs and largely ignored the quickly unravelling effects of climate change and environmental destruction.

The UNDP-UN Women Global Gender Response Tracker demonstrated how despite their being at the forefront of the pandemic emergency response in their roles as educators and health service and care providers, women have been largely locked out of emergency planning and decision-making: only seven per cent of 226 COVID-19 task forces achieved gender parity, while 83 per cent were male-dominated. It is then not surprising that only 18 per cent of economic, labour market and social protection measures supported women's economic security or unpaid care. The global response to violence against women and girls was more encouraging, with 163 countries and territories taking 853 measures responding to this issue. However, few took a comprehensive response.8

Despite the growing urgency to move towards sustainable solutions as countries recover from the health crisis, the OECD Green Recovery Database showed that only 33 per cent of the total recovery spending in OECD member countries and key partner countries announced from the start of the pandemic until April 2022 was green.9 Worryingly, at the same time, the budget allocated to measures with a mixed or negative environmental impact also slightly increased, likely due to the increases in environmentally harmful government spending.<sup>10</sup> In recovery packages too, the OECD database found that less than three per cent of all measures with a discernible environmental impact and assessed with a gender-lens had an explicit commitment to gender equality.11 The data analysed for this factsheet builds on this analysis expanding it to a universe of 196 countries.

## 2. Policymaking at the gender and environment nexus: A rare occurrence

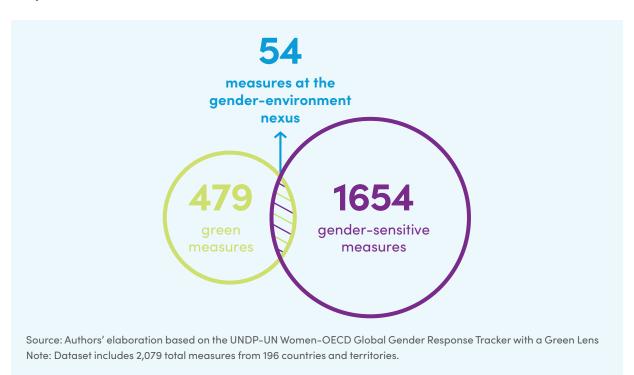
In total, the COVID-19 Global Gender Response Tracker with a Green Lens recorded 2,079 measures that are either gender-sensitive or green from 196 countries or territories (see Box 1 for more details). Yet only a minuscule fraction of these (54 measures across 32 countries) address the needs of women in light of the intersecting public health and climate crisis (Figure 1). Overall, gender-sensitive measures account for only eleven per cent of all 479 green measures; and green

measures account for only three per cent of the 1,654 gender-sensitive measures in the database.

This demonstrates that while both gender and environment were independently overlooked during the pandemic, measures addressing the gender-environment nexus were exceedingly rare. Measures that are both green and gender-sensitive were identified in only 32 countries.

FIGURE 1.

Overview of gender-sensitive and green measures in the COVID-19 Global Gender Response Tracker with a Green Lens

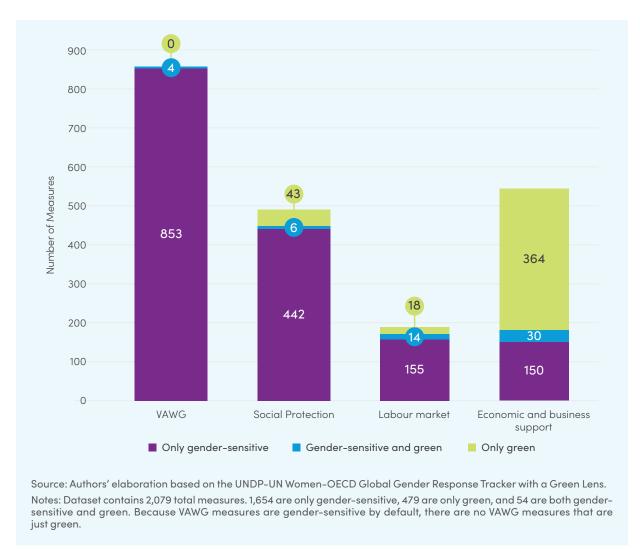


Of the measures at the gender-environment nexus, the large majority (34 of 54) are from Europe, Northern America, Australia, and New Zealand – largely reflecting the over-representation of OECD member countries and key partner countries in the dataset. Latin America and the Caribbean

and Central and Southern Asia each account for seven green- and gender-sensitive measures. Sub-Saharan Africa and Eastern Asia combined to have six gender-sensitive and green measures, while no such measures have yet been identified from the Northern Africa or Western Asia region. All measures are classified into four different policy areas: violence against women and girls, social protection, labour market, and economic and business support. Figure 2 presents the breakdown of gender-sensitive and green measures across each of these areas. Eight out of

ten green measures are in the form of economic and business support (364 of 479) – a policy area which accounts for a relatively smaller share of gender–sensitive measures. In contrast, most gender–sensitive measures target VAWG (853 of 1,654) or social protection (442 of 1,654).

FIGURE 2. Number of measures that are only gender–sensitive, only green, or both gender–sensitive and green, by policy category in the COVID–19 Global Gender Response Tracker with a Green Lens

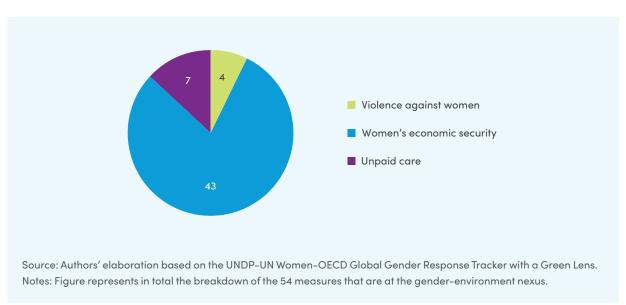


Measures at the gender-environment nexus follow a distribution that resembles the one from environmentally positive measures, leaving social protection and VAWG measures as the policy areas least connected with green priorities. Of the 54 policies situated at the gender-environment nexus,

more than half (30 of 54) provide support for businesses<sup>12</sup> and a quarter are geared to protect jobs through labour market interventions (14 of 54). Social protection and VAWG measures together account for less than a fifth of green and gendersensitive measures (6 and 4 of 54, respectively).

Across these four policy areas, the 54 gendersensitive and green measures are then classified into three different gender-sensitive dimensions: women's economic security, unpaid care work, and violence against women (Figure 3). Women's economic security is by far the most active area of policymaking at the gender-environment nexus, accounting for 43 of 54 gender-sensitive and green measures, with measures tackling unpaid care and violence against women lagging far behind.

FIGURE 3. Breakdown of measures at the gender-environment nexus by gender-sensitive dimension



#### 2.1 Most green and gender-sensitive measures promote women's economic security

Twenty-eight countries introduced 43 green measures that supported women's economic security. Over half of these measures were in the form of economic and business support (23 in 17 countries), with labour market (14 measures in 11 countries) and social protection measures (6 measures in 6 countries) accounting for the rest.

Economic and business support measures provide financial benefits, such as grants, loans or tax relief, to businesses that embrace a gender and environment lens. There are two primary ways that countries have done this. One way was to provide

targeted financial support for environmentallyfriendly objectives in female-dominated economic sectors, such as education, healthcare, or tourism, 13 often as part of broader national recovery or resilience plans. For example:

• Italy's recovery plan invests in green infrastructure in the education sector, where women outnumber men three-to-one, through funding school building renovations to reduce emissions, creating green spaces, and improving the seismic safety of buildings.14

 Barbados targeted the tourism sector, where women outnumber men two-to-one, with a stimulus package that focused on job retention, training, and sustainability initiatives, including water conservation and the instalment of renewable energy capacities.<sup>15</sup>

The other common approach was to promote women's inclusion in new and emerging green industries, such as sustainable agriculture or biodiversity. For example:

- In Bangladesh, the Perspective Plan 2021– 2041 promotes gender-inclusive green growth through investments in sustainable fisheries, where women account for up to 80 per cent of workers.<sup>16</sup>
- The "+Women +Nature" programme in Costa Rica provided access to financing for women conducting innovative projects related to biodiversity, with special loans allocated to women in rural areas. In 2021, 120 women-led green enterprises received more than USD 1.4 million through the programme.<sup>17</sup>

Green labour market interventions from 11 countries made up one-third of measures targeting women's economic security. These measures supported women's training or re-skilling to access green jobs or provided financial support for women entrepreneurs to promote sustainable business practices. For example:

- Portugal's recovery plan prioritizes climate and an inclusive, future-oriented labour market through funding gender-equal training programmes in STEAM (science, technology, engineering, arts and mathematics), including in environmental fields.<sup>18</sup>
- In Zimbabwe, where agriculture accounts for nearly 70 per cent of women's employment, 5,200 smallholder farmers were targeted for support and training to increase resilience and food security during climate-related and other shocks.<sup>19</sup>

As economies reopened after the worst of the pandemic was over, women have had access to only a fraction of green jobs created. For instance, women make only 20 to 25 per cent of workers in the renewable energy sector in some advanced economies. <sup>20</sup> If measures are not adopted to increase women's participation in emerging green occupations and expand the number of jobs in these areas, current gender stereotypes and employment gaps are likely to persist. Therefore, upscaling measures such as the ones described above is crucial to promote women's equal participation in green transitions to more sustainable and equitable future.

While less common, COVID-19 also demonstrated that gender-sensitive social protection measures can also embrace environmental goals. Six countries introduced social protection measures that safeguard women's economic security while also promoting environmental sustainability or resilience. For example:

- Liberia worked with local farms and development partners to grow sustainable local food, distribute excess food to schools to reduce waste, and provide food to 2.5 million vulnerable people, including pregnant women and persons with disabilities.<sup>21</sup>
- Belize launched a direct support programme to finance the purchase of agricultural inputs and provide cash transfers to small-scale farmers and women in agriculture.<sup>22</sup>

Women's economic security remains a promising area for policy innovation, learning and diffusion – particularly in green jobs and sustainable business practices. In the context of increasing risk of climate-related shocks, such as droughts, floods or heat waves, it is critical to strengthen the foundation of gender-sensitive and climate-resilient social protection policies to ensure that countries are prepared to support women and girls at risk of experiencing extreme climate-related events.

#### 2.2 A handful of green measures support unpaid care

The mandated government lockdowns during COVID-19 made clear how essential care work is, while also demonstrating the lack of infrastructure and equitable access to childcare or long-term care support.<sup>23</sup> Recognizing this, at least seven countries – Belgium, Czechia, Hungary, Lithuania, Mexico, Spain, and the United States of America – made explicit commitments to environmentally sustainable care infrastructure as part of COVID-19 recovery.

Frequently as part of broader national recovery plans, these measures enabled countries to direct efforts towards investing in energy efficient public buildings in their upscaling of existing care services, providing more jobs in the care sector, and promoting infrastructure that supports both caregiving and curbing carbon emissions. For instance:

 Lithuania budgeted 5.4 million EUR in its recovery plan to support energy efficient renovations in long-term care and daycare facilities. This is part of broader commitments to modernize and strengthen healthcare and education, and improve social cohesion through sustainable, accessible systems and infrastructure.<sup>24</sup>  Spain's recovery plan committed to both a green transition and gender equality, with specific plans to reduce gender employment gaps through improvements to the care economy. This includes extending early education centres that are accessible to underserved families and promoting better conditions for care workers.<sup>25</sup>

Beyond the small number of measures that pursue both green- and care-related goals, some countries, such as Canada and Argentina, recognise that public investments in the care sector can be a key driver for economic recovery, with the potential to generate jobs, build human capital and promote women's employment.<sup>26</sup> These measures may not necessarily be "green" because they do not explicitly pursue environmental objectives. Yet, large-scale investments in care services promote the creation of jobs that are likely to disproportionately benefit women without exacerbating global warming in the process.<sup>27</sup> As the world tries to build back better, investments in care are therefore essential to ensure that women are equally able to participate in a green economic recovery.

#### 2.3 Only a tiny number of green measures tackle violence against women and girls

At least four countries, Australia, Ireland, Portugal and Turkmenistan, introduced innovative measures during the pandemic to address violence against women and girls, while also promoting environmental sustainability. Portugal and Ireland integrated environmental considerations into VAWG interventions:

 Portugal's recovery plan included a housing grant that promotes energy efficient temporary housing, including in shelters for survivors of gender-based violence (GBV).<sup>28</sup>  In Ireland, 24 million EUR was allocated to improve energy efficiency across the justice sector, including in the funds to rollout protective service units that coordinate investigations of GBV and human trafficking.<sup>29</sup>

**Australia** and **Turkmenistan** prioritized the two policy areas in parallel but as part of broader recovery packages:

 The Peel Recovery Plan in Australia includes investments to promote economic recovery across several sectors, including renewable energy and conservation, while allocating more than 15 million AUD towards the expansion of GBV services.<sup>30</sup>

 Turkmenistan's Socio-Economic Response Plan to COVID-19 aimed to improve services related to VAWG while also prioritizing wide-reaching environmental interventions.<sup>31</sup>

Beyond measures explicitly tackling violence against women and green goals, some small island states — that often face the twin challenges of climate risks and high levels of GBV — adapted pre-existing mechanisms developed to respond to extreme weather events and address VAWG during the pandemic. For instance, Fiji activated its GBV Emergency Response Group, which was initially created to respond to extreme weather events, to introduce 14 measures that covered

all critical areas of VAWG response, including expanding reporting mechanisms, ensuring access to justice and services for survivors, awareness raising and data collection. **Vanuatu** developed gender assessments for the pandemic and the tropical cyclone that also occurred in 2020, which resulted in an additional 3 per cent of the recovery budget being allocated to assist those most at risk, including those facing GBV.<sup>32</sup>

As the effects of climate change become more immediate, the risk of GBV will likely increase.<sup>33</sup> These findings show that prioritizing VAWG initiatives in environmental policies is possible, while also recognizing the vast potential for governments to become leaders on policy innovation in this area of the gender-environment nexus.

#### 3. Conclusion

The impact of climate change and gender inequality are deeply intertwined. Environmental degradation resulting from the climate crisis deepens underlying gender inequities. Women and girls are especially vulnerable during climate-induced natural disasters, facing increased food insecurity, poverty, and violence.<sup>34</sup> Additionally, the burden of unpaid care work falls disproportionately on women and girls, affecting their access to work and livelihoods.<sup>35</sup> Women similarly have unique vantage points and areas of expertise to support the transition to green jobs. To recover and build resilience for the future, integrated frameworks that prioritize both green policies and gender equality are essential.

As documented here, governments' commitments to gender-sensitive and green policymaking took a backseat during the pandemic. However, through examining this small subset of measures at the gender-environment nexus, it becomes evident

that there are many potential promising pathways for incorporating women's needs and priorities into climate policies. For example:

- Measures that support inclusive and safe mobility, including through public transport, like those found in Austria and Canada would benefit from women's inputs as their primary users.
- Measures that ensure women's participation in green jobs or sustainable industries, such as in Costa Rica and Spain, can ensure women are part of the just transition and prepared for jobs of the future.
- Disaster risk reduction and management measures, such as in Turkmenistan and Bangladesh, should integrate genderbased violence prevention and response considerations into management and recovery plans.

Likewise, some gender-sensitive policymaking could also benefit from integrating sustainability considerations. For example:

- Social protection measures to support women's economic empowerment in agriculture can also support sustainable local farming, such as in the case of Liberia, Saint Lucia and Zimbabwe.
- Investments in care services that support women's economic empowerment and reduce their burden of unpaid care can also promote energy efficiency and building renovations in public infrastructure, as in the case of Ireland and Spain.
- VAW measures providing emergency housing or other facilities to victims of domestic violence, can also enhance sustainable infrastructure, as in Portugal.

Women and girls play a critical role in sectors affected by climate change and have used their knowledge to lead adaptation and mitigation efforts.<sup>36</sup> Ensuring women's leadership in climate change policymaking is critical to tackling the climate crisis, ensuring social justice, and achieving multiplier effects on the SDGs.

Similarly, further efforts in gender-disaggregated data collection and analysis are essential to better understanding the gendered drivers and impacts of climate change. This includes developing gender-responsive monitoring and evaluation systems and climate change transparency frameworks. These will create accountability mechanisms to track gender equality outcomes and ensure policies and programmes effectively address the needs of women and girls on the ground.

The data presented in this factsheet makes it clear that there is enormous potential for strengthening policymaking at the gender-environment nexus. Gender and environmental expertise should be brought together to devise new and innovative solutions to the climate emergency and environmental crises the world faces. In addition to incorporating a gender perspective into climate mitigation, adaptation and environmental sustainability planning, it will be critical to ensure women's participation and leadership in decision-making about 'green' transitions from the community to the global level.



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- 2 OECD 2020; UNFCCC undated; OECD 2022b.
- 3 Convention on biodiversity undated.
- 4 UN ECOSOC 2022.
- 5 UN Women 2021.
- 6 OECD 2021. UNDP and UN Women 2021.
- **7** OECD 2021.
- 8 UN Women and UNDP 2022.
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- 10 Ibid.
- Only 705 measures of the OECD Green Recovery Database were assessed for gender-relevance and gender-sensitivity, from the total 1380 measures at the end of 2021.
- 12 Gender-sensitive and green business support measures are classified into two gender-sensitive dimensions: women's economic security (23 of 30) and unpaid care (7 of 30). See section 2.1 for more details.
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