

COVID-19 GLOBAL GENDER RESPONSE TRACKER

Factsheet: Eastern and South-Eastern Asia and the Pacific

Version 1 (September 28, 2020)

The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in at least 27 million cases and over 900,000 deaths worldwide.¹ Despite their enormous contributions to mitigating the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, the crisis is threatening to erase decades of progress for women and girls. While men have been most affected in terms of fatalities, COVID-19 has exacerbated economic crises, care deficits and the 'shadow pandemic' of gender-based violence, with disproportionate impacts on women.² Inequalities between groups of women based on race, disability, income, age and more have also been starkly apparent in both the spread and the impact of the virus. Based on a unique database compiled by UNDP and UN Women, this factsheet provides an overview of the COVID-19 response so far of governments in Eastern and South-Eastern Asia and the Pacific, with a focus on measures aimed at addressing threats to gender equality across three key dimensions: the surge in violence against women and girls, the unprecedented increase in unpaid care work, and the economic insecurity caused by the large-scale loss of jobs, incomes and livelihoods.³ Overall, the region's gender response has been patchy and uneven across countries. Despite this, examples of innovative, gender-responsive measures continue to be implemented in a range of contexts.

BOX 1: COVID-19 GLOBAL GENDER RESPONSE TRACKER

Information in this factsheet is based on the [UNDP-UN Women COVID-19 Global Gender Response Tracker](#), which monitors policy measures enacted by national governments worldwide to tackle the COVID-19 crisis, and highlights responses that are gender-sensitive. Co-created by the two agencies, the tracker is coordinated by UNDP, with substantive leadership and technical contributions from UN Women. It is a living database with countries and measures being regularly added and updated.⁴ Like all policy trackers, there may be 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 components of existing measures. Overall, findings should be interpreted with caution. When considering the number of individual measures, for example, it is important to note that countries with few or no COVID-19-related measures may have pre-existing gender-sensitive policies in place that help mitigate the negative impact of the pandemic. Measures also vary significantly in scope. This factsheet therefore also provides information on the content of the measures, which should be considered alongside the aggregate totals. No attempt is made to rank countries, but there is great potential for countries to learn from one another to improve their policy responses for women and girls. More information about the classification of policies, the definition of gender-sensitive measures and the data collection and analysis process can be found in the [methodological note](#).

¹ As of 10am on CEST 6 September 2020. WHO Weekly Epidemiological Update. https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/situation-reports/20200907-weekly-epi-update-4.pdf?sfvrsn=f5f607ee_2

² UN Women. 2020. "From insights to action: gender equality in the wake of COVID-19." <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2020/09/gender-equality-in-the-wake-of-covid-19>

³ Asia-Pacific Gender in Humanitarian Action Working Group. 2020. "The COVID-19 Outbreak and Gender: Regional Analysis and Recommendations from Asia and the Pacific." May. <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/GiHA%20WG%20analysis%20%20brief.pdf>

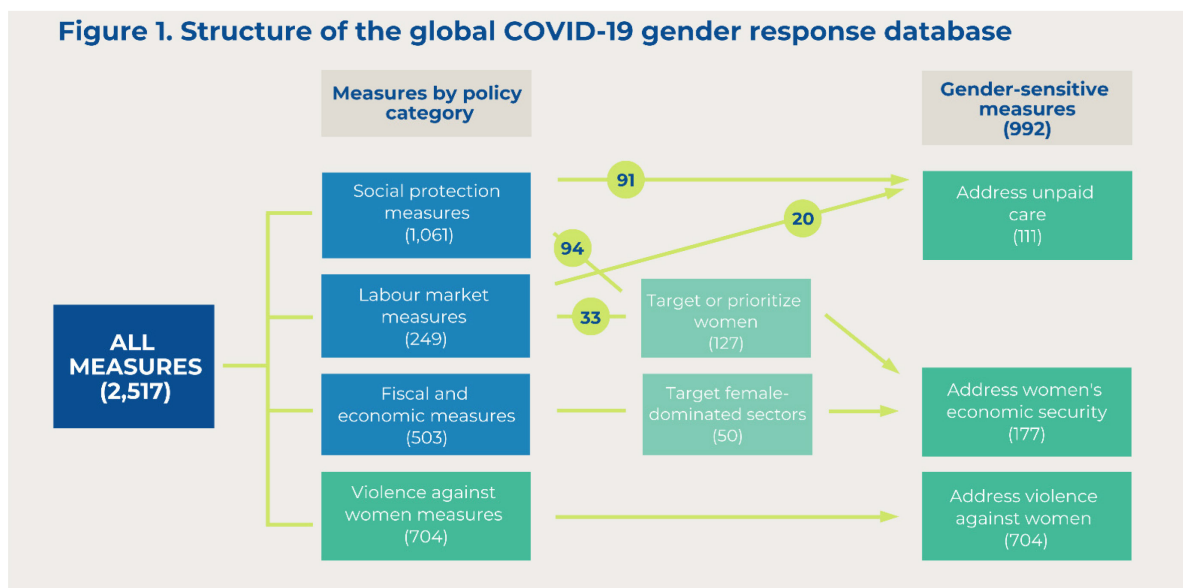
⁴ To provide information on national measures to be included in the UNDP-UN Women COVID-19 Global Gender Response Tracker please contact covid.gender.helpdesk@undp.org.

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I. What is a gender-sensitive measure?

The set of all measures contained in the tracker consists of 2,517 measures taken in response to COVID-19. These measures fall into four main policy categories: social protection, labour markets, fiscal and economic policies and measures to address violence against women and girls (Figure 1). These measures were partly imported from other databases and partly collected by UNDP and UN Women (see [methodological note](#)).



Gender-sensitive measures (992 in total) are a subset of all measures – those that seek to directly address the specific risks and challenges that women and girls face as a result of the pandemic, including:

- all violence against women measures are categorized as gender-sensitive by default
- social protection and labour market measures are defined as gender-sensitive if they target women's economic security or address unpaid care
- fiscal and economic measures are defined as gender-sensitive if they provide support to female-dominated sectors of the economy, on the assumption that this is likely to protect women's employment and thereby their economic security.⁵

The assessment is conducted based on the available information about policy design. An assessment of the implementation or gender impact of these measures is not included.

⁵ Given the different data collection and analysis processes used for identifying violence against women measures, on the one hand, and women's economic security and unpaid care measures, on the other, the three areas are not strictly comparable. While women's economic security and unpaid care measures have been located within a broader universe of social protection, labour market, fiscal and economic measures, violence against women measures have no such point of reference.

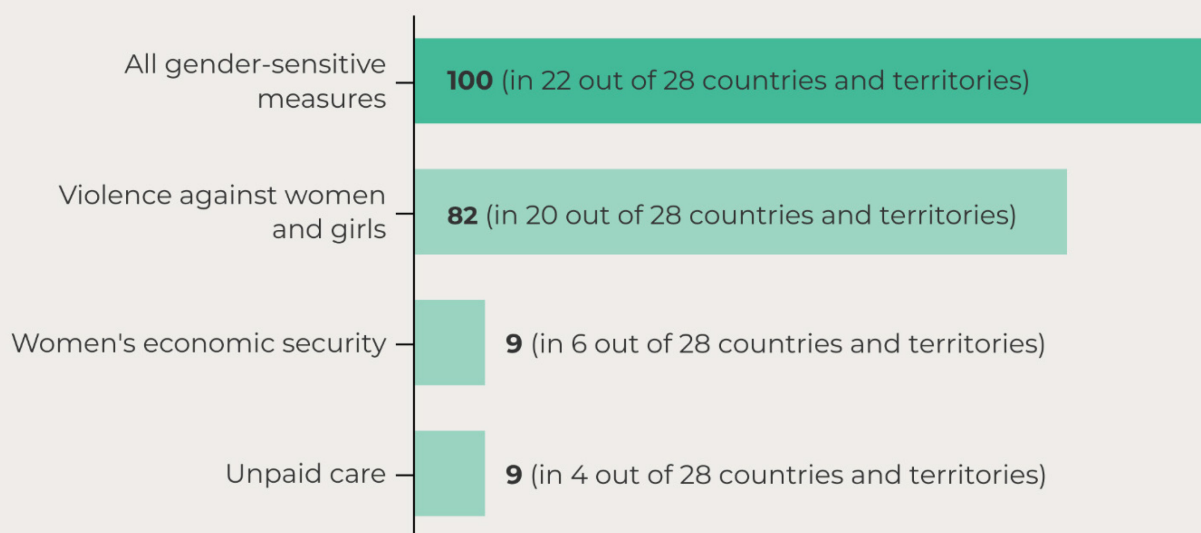
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II. The regional picture

Across Eastern and South-Eastern Asia and the Pacific, the tracker registers 22 countries and territories (see Annex for the full list) out of the 28 analysed, with a total of 100 gender-sensitive measures in response to COVID-19. Echoing global trends, most measures taken in the region address violence against women and girls (82 measures across 20 countries), followed by measures to address unpaid care work (nine measures across four countries), and women's economic security (nine measures across six countries).

Figure 2: Number of gender-sensitive measures in Eastern and South-Eastern Asia and the Pacific, by dimension



Measures that target women's economic security and address unpaid care also make up only a fraction of the total social protection and labour market response, on the one hand, and the fiscal and economic response, on the other:

- In total, 26 countries and territories in Eastern and South-Eastern Asia and the Pacific have adopted 169 social protection and labour market measures in response to COVID-19. However, only 8 per cent of these measures (14) are gender-sensitive in that they strengthen women's economic security or address unpaid care (Figure 3).
- Similarly, 10 countries and territories in Eastern and South-Eastern Asia and the Pacific have adopted 51 fiscal and economic measures to help businesses weather the crisis, but only 8 per cent of these measures have aimed at strengthening women's economic security by channelling resources to feminized sectors (Figure 4).

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Overall, only two countries in the region (Indonesia and China) register a holistic response with measures that span at least three dimensions. Six out of 28 countries and territories analysed in the region register no gender-sensitive measures at all in response to COVID-19.

Figure 3. Proportion of gender-sensitive measures out of total social protection and labour market response in Eastern and South-Eastern Asia and the Pacific

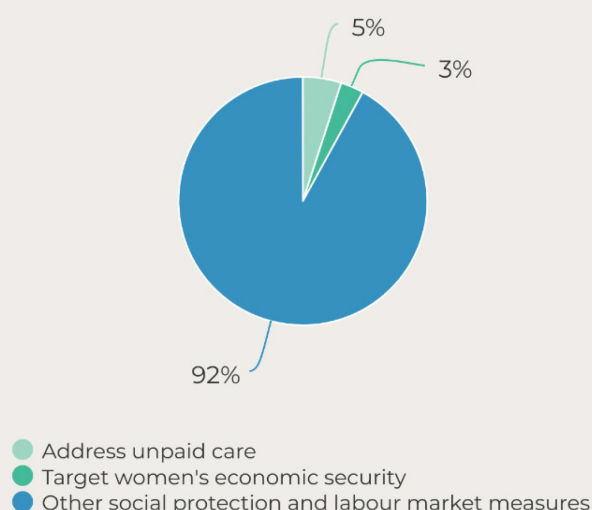
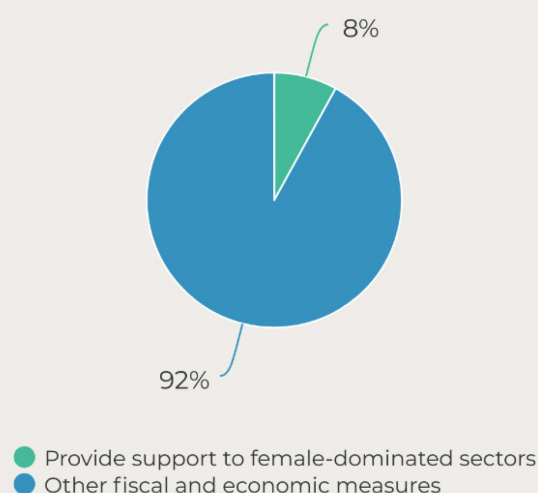


Figure 4. Proportion of gender-sensitive measures out of total fiscal and economic response in Eastern and South-Eastern Asia and the Pacific



III. Which gender policies are governments prioritizing?

Violence against women and girls (VAWG)

Some 82 per cent of all gender-sensitive measures in Eastern and South-Eastern Asia and the Pacific (82 measures across 20 countries) focus on preventing and/or responding to violence against women and girls. The Pacific (31 measures across 8 countries) and South-Eastern Asia (46 measures across 10 countries) account for the bulk of these measures, with just five measures addressing VAWG registered in the Eastern Asia subregion in China and Japan.

Of all VAWG measures in the region, 62 per cent (51 in 16 countries) aim to strengthen of services for women survivors (Figure 5), including through police and judicial responses (14 measures in nine countries), helplines and other reporting

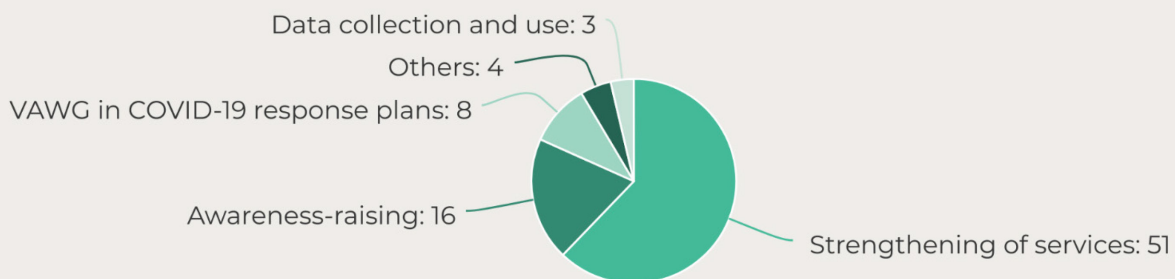
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mechanisms (11 measures in nine countries) shelters (seven measures in seven countries), continued provision of psychosocial support (seven measures across seven countries) and coordinated services. For example:

- In the **Marshall Islands**, virtual court hearings are being introduced and efforts are underway to improve the justice system as a key means to ensure continuity of access to justice throughout the crisis. The judiciary continues its practice of prioritizing domestic violence.
- In **Myanmar**, the Department of Social Welfare continues to support centres for survivors of violence, such as One-Stop Crisis Centres that provide comprehensive treatment and services, One-Stop Women Support Centres that provide psychosocial counselling, and other social services for women who are affected by violence.
- In **Singapore**, steps were taken such that all court hearings in the Family Justice Courts scheduled from 2 June 2020 onwards are conducted through remote hearings via video or telephone conferencing, where appropriate.
- In the **Solomon Islands**, through the Gender-based Violence in Emergencies Committee, an emergency phone tree was developed for the COVID-19 emergency period to ensure survivors could access services. These mechanisms were disseminated widely for public awareness. The SAFENET toll-free helpline for survivors of gender-based violence (GBV) has also been maintained, and partners have disseminated information on it to raise awareness.
- In **Thailand**, the Ministry of Public Health added questions on violence against women and concerns on domestic violence in its screening questions on COVID-19. Cases identified in this screening are referred to the One-Stop Service Centre for in-depth assessment by a psychologist nurse.
- In **Timor-Leste**, Reception Houses were created to enable women and girls to quarantine before entering a shelter.
- In **Viet Nam**, the National Hotline for Children Survivors of VAW has been updated and strengthened and continues to operate during the pandemic. The national Hotline (111) is free for children and adults to report abuse, and to direct them to available services at local level.

Figure 5. Number of violence against women measures, by type



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The second most common type of measure taken in the region was awareness-raising and campaigns (16 measures in 13 countries). For example:

- In **Samoa**, the Ministry of Women, Community and Social Development, in partnership with UN agencies and NGOs, has been conducting community outreach awareness, which includes GBV-related information-sharing. This involves having village representatives sign a newly developed code of conduct, which promotes a survivor-centred approach, and sharing community worker's guidelines with information on referral mechanisms available to them during the state of emergency.
- In **Vanuatu**, the Ministry of Health, in partnership with Care International, developed a COVID-19 booklet for households, in both English and Bislama, providing context-appropriate public health recommendations, national referral information, and guidance for people experiencing violence at home.

Only three countries in the region (Cambodia, Fiji and Timor-Leste) have taken measures to improve the collection and use of violence against women data in the COVID-19 context. For example:

- In **Cambodia**, the Government – through the Ministry of Women's Affairs and in close collaboration with national and international partners – has taken action to document the impact of COVID-19 in GBV cases and collect evidence on the related demand for services.

Services to respond to and prevent VAWG must be treated as essential services and as an integral part of national and local COVID-19 response plans. However, according to the tracker, only seven countries in the region have taken this step (Fiji, Japan, Kiribati, Singapore, Solomon Islands, Thailand and Tonga). The pandemic will have long-lasting consequences, increasing the risk of violence for women and girls, and only commitments that are part of governments' sustained and long-term planning and policies can help to address these.

The tracker registers no measures to address **online violence** in these regions, which evidence shows has increased during the pandemic,⁶ and very few measures to reach the most **marginalized women**. Fiji – where the Gender-Based Violence Working Group created a referral pathway for women with disabilities – is a notable exception.

⁶ UN Women. 2020. "Brief: Online and ICT-facilitated violence against women and girls during COVID-19." April.
<https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2020/04/brief-online-and-ict-facilitated-violence-against-women-and-girls-during-covid-19>

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Women's economic security

Out of the 220 fiscal and economic, social protection and labour market measures registered for more than 26 countries and territories in Eastern and South-Eastern Asia and the Pacific, only nine measures across six countries and territories address women's economic security – amounting to just four per cent of the total fiscal, economic, social protection and jobs response.

Five of these measures fall into the social protection category (Figure 6) and most of these are cash transfers that prioritize women as the main recipients. For example:

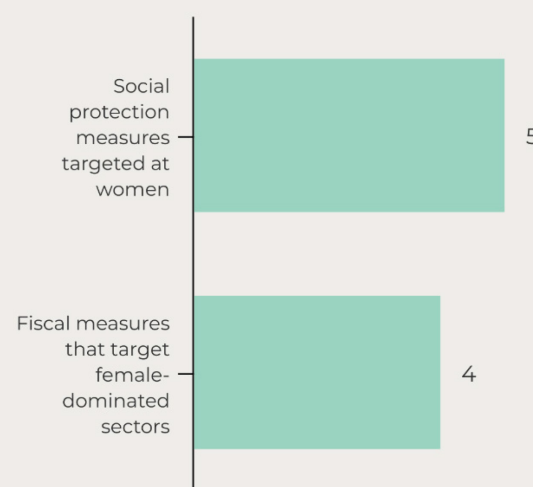
- In **Indonesia**, the flagship conditional cash-transfer programme, *Programme Keluarga Harapan* (PKH), expanded coverage from 9.2 to 10 million beneficiary families (or 15 per cent of the population) and doubled the benefit level for three months (April–June).
- **Myanmar** has also expanded existing cash transfers. The Government will provide top-up benefits for recipients of the Maternal and Child Cash Transfer (targeting mothers of children under the age of 2 and pregnant women) and recipients of social pensions for 2 to 3 months, while also reducing the age limit of the social pension. This measure aims to reach 1 million individuals.

The tracker registers no measures in the labour market category aimed at addressing women's economic security.

Finally, only one country in the region registers fiscal and economic measures to support feminized sectors of their economies – that is, sectors that absorb a higher proportion of women's employment compared to that of men. These measures account for two per cent of all fiscal and economic measures adopted in the region.

- **China** has offered CNY 3.55 trillion (USD 521 billion) of low-cost capital to financial institutions via reserve requirement ratio cuts, relending, and rediscount quotas. The country has also rolled out targeted incentives, including cutting value-added tax, consumption tax, corporate and individual income taxes, and waiving employers' payments to social insurance to some sectors where women are overrepresented, such as hairdressing and laundry.

Figure 6. Number of measures in Eastern and South-Eastern Asia and the Pacific that address women's economic security, by policy category



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Overall, the low number of labour market, fiscal and economic measures aimed at strengthening women's economic security or to support the sectors that employ them signals a major gap in the response so far. Stronger action is needed to ensure that women can keep their jobs or re-enter the labour market if they have lost them as a result of the pandemic.

Unpaid care

Measures to support unpaid care in the COVID-19 crisis include the provision of paid family leaves, cash-for-care programmes, flexible and shorter work-time arrangements or continued provision of childcare services, including for essential workers. Such measures are scarce in Eastern and South-Eastern Asia and completely absent in the Pacific, accounting for only 5 per cent (nine measures in four countries) of the total 169 social protection and labour market measures in the region. For example:

- In **China**, older adults who are living alone with intensive care needs, and whose family caregiver is in quarantine or is a health-care worker, are being provided with home-based services or temporary residential care.
- In the **Cook Islands**, a cash-for-care scheme has been implemented to ensure that for each child aged 0–16 who is currently receiving child benefits, an additional NZD\$ 100 on top of the current NZD\$ 50 will be allocated for every fortnight during school closure outside of school holidays. An application process is not required. In addition, a one-off top-up payment to current welfare benefits of NZD\$ 400 per beneficiary is available to women in their capacity as caregivers, under a broader scheme targeting vulnerable groups.
- In the **Republic of Korea**, a combination of labour market and social protection measures have been taken to support unpaid care work. Firstly, the Government is supporting parents with childcare responsibilities with a cash benefit of KRW 50,000 (USD 43) per day as they shift to home care in light of school and day care closures. Furthermore, working parents are entitled to an additional five days of leave if they reduce work hours for COVID-19-related family care, and employees with children can reduce their working hours to take care of their children.

Overall, given that less than one in five countries and territories in Eastern and South-Eastern Asia and the Pacific (4 out of 28) are taking action to support unpaid care, and 22 countries and territories in the region have not taken any measures at all to address unpaid care, the response has been woefully inadequate to address the severe care crisis catalysed by COVID-19.

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Annex I: Number of gender-sensitive measures registered by type and country

Country/territory	Women's economic security	Unpaid care	Violence against women	Total gender-sensitive
Brunei Darussalam	0	0	4	4
Cambodia	0	0	8	8
China	2	1	3	6
China, Hong Kong Special Administrative Region	2	0	0	2
Cook Islands	0	3	0	3
Fiji	0	0	13	13
Indonesia	1	1	4	6
Japan	1	0	2	3
Kiribati	0	0	1	1
Malaysia	0	0	4	4
Marshall Islands	0	0	2	2
Myanmar	2	0	7	9
Papua New Guinea	0	0	1	1
Philippines	0	0	1	1
Republic of Korea	0	4	0	4
Samoa	0	0	1	1
Singapore	0	0	7	7
Solomon Islands	0	0	7	7
Thailand	0	0	6	6
Timor-Leste	0	0	3	3
Tonga	0	0	5	5
Tuvalu	1	0	0	1
Vanuatu	0	0	1	1
Viet Nam	0	0	2	2
TOTAL	9	9	82	100

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Annex II: Countries in focus

The Republic of Korea

The Republic of Korea was one of the first countries in the world to experience a spike in COVID-19 cases in the first months of 2020. The country's rapid public health response to this emergent threat was marked by rigorous test-and-trace practices, and free COVID-19-related medical care for all.⁷ From a gender perspective, the Republic of Korea took four gender-sensitive measures in response to the pandemic, of a total of 28 measures (14 per cent). All of the gender-sensitive measures address unpaid care work, with no measures directly targeting women's economic security, violence against women, or feminized sectors of the economy. Though the Republic of Korea's emergency response is therefore limited from a gender perspective, the measures addressing unpaid care work are substantial, combining cash-for-care with employment-cost subsidies for employees with childcare responsibilities, thus indirectly supporting women's economic security. As of 20 September, the Republic of Korea had recorded 383 deaths from COVID-19.

As part of special measures to respond to COVID-19, the Government announced that family members or those who live with disabled persons can register as temporary care workers to provide care in the absence of usual care arrangements. In this case, the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare will register them as temporary care workers and they will be paid the same wage as their professional equivalents. They will also be provided with two hours of safety instructions by quarantine facilities, health centres or hospitals. If families are not able to help patients with disabilities, then these patients will be able to enter quarantine facilities.

In March, the Government also announced a temporary increase of wage subsidies (from 1 March to 30 June) for employees with children, in light of the postponement of the new school term. These subsidies provide a significant top-up to existing compensations for wage cuts – to KRW 400,000 (USD 342) per worker – in the event that an employee reduces work hours for COVID-19-related family care. Eligibility criteria were also relaxed (e.g. the minimum employment duration was reduced from six months to one month), providing more workers with access to these benefits. Additional wage support is provided to pregnant employees. These measures directly address the increase in unpaid care work by providing parents with options to adapt working hours to balance care responsibilities, while supporting continued access to income.

Finally, the Government will support childcare with KRW 2.4 trillion (USD 2 billion) to low-income households as they shift from childcare institutions to home care provided by family. Specifically, parent employees are entitled to KRW 50,000 (USD 43)/day. Some parent employees are also entitled to up to five days of leave along with childcare support. However, this measure is limited to those not already receiving paid family emergency leave from their firms.

⁷ <https://en.unesco.org/news/how-republic-korea-flattened-covid-19-curve-openness-transparency-and-democracy>

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Fiji

Fiji took 20 measures in response to COVID-19, of which 13 were gender-sensitive. All of these measures address the violence faced by women and girls during the pandemic, one of the highest totals in this policy category in the region. Despite this constructive response in the area of ending violence against women, Fiji has not taken any measures to address women's economic security, unpaid care work, or targeting feminized sectors of the economy. As of 18 September, Fiji had recorded just two deaths from COVID-19.

Fiji has integrated ending violence against women and girls into the national COVID-19 response through the development of a GBV Working Group under the Safety and Protection Cluster, led by the Fiji Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation (MWCPA). The GBV Working Group advanced strategies on behalf of all service-providers and signed on to the Fiji Service-Delivery Protocol for Responding to Cases of GBV. Specifically, the GBV Working Group developed technical tools, adapted referral pathways, and provided trainings and communication. This included a referral pathway for women with disabilities. The MWCPA also analysed domestic violence helpline data to look at trends in reporting during the pandemic.

Throughout the COVID-19 period, GBV services have been considered essential services. To strengthen services for survivors, the Fiji Government funded two national free domestic violence and child helplines which were operational throughout the COVID-19 period. The GBV Working Group strengthened psychosocial support through the development of information, education and communication materials and training for helpline staff. A training was also developed specifically for health-care workers in hospitals and clinics to identify and safely refer women and children who have experienced violence. To improve access to justice during lockdowns, the GBV Working Group worked closely with Fiji Police and the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre to help explain how to get a domestic violence restraining order over the telephone. In addition, the GBV Working Group negotiated that women fleeing violence should be transported in police vehicles to support services during curfew hours. The Fiji Women's Crisis Centre vehicle has also been cleared by police to move around during the Government-imposed curfew, to transport survivors as required.

To raise awareness about gender-based violence, the GBV Working Group has brought together individuals to speak out against GBV, ranging from the police commissioner to rugby players and faith leaders, as the basis for a national media campaign in three languages, which was aired in July, August and September.