

COVID-19 CRISIS

**Supporting Equitable and Inclusive Governance Responses to
Addressing COVID-19's Impact on Fragility, Peace and Development**



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Prepared by:
UNDP MALDIVES

Overview

UNDP, as part of the global COVID-19 response, will continue to strengthen national and local governance institutions and processes to help governments and communities to cope with and adequately respond to the crisis, while also fostering conditions necessary for long-term stability and resilience. The global COVID-19 pandemic is putting at stake any advances towards the Sustainable Development Goals and risks increasing socio-economic inequalities. It is also a multidimensional crisis – health crisis, care crisis and economic crisis. An effective response must address all three. The costs of response (e.g. self-isolation social distancing) are not equally distributed. Policy responses must take this into account.

Ensuring access to justice, people-centered security services, and support to national human rights systems are particularly essential in times of humanitarian crisis such as COVID-19, not only for meeting people's immediate needs but for reducing vulnerabilities to additional shocks and crises, including many potentially caused by the virus or responses to it. Connecting humanitarian responses to development efforts of enhancing capacities of human rights, rule of law and security institutions is critical to prevent, respond and recover from the COVID-19 crisis. Support to institutions to respond in a people-centered and human rights-based manner will need to be at the core of the response, including to ensure to leave no one behind and ensure that measures adopted are in line with international human rights standards.

Similarly, a failure to adopt a gender perspective will have an impact on the effects of the crisis and future recovery – beyond the specific effects on women. Women and men and girls and boys are being differently affected and experience different economic, health and social risks. This outbreak threatens to exacerbate existing gender inequalities. Gender responsiveness requires acknowledging changing household dynamics in response to the crisis – including intimate partner violence.

Country experiences in the past with other epidemic outbreaks, such as the Ebola virus⁴, Zika, MERS, SARS or the AH1N1, have revealed that the most vulnerable, including the elderly, people with disabilities, low-income households, households highly exposed to shocks, and informal workers without social protection or any kind of insurance, are disproportionately affected. Past experiences of crisis management during conflicts or disasters have proven that the inclusion of women's voices and concerns in decision-making processes increases the effectiveness of the response.

Brief Country Context

While it is still too early to accurately gauge the full impact of the COVID-19, it is clear that the crisis has already turned into a global economic crisis and becoming a human development crisis. The COVID-19 crisis will undoubtedly bring severe impacts to Maldives and its people. The severity of these impacts will depend on how long the crisis lasts, how the government responds and how effectively the international community supports these efforts. All available indications, at this stage, point to a deepening crisis that will further undermine the progress on the SDGs. If not responded urgently and appropriately, this health and economic crisis will turn into social and political crisis in the immediate future.

In planning any response focus must be on delivering timely and multi-sector response that adheres to human rights and equity principles. Everything we do during and after this crisis must be with a strong focus on building more equal and inclusive societies that are more resilient in the face of pandemics, climate change, and the many other challenges we face. This is an opportunity to revive community spirits, volunteerism and promote social cohesion across the country.

A rights-based approach must be used so as to ensure no one is left behind. It is critical that Maldives adopts a recovery strategy which is developed through multi-sector coordination and planning. As we have learned from past crises effective response must be driven by solidarity and human rights whilst focusing on the most vulnerable people. Guiding principles for the UNDP offer must be to prioritize the following:

- National solidarity is crucial to ensure no one is left behind
- Protect human rights and focus on inclusion
- Support young people who are affected by the crisis
- Prioritize social cohesion measures
- Whole of society approach: Local and National Authorities, Civil society and community-based organizations, Businesses and private sector participation

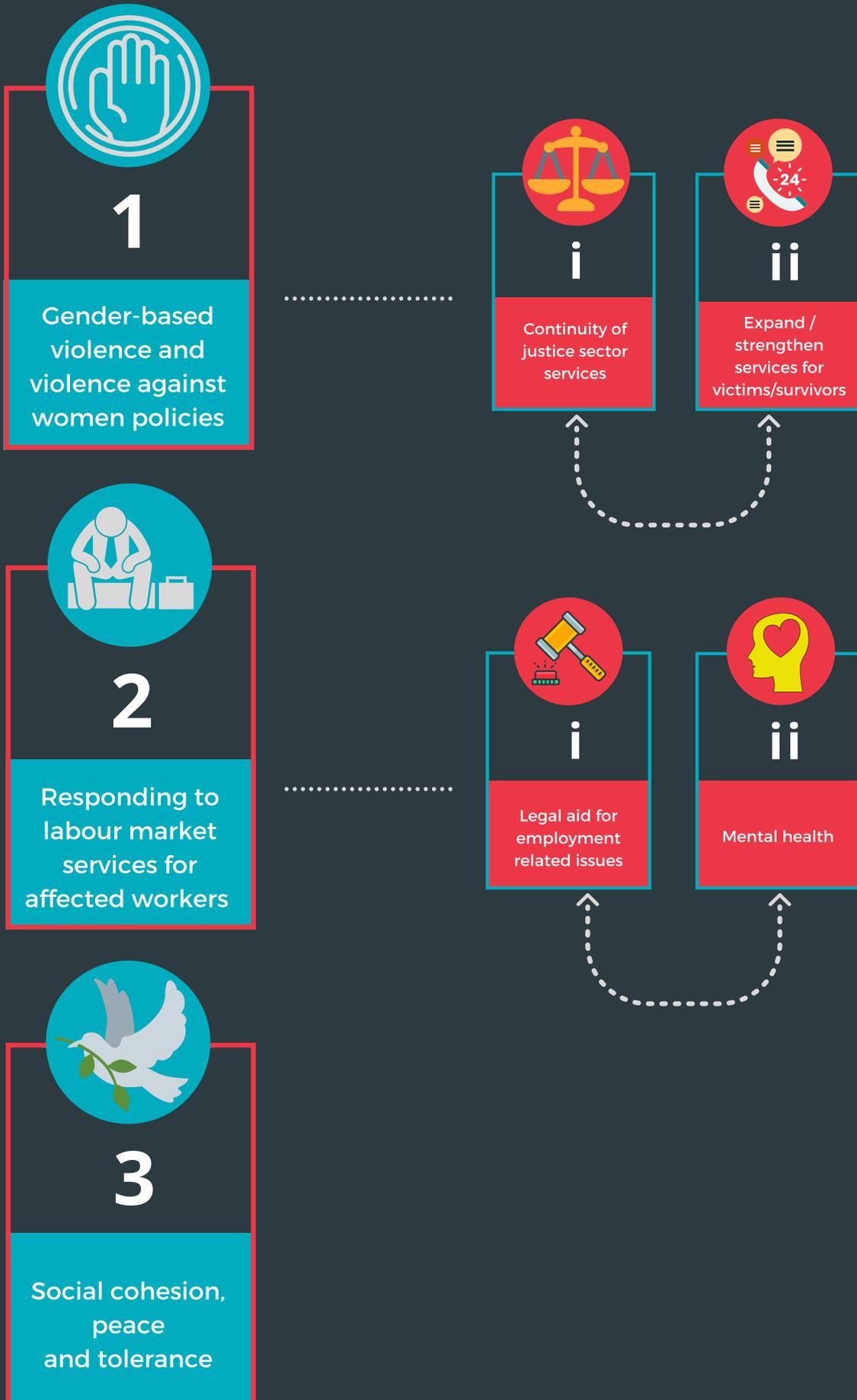


Proposed Responses

UNDP's COVID-19 response will support the principles that guide all its work – realization of **human rights, inclusive participation, gender sensitivity, accountability, conflict sensitivity** and a **focus on the most marginalized and vulnerable**, including meaningful participation of young people.



KEY AREAS OF INTERVENTION IN THE SHORT TERM



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1. Gender-based violence and violence against women policies in the context of the COVID-19 outbreak

Women are often at the frontlines of the response in healthcare centers, social services, communities and households. Women also play a central role in ensuring the well-being, care, and resilience of affected people, the elderly, children, and their families. The economic consequences will be vast and will deepen existing inequalities, including gender inequalities. During periods of isolation and quarantine, women can be exposed to their abuser full time. The tensions due to prolonged coexistence in the private space, combined with the uncertainty and anxiety caused by the outbreak of the new coronavirus, may increase the number of cases of violence against women and of domestic violence. The overload of domestic and care work, in addition to restrictions in the family economy, can increase tensions and violent behavior against women, children and older relatives. Violence can also affect the re-entry of women into the labor market and constrain their economic autonomy. Based on these scenarios, the following interventions are underway with UNDP and its partners:

- **Ensuring continuity of justice sector services** when the mobility of judges and justice personnel is compromised, through digital and remote mechanisms, especially when these services are required to resolve disputes related to intimate partner violence, divorce, custody, child support or maintenance etc. Support will be provided for digitalization and technical assistance towards enacting necessary regulations and procedures for court hearings to take place.

- **Expand / strengthen services for victims/survivors**, such as hotlines and FCSCs, adapt their structures to continue providing help in the context of a health emergency, guaranteeing a safe environment for those using the service and for care providers. Discussions are underway with Family Legal Clinic for a partnership to enhance their services.

2. Responding to Labour market services for workers affected by the crisis

- **Legal aid for employment related issues – in partnership with Transparency Maldives' Advocacy and Legal Center (ALAC)**. While the economic impact of this pandemic is undeniable, the minimization of losses to businesses by discriminatory practices affecting rights of workers is a very real risk. This is particularly prevalent in the private sector. Many in the tourism sector are forced to take a no pay leave while others are being laid off. In order to address this ALAC will provide support to cases relating to unfair dismissals, violation of the employment law and other employment related cases in response to the economic impact of Covid-19 pandemic. This will be done through over the phone legal assistance, development of resources for workers which can be used as guidance.
- **Mental health** – In addition to handling the accompanying practical and emotional fear and worries related to the virus, there are many other related issues relating to an outbreak: A potential increase in child abuse, domestic or intimate partner violence, substance abuse and anxiety related to facing severe economic hardship are to be expected. Therefore, focus is on increasing mental health surveillance and capacity to respond by targeting PSS and support group mechanisms at community level to cater those that are directly affected and are struggling with stress management. In this regard UNDP is partnering with Maldivian Red Crescent to provide psychosocial support to persons going through economic hardships.

3. Promoting social cohesion, peace and tolerance

- A holistic messaging campaign on promoting tolerance, respect for diversity and national identity will be conducted as part of the interventions. This intervention is informed by the behavioral shifts observed in the past, such as the rise in conservatism and traditional values in the aftermath of 2004 Tsunami. It is also noted that early warning signs of rise in such rhetoric has been recorded in the COVID-19 pandemic and without structured and systematic interventions it has the potential to exacerbate the underlying violent extremist trends/rhetoric in the Maldives.
- The objective for this intervention is to lower the risk of increase in extremist narratives by presenting alternative narratives that depict collective good and achievement, reinterpreting what it means to be a Maldivian, humility, kindness and humaneness through a holistic messaging campaign.





As the Government of Maldives starts designing relief funds and other responses, this presents an unprecedented opportunity for transforming the economic structure to be low-carbon, climate-resilient and inclusive. UNDP is pleased to be part of the process.

- UNDP Maldives Resident Representative, Akiko Fujii



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