

# COVID-19 GLOBAL GENDER RESPONSE TRACKER

## Factsheet: Sub-Saharan Africa

Version 1 (September 28, 2020)

The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in at least 27 million cases and over 900,000 deaths worldwide.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> Inequalities between groups of women based on race, disability, income, age and more have 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 sub-Saharan Africa, 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. Despite often fragile health infrastructure, clusters of high-density populations, and a high global burden of pre-existing infectious diseases, countries in the region took a number of early public health responses. But, overall, the region’s gender response has been uneven across countries and dimensions. While sub-Saharan Africa registers a relatively high number of measures to address violence against women and women’s economic security, it is the region with the lowest number of measures to address unpaid care globally.

### 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.<sup>3</sup> 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](#).

<sup>1</sup> As of 10am CEST on 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](https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/situation-reports/20200907-weekly-epi-update-4.pdf?sfvrsn=f5f607ee_2)

<sup>2</sup> UN Women. 2020. “From insights to action: gender equality in the wake of COVID-19.”

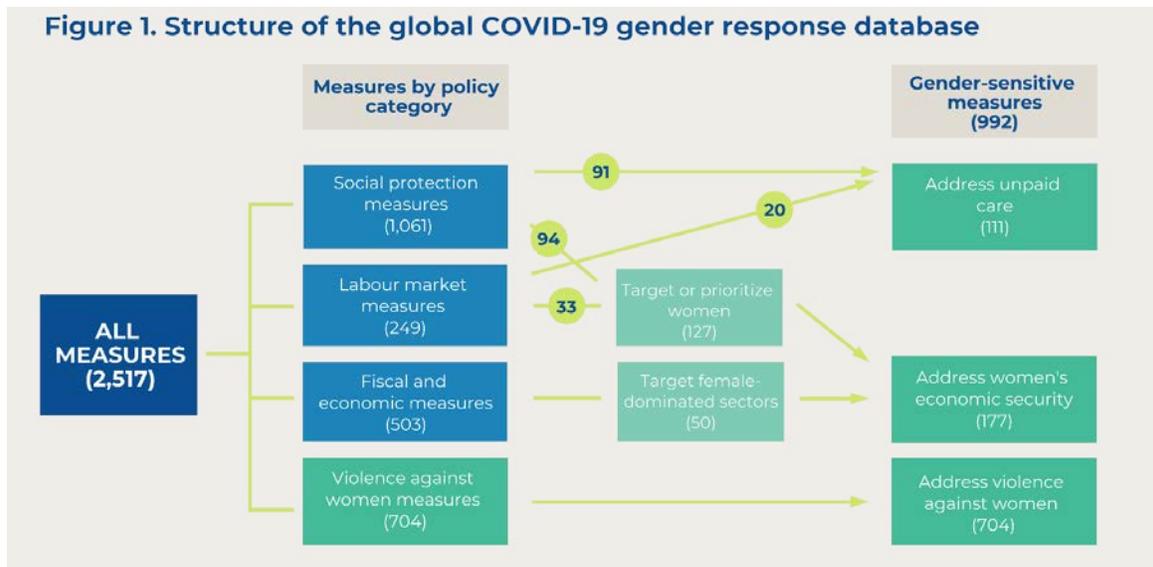
<sup>3</sup> To provide information on national measures to be included in the UNDP-UN Women COVID-19 Global Gender Response Tracker please contact [covid.gender.helpdesk@undp.org](mailto:covid.gender.helpdesk@undp.org).

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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.<sup>4</sup>

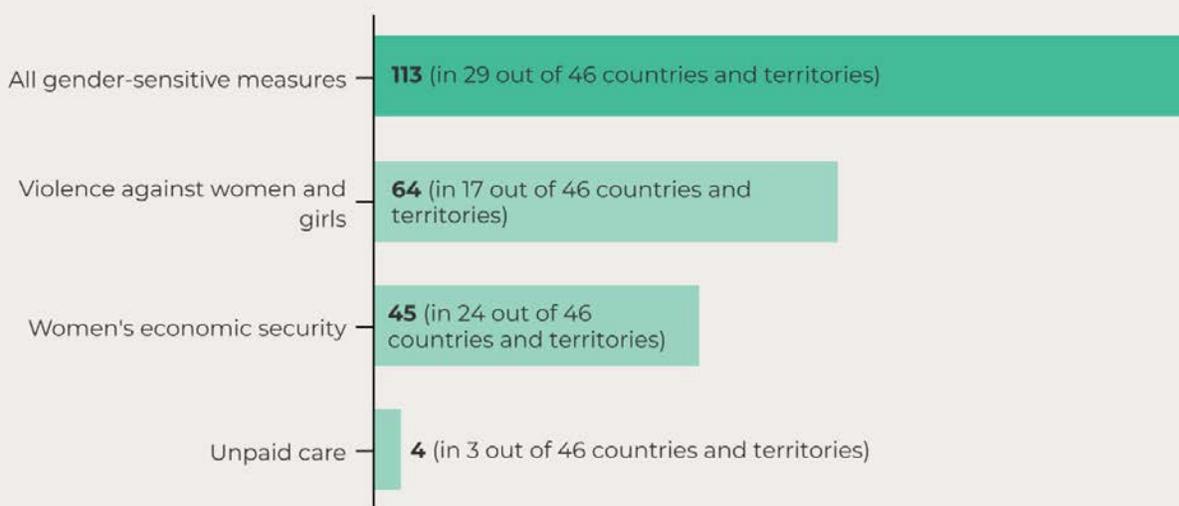
The assessment is conducted based on the available information about policy design. An assessment of the implementation or gender impact of these measures is not included.

<sup>4</sup> 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.

### II. The regional picture

Across the sub-Saharan African region, 29 of the 46 countries and territories analysed have taken a total of 113 gender-sensitive measures in response to COVID-19 (see Annex I for the full list). Echoing global trends, most measures adopted in the region address violence against women (64 measures across 17 countries), followed by measures to ensure women's economic security (45 measures across 24 countries), with the lowest number of measures to address unpaid care work (four measures across three countries) (Figure 2).

**Figure 2. Number of gender-sensitive measures in sub-Saharan Africa, by dimension**



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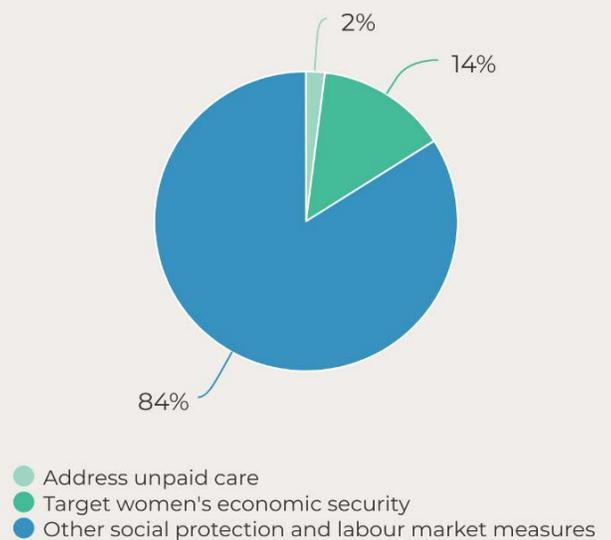
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Measures that target women's economic security and address unpaid care also make up only a fraction of the total social protection and labour market response, on the one hand, and the fiscal and economic response, on the other:

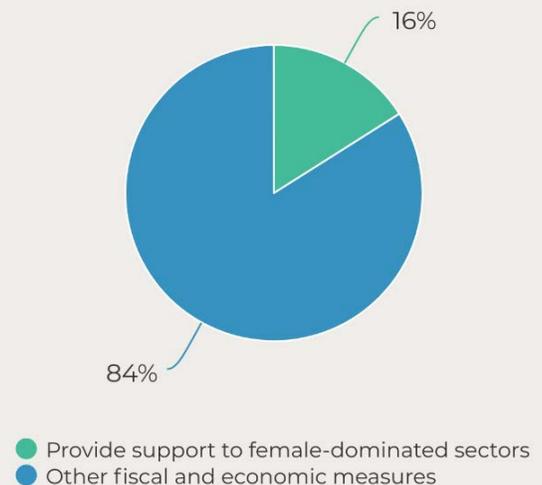
- In total, 45 countries and territories in sub-Saharan Africa have adopted 189 social protection and labour market measures in response to COVID-19. However, only 16 per cent of these measures (30) are gender-sensitive in that they strengthen women's economic security or address unpaid care (Figure 3).
- Similarly, 31 countries and territories in the region have adopted 98 fiscal and economic measures to help businesses weather the crisis; 19 per cent of these measures (19) have aimed to strengthen women's economic security by channelling resources to feminized sectors (Figure 4).

Mainly because of the lower number of measures to address unpaid care, no country in sub-Saharan Africa registers a holistic response with measures that span the three dimensions (violence, economic security, unpaid care). Worryingly, 16 out of 45 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 sub-Saharan Africa**



**Figure 4. Proportion of gender-sensitive measures out of total fiscal and economic response in sub-Saharan Africa**



### III. Which gender policies are governments prioritizing?

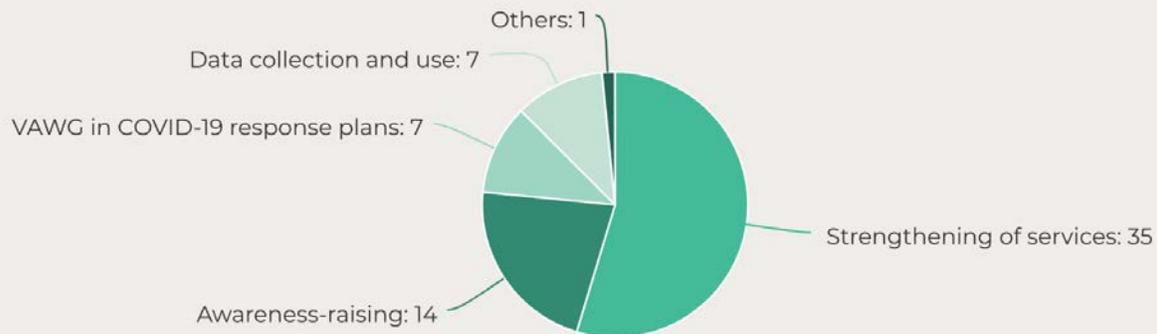
#### *Violence against women and girls (VAWG)*

Some 57 per cent of all gender-sensitive measures in sub-Saharan Africa (64 measures across 17 countries) focus on preventing and/or responding to violence against women and girls. Eastern and Southern African countries account for around two-thirds of VAWG measures (46 measures across 11 countries), while Western and Central African countries register around one-third of measures (18 measures across six countries) to address violence against women.

Over half of all VAWG measures in the region (35 in 13 countries) aim to strengthen services for women survivors (Figure 5), including through helplines and other reporting mechanisms (11 measures in 10 countries), continued provision of psychosocial support (seven measures in six countries), and police and judicial responses (seven measures in six countries). For example:

- In **Angola**, the Minister of Social Action, Family and Women's Promotion created a helpline whereby trained counsellors provide psychosocial assistance.
- In **Cote d'Ivoire**, the Government has reactivated the transit and reception centre for survivors set up by the Ministry of Women.
- In **Malawi**, guidelines were developed to assist mapping of referral pathways, and community complaint mechanisms have been established. Furthermore, the Ministry of Gender, Child Development and Community Development received 940 bicycles and 60 motorcycles from the UN's Spotlight Initiative for use by VAWG service-providers in communities. They are expected to ease mobility challenges for service-providers in their efforts to reach out to marginalized groups in hard-to-reach areas.
- In **Mozambique**, The Ministries of Interior and Health made national helplines available 24/7, partnering with telecommunications companies, as a means for women and girls to report safely, offering remote services where possible.
- In **South Africa**, for Level 4 of the lockdown, the courts prioritized cases involving corruption, sexual offences, gender-based violence and femicide, serious violent crimes, robbery, murder and the violation of COVID-19 regulations.
- In **South Sudan**, national helplines have been launched to assist gender-based violence survivors 24/7 by providing information and linking them to the nearest service-providers, including Family Protection Centres (VAWG one-stop centres).
- In **Uganda**, the COVID-19 Essential Services Committee of the Ministry of Health developed, with the support of UNFPA, Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) to ensure continuity of gender-based violence, sexual and reproductive health and HIV services during the pandemic. The SOPs will enable the Ministry of Health to prioritize integrated services as part of the essential service package in COVID-19 case management.
- In **Zimbabwe**, domestic violence cases continue to be treated as urgent by courts, the Victim Friendly Unit is operating, and measures have been taken to enable that services such as shelters continue to function.

**Figure 5. Number of violence against women measures in sub-Saharan Africa, by type**



The second most common type of measure taken in the region was awareness-raising and campaigns (14 measures in 12 countries). Many of these efforts have been innovative and collaborative. For example:

- In **Hawassa City, Ethiopia**, Safe City messages on prevention and response to domestic and sexual violence have been shared with religious authorities for community outreach.
- In **Niger**, with the support of UN Women and UNFPA, the Federal Ministry of Women's Affairs produced jingles to be played during radio programmes promoting COVID-19 safety and hygiene directives, as well as reporting channels for survivors of sexual and gender-based violence.

Only six countries in the region (Cameroon, Kenya, Malawi, South Africa, Uganda and Zimbabwe) have taken seven measures to improve the collection and use of violence against women data in the COVID-19 context. For example:

- In **Cameroon**, a survey was launched by the National Bureau of Censuses and Population Studies and the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Family, with the support of UN Women, to assess the impact of COVID-19 and governmental measures on daily life. The survey included a focus on GBV, as well as on household and care work distribution between men and women. The survey was conducted online using social media platforms (WhatsApp and Facebook).
- In **Kenya**, the President ordered an investigation into rising reports of violence against women and girls – including rape, domestic violence, female genital mutilation and child marriage – as a result of COVID-19 restrictions.

Services to respond to and prevent VAWG must be treated as essential services and an integral part of national and local COVID-19 response plans. However, according to the tracker, only seven countries (Côte d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa, Uganda and Zimbabwe) in the region have taken this step.

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This is worrying, since the pandemic will have long-lasting consequences that increase 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 this region,<sup>5</sup> which evidence shows has increased during the pandemic, and very few measures to reach the most marginalized women.

### *Women's economic security*

Out of the 287 fiscal and economic, social protection and labour market measures registered for more than 40 countries and territories in sub-Saharan Africa, only 45 measures across 24 countries and territories address women's economic security – amounting to less than 16 per cent of the total fiscal, economic, social protection and jobs response.

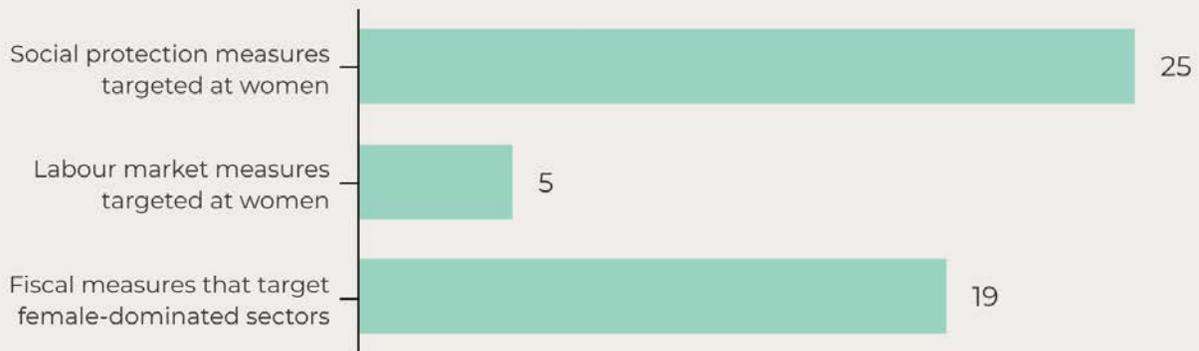
Of these measures, 22 fall under the **social protection** category (Figure 6). The main social protection programmes that sub-Saharan African governments have used to strengthen women's economic security in the context of COVID-19 are cash transfers (11 measures in eleven countries) and food assistance or other forms of in-kind support (six measures in six countries) that prioritize women as the main recipients. For example:

- In **Kenya**, the National Safety Net Programme prioritizes giving cash to women in beneficiary households. More than one million *Inua Jamii* beneficiaries have started receiving KES 8,000 (USD 74) each from the State to cushion them against the effects of COVID-19. Social distancing measures are implemented at payment centres to protect beneficiaries. The scheme is earmarked towards older persons, orphans and other vulnerable members of society.
- The Government of **Rwanda** is making the most of well-established decentralized structures to implement the social protection response, starting with in-kind distribution of food and other essential items to 20,000 families, partly targeting female-headed households. Beneficiaries are identified by committees at the lowest local administrative level, known as "*isibo*", which covers 15–20 households. Households in need of food can self-report to any committee member by calling them directly or dialling a dedicated toll-free number. Food and other essential items are then distributed through different administrative levels (District-Sector-Cell-Village-Isibo).

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<sup>5</sup> 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>

**Figure 6. Number of measures in sub-Saharan Africa that address women's economic security, by policy category**



Another four measures in three countries aim to address women's economic security through **labour market** measures.

- In **Liberia**, the Government has extended credits for street vendors. The “Market Women and Small Informal Petty Traders Bank Loan Programme” has been approved, with modifications to add credit unions and related entities registered and doing business before 1 January 2020. The Government will fully pay the loans owed by market women, and petty and small traders in affected counties as part of the requested budgetary reallocation. This programme will further help banks increase lending to new borrowers.
- In **Nigeria**, an innovative scheme has been launched, called “Jobs for Youths and Women Post- COVID”. This project brings together road construction and maintenance, digital economy and education. It also contains additional elements such as the creation of a national public works programme to create 774,000 jobs (in all 774 local governments) and empowerment schemes designed to boost the capacity of women in artisanal employment and Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs). The project will support the creation of jobs through training in digital skills in partnership with private sector providers like Google, Microsoft, IBM and Cisco; direct labour in a national public infrastructure maintenance project; and the provision of start-up capital and entrepreneurship skills for young Nigerians and for women.
- Also in **Nigeria**, the Government has approved a three-month repayment moratorium for all TraderMoni, MarketMoni and FarmerMoni loans, as part of the Government Enterprise and Empowerment Programme (GEEP). TraderMoni is a federal loan programme specifically for petty traders and artisans across Nigeria, while MarketMoni is specifically targeted to women, and FarmerMoni to farmers.<sup>6</sup> Overall, women comprise 59 per cent of GEEP recipients.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.socialprotection.org/discover/blog/tradermoni-empowerment-scheme-nigeria> ; <https://n-sip.gov.ng/geep/>

<sup>7</sup> <https://guardian.ng/business-services/women-empowerment-geep-empowers-more-women-in-benue-with-interest-free-loans/>

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Finally, 11 countries in the region register a total of 19 **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 20 per cent of all fiscal and economic measures analysed in the region.

- **Cote d’Ivoire** is setting up a private sector support fund in the amount of XOF 250 billion (USD 445 million), of which XOF 100 billion (USD 178 million) will be dedicated to strengthening small and medium enterprises. Of the SME-dedicated support, 40 per cent will be dedicated to guarantee funds in order to facilitate access to bank credits and 60 per cent will be for SME assistance funds. Another XOF 100 billion will be dedicated to a fund to support informal enterprises. Informal employment accounts for 91 per cent of women’s and 84 per cent of men’s employment in Cote d’Ivoire.
- **The Democratic Republic of the Congo** has taken a range of tax measures that are likely to benefit feminized sectors of the economy as well as low-income women. Measures include a suspension of the collection of value-added taxes (VAT) on the import and sale of basic necessities or mass consumption products, for a period of three months, likely to benefit low-income women who are generally responsible for meeting basic household needs. Secondly, there has been a suspension for three months of the payment of some local taxes on agricultural products, likely to disproportionately benefit women, 72 per cent of whom work in agriculture compared to 58 per cent of men.
- In **South Africa**, the Department of Tourism made an additional ZAR 200 million (USD 12 million) available to assist MSMEs in the hospitality and tourism sector across all nine provinces and various tourism subsectors. Preference will be given to small and medium enterprises in rural areas and townships and those owned by women, young people and persons with disabilities.<sup>8</sup>
- **Senegal** has put in place measures to facilitate access to small business loans during the Covid-19 pandemic, of which around ninety per cent of beneficiaries are women.

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<sup>8</sup> <https://oecd.github.io/OECD-covid-action-map/#Fiscalmeasures>

### *Unpaid care work*

Measures to support unpaid care in the COVID-19 response 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 extremely scarce in sub-Saharan Africa, accounting for around 2 per cent (four measures in three countries) of the total 189 social protection and labour market measures in the region. Six out of the 42 countries and territories analysed in sub-Saharan Africa have not taken any measures to address unpaid care at all. Exceptions include:

- In **Burundi**, food and hygiene kits were provided to care centres for vulnerable people.
- In **Cabo Verde**, where parents of children under the age of 3 can opt to work from home under a teleworking regime, in consultation with their employer. Home-care measures for older and dependent persons living in isolation will also be stepped up, with the recruitment of social workers, caregivers and volunteers. This measure covers 712 older people in care facilities, who will begin to receive home care.

Overall, the response in the region has been woefully inadequate to address the severe care crisis that COVID-19 has catalysed.

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

Country/territory	Women's economic security	Unpaid care	Violence against women	Total gender-sensitive
Angola	1	1	4	6
Benin	1	0	0	1
Burkina Faso	5	0	0	5
Burundi	1	1	0	2
Cabo Verde	1	2	0	3
Cameroon	1	0	1	2
Côte d'Ivoire	3	0	7	10
Democratic Republic of the Congo	1	0	3	4
Ethiopia	3	0	2	5
Gambia	1	0	0	1
Kenya	2	0	1	3
Liberia	1	0	0	1
Madagascar	1	0	0	1
Malawi	0	0	6	6
Mauritania	1	0	0	1
Mozambique	0	0	1	1
Niger	3	0	1	4
Nigeria	6	0	4	10
Rwanda	2	0	3	5
Sao Tome and Principe	1	0	0	1
Senegal	0	0	2	2
Sierra Leone	1	0	0	1
Somalia	1	0	0	1
South Africa	4	0	10	14
South Sudan	1	0	1	2

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*Cont'd*, number of registered gender-sensitive measures by type and country

Country/territory	Women's economic security	Unpaid care	Violence against women	Total gender-sensitive
Togo	1	0	0	1
Uganda	2	0	9	11
United Republic of Tanzania	0	0	1	1
Zimbabwe	0	0	8	8
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>113</b>

### Annex II: Countries in focus

#### Ethiopia

**Ethiopia has taken a total of 10 measures in response to COVID-19, of which five are gender-sensitive. While limited in number and scope, the gender-sensitive measures that have been taken address women's economic security (three) and violence against women (two), with indirect benefits for women's unpaid care work. While Ethiopia recorded relatively low numbers of COVID-19 cases in the first half of 2020, since July the country has seen growing numbers of confirmed cases, and a death toll of over 1,000.<sup>9</sup> More broadly, as part of the COVID-response, the country announced a five-month state of emergency on 8 April, with physical distancing measures and restrictions on community gatherings, school closures and mandatory quarantines for travellers.<sup>10</sup>**

Ethiopia is one of the only examples of where a country has taken measures that grant paid leave to beneficiaries of public works programmes, with direct benefits for women's economic security and indirect support for their unpaid care work. This is through the Urban Productive Safety Net Project (UPSNP), which partly targets female-headed households and foresees the provision of both community-based childcare services and reduced working time for women with children. Before and after childbirth, the programme enables women to receive direct support without work requirements. During COVID-19, beneficiaries of the UPSNP will receive an advance of 3 months' payment while on leave from their public work obligations. Further, beneficiaries of the UPSNP will be able to withdraw 50 per cent of their savings to cover expenses arising from the COVID-19 emergency. In addition, low-income citizens who are currently not benefiting from UPSNP will be covered by the project and will receive 3 months' advance payment. In 16 cities, citizens who are identified as being at high risk of COVID-19 exposure and harm and who need assistance will also receive 3 months' payment.

The Rural Productive Safety Net Project has also made a number of adaptations for COVID-19. Firstly, the public works requirement has been waived since the beginning of April. Secondly, the project will scale up horizontally and vertically for 3 to 6 months, starting in July. The estimated scale-up caseload is 1 million people, with an estimated cost of USD \$50–70 million. It is likely that benefits will include both cash and food. The cash benefit value will increase by about 22 per cent for scale-up.

In Harari State specifically, paid sick leave has been implemented for government employees who are at a higher risk of COVID-19 (older persons, pregnant women, those with underlying conditions). These groups have been permitted to stay at home while continuing to receive their salaries, ensuring that higher-risk groups are able to maintain social distancing measures while remaining secure in their income.

<sup>9</sup> WHO. 2020. <https://covid19.who.int/region/afro/country/et>

<sup>10</sup> UN Women. 2020. [https://www2.unwomen.org/-/media/field%20office%20africa/attachments/publications/2020/policy-brief\\_evawg%20covid\\_ethiopia.pdf?la=en&vs=2540](https://www2.unwomen.org/-/media/field%20office%20africa/attachments/publications/2020/policy-brief_evawg%20covid_ethiopia.pdf?la=en&vs=2540)

To address violence against women in Ethiopia, the courts have continued to hear domestic violence cases with minimal interruption during COVID-19. In addition, in Hawassa City, “Safe City” messages on prevention and response to domestic and sexual violence have been shared with religious authorities for community outreach.

### Nigeria

**The tracker records 18 measures taken by Nigeria, of which 10 are gender-sensitive. The gender-sensitive measures taken by Nigeria address women’s economic security (six measures), and violence against women (four measures). As of 19 September, Nigeria had reported 1,094 deaths from COVID-19, a lower number than other countries with similarly dense urban populations.<sup>11</sup>**

To support women’s economic security, the existing National Social Safety Nets Project (NASSP) platform was quickly adapted to scale-up support, both horizontally (to include more beneficiaries) and vertically (to increase benefits). The National Social Register includes over 2.6 million poor and vulnerable households (with 11 million individuals), and this is expected to expand to 4 million households. In this register, women caregivers are prioritized to receive transfers. In addition, households ranked in the 6<sup>th</sup> poverty decile and below will be eligible for an advance payment of NGN 20,000 (USD 52) as monthly payments for four months. Furthermore, in the State of Lagos, emergency food packages have been prepared, targeting the 200,000 most vulnerable households (around 1.2 million people). Priority is given to single women, older and disabled persons. Internally displaced persons are also due to receive two months of food rations.

The Government has approved a three-month repayment moratorium for all TraderMoni, MarketMoni and FarmerMoni loans, under the GEEP programme. TraderMoni provides loans for petty traders and artisans across Nigeria, while MarketMoni is specifically targeted to women, and FarmerMoni to farmers. Overall, women compose 59 per cent of GEEP recipients. Additionally, the “Jobs for Youths and Women Post-COVID” project will create of a national public works programme to generate 774,000 jobs and empowerment schemes to boost the capacity of women in artisanal employment and MSMEs.

Two measures were taken by the Central Bank of Nigeria to target feminized sectors of the economy, with benefits for the disproportionate number of women employed in these sectors. Firstly, an NGN 50 billion (USD 130 million) credit facility was created for affected households and MSMEs. Eligible sectors include accommodation and food-service activities (with a gender employment gap of 5.1 percentage points) and manufacturing (with a gender employment gap of 6.8 percentage points). Secondly, the Bank has pledged NGN 1 trillion (USD 2.6 billion) in loans to boost local manufacturing and production.

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<sup>11</sup> Ugwu, C. and others. 2020. “Insights into the Nigerian COVID19 Outbreak”. *Preprints 2020*; Our World in Data 2020. “Cumulative confirmed COVID-19 deaths”. <https://ourworldindata.org/covid-deaths?country=~NGA>. Limited testing and challenges in the attribution of the cause of death mean that the number of confirmed deaths may not be an accurate count of the true number of deaths from COVID-19.

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Lastly, four measures have been taken to tackle violence against women. Thirty-six Governors of the Federation declared a state of emergency on VAWG in Nigeria. The Federal Capital Territory Sexual and Gender-Based Violence Response Team has relied on technology to assist survivors during this period of lockdown through psychosocial support and counselling. This is done at one-stop centres and via helplines disseminated on various social media platforms. Following an increase in hotline reporting during the pandemic, more lines have been established with trained personnel. Awareness-raising on VAWG has been carried out via radio and social media, led by the Federal Ministry of Women's Affairs.