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of G20 Countries**

**Gender Equality and  
Women's  
Empowerment**

Parliamentary Research Unit

TITLE:  
**GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT<sup>1</sup>**

**Key focus areas:**

Gender-sensitive parliaments and equal participation of women  
Combatting the economic consequences of COVID-19 on women  
The role of parliament in supporting opportunities of those disadvantaged by social identity

## 1. Introduction

No country in the world has achieved gender equality. While advances have been made in areas such as access to primary education for girls and the representation of women in the political sphere, women continue to face discrimination and inequality in many other domains.

Women continue to face discrimination across economic, social and political spheres and entrenched gender disparities remain a major driver of poverty. Much of the international and domestic agreements and legislation has not translated into tangible change and impact on the daily lives of women.

Women continue to be poorer than men, have less access to resources, disproportionately shoulder the burden of unpaid care work and face continuous and increasing levels of violence in personal and public spaces.

The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed and exacerbated longstanding structural inequalities and discrimination against women. The World Economic Forum in 2020 stated that COVID-19 is the biggest setback to gender equality in a decade. On its current trajectory, it will now take 135.6 years to close the gender gap worldwide. In Sub-Saharan Africa it is estimated that it will take 121.7 years to close the gender gap.<sup>2</sup>

Advancing gender equality is critical to all areas of a health society and is a fundamental human right. Empowering women and girls helps expand economic growth, promote social development and establish more stable and just societies.<sup>3</sup>

This paper considers gender equality and women's empowerment in the context of three focus areas namely, the equal participation of women in politics/parliaments and the importance of gender-sensitive parliaments; combatting the impact of COVID-19 on women's economic empowerment and the role of parliament in supporting opportunities of those disadvantaged by social identity.

### OVERVIEW

The COVID-19 pandemic has raised new barriers to building inclusive and prosperous economies and societies. Pre-existing gender gaps have amplified the crisis asymmetrically between men and women, even as women have been at the frontlines of managing the crisis as essential workers. The hardest hit sectors by lockdowns and rapid digitalization are those where women are more frequently employed. Combined with the additional pressures of providing care in the home, the crisis has halted progress toward gender parity in several economies and industries.

*World Economic Forum  
2021 Global Gender Gap Report*

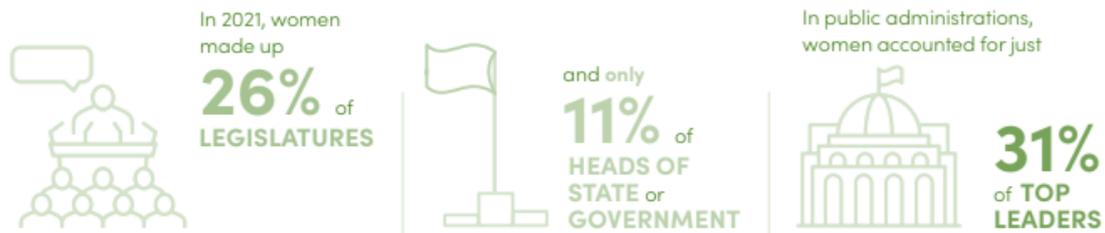
<sup>1</sup> Author: C. Levendale, Due date: 15 July 2022

<sup>2</sup> World Economic Forum, 2021, Global Gender Gap Report

<sup>3</sup> United Nations Global Compact, n.d., Gender Equality, <https://www.unglobalcompact.org/what-is-gc/our-work/social/gender-equality>

## 2. Gender-sensitive parliaments and equal participation of women

The gender gap in Political Empowerment has increased since 2020 – at present there is a 78% deficit in parity. Across the 156 countries covered by the Global Gender Gap index, women represent only 26.1% of some 35 500 parliament seats and just 22.6% of over 3 400 ministers worldwide. In 81 countries, there has never been a woman head of state, as of 15th January 2021. At the current rate of progress, the World Economic Forum estimates that it will take 145.5 years to attain gender parity in politics.<sup>4</sup>



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United Nation Women highlights the following:<sup>6</sup>

- Women’s participation in public life and decision-making symbolises a country’s commitment to democracy and inclusion.
- Their presence in leadership positions can transform citizens’ attitudes about traditional gender roles and encourage more women and girls to participate in politics and public life.
- Women’s participation in politics diversifies policy agendas and has a positive effect on wide-ranging policy outcomes.
- Women’s leadership in public institutions is associated with more responsive and accountable governments.

Globally, women represented less than one-third (on average 25%) of members of parliaments in G20 countries in 2019. Progress has been slow, as in 2014 this figure was 23%. Beyond these averages, there are important variations across countries: women occupy less than a quarter of seats in the parliaments of half of the G20 countries.<sup>7</sup> In Africa, women represent only 12% of political party top leadership positions across the 54 African countries.<sup>8</sup> South Africa is currently ranked 10<sup>th</sup> by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) for its representation of women in Parliament, which currently stands at 46%. The country is one of only 16 in Sub-Saharan Africa who has a female Speaker of Parliament – this position is held by only 62 women in the world.<sup>9</sup> South Africa has also reached gender parity in terms of Cabinet ministers.

<sup>4</sup> World Economic Forum, 2021, Global Gender Gap Report

<sup>5</sup> UNWomen, 2022, Government Responses to COVID-19: lessons on gender equality for a world in turmoil

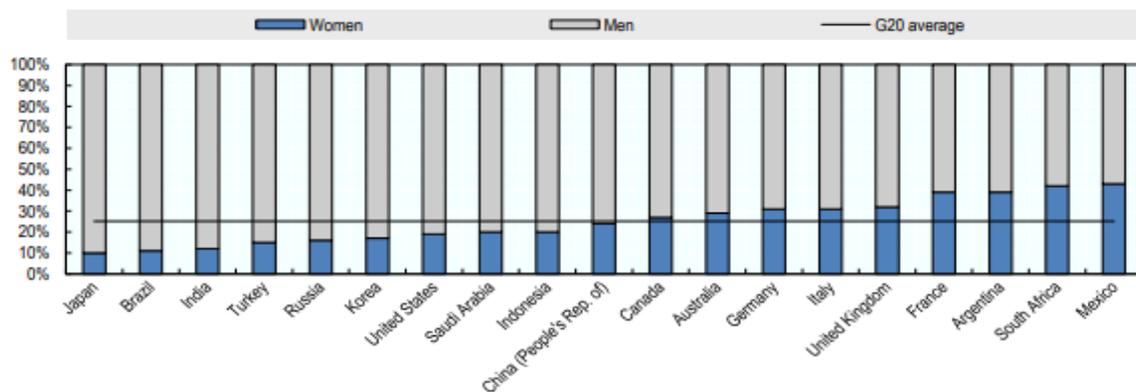
<sup>6</sup> Ibid. at 5

<sup>7</sup> OECD, 2019, From promises to action: Addressing discriminatory social institutions to accelerate gender equality in G20 countries

<sup>8</sup> International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, 2021, Women’s Political Participation - Africa Barometer 2021

<sup>9</sup> Inter-Parliamentary Union Parline database as at July 2022

## Representation of women in national parliaments in G20 countries in 2019



The active involvement of women in defining governance policies and processes at global, national and local levels and in influencing the institutions that formulate them is important. This is because these policies and processes help to shape perceptions of the roles that women and men occupy and play in society and further determine the access of women and men to rights and resources.<sup>10</sup> As such, the involvement and participation of women in all levels of governance makes it more likely that women will respond to the differing needs and situations of both women and men and contribute to gender equality.<sup>11</sup>

A report by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) looking at gender progress and challenges across G20 countries indicates that discriminatory social norms and practices towards women political leaders remains an important issue. In many countries negative perceptions towards women in leadership abound and women often encounter discrimination solely because of their gender. In addition, women often have less networks and connections in the business and finance sector than their male counterparts, which makes financing their campaigns difficult. Women parliamentarians are frequently victims of physical and online violence and harassment, as well as intense personal scrutiny – occurrences like these reinforce gender stereotypes about the “role of women” and may deter other women from entering the political arena.<sup>12</sup>

Add to the above challenges the impact of COVID-19 and the situation of women in politics becomes more precarious. Women’s absence from decision-making, policy formulation and power-sharing processes and spaces compromises inclusiveness and effectiveness of crisis response and recovery.

While the impact of COVID-19 on women’s political and decision-making positions may not be glaringly obvious, the impact is nonetheless significant.

The African Union highlights that while progress in women’s political participation and representation in parliaments is notable, the participation of women in political decision-making is still very limited. Indications are that “the voices of women have been left out of the decision-making tables of COVID-19”.<sup>13</sup> It highlights that gender inequalities have the potential to exacerbate the outbreak and responses that do not incorporate gender considerations may worsen inequalities. If women are not included in and/or leading decision-making processes, the differential challenges that women experience inside and outside of the COVID-19 crisis will not be addressed. A review of women’s participation and

<sup>10</sup> Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2015, Tenth Meeting of Women Speakers of Parliament: Draft Agenda

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. at 7

<sup>12</sup> OECD, 2019, From promises to action: Addressing discriminatory social institutions to accelerate gender equality in G20 countries

<sup>13</sup> African Union, 2020, African Union Guidelines on Gender-Responsive Responses to COVID-19

representation on COVID-19 task forces or advisory bodies found that women represented only 24% of members of these bodies and accounted for only 18% of leaders.<sup>14</sup>

A number of broad risks for women's political participation have emerged from the COVID-19 pandemic:<sup>15</sup>

- *Increased financial instability and greater burden of unpaid care work*

Women need access to finance and resources for political campaigning and inclusion. Engaging in political campaigning also requires time. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, many women have lost their jobs and have taken on the sole responsibility for childcare, elderly care and domestic work. This leaves women with both a financial and time deficit to pursue a political career.

- *Unequal access to online platforms*

In the context of COVID-19, in the interest of safety and curbing the spread of the disease, a lot of campaigning and voter engagement has moved to online platforms. Women on average have less access and familiarity with online platform and social media tools, and in particular, women in rural areas and those in areas with poor internet service may be left out of the loop or unable to engage with the electorate effectively. UN Women highlights that governments and their electoral management bodies need to ensure that women can participate equally in elections, whether voting is in person or through remote means. Particular attention is needed to ensure that women facing multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination—especially rural women, indigenous women and those with disabilities—are not disenfranchised or faced with undue family influence on voting preferences.<sup>16</sup> Online campaigning also increases women's vulnerability to online harassment.

- *Decreased public visibility of women*

In some instances, women have become less publicly visible and debates and discussion around COVID-19 have wiped women's rights debates off the political agenda. Women, in most contexts, have been spearheading community responses, while male politicians are at the helm in political debates, press briefings and media discussions. Aside from women politicians, shelter in place/ lockdown regulations have also had an impact on the ability of women in civil society and women activists to publicly advocate for women's rights. Added to this, elections in many countries were postponed, meaning that opportunities for increased women's representation were delayed.

United Nations Secretary General Antonio Guterres remarked the following:

*“When women are missing from decision-making, we see the world through only one perspective. We create economic models that fail to measure the productive work that occurs in the home. We create digital fora with built-in coding biases. We see decisions threatening efforts to guarantee full access to sexual and reproductive health services and rights. And we spend trillions on weapons that fail to make us safer, while neglecting the violence that one in three women globally have experienced.”<sup>17</sup>*

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<sup>14</sup> COVID-19 Global Gender Response Tracker, 2021, <https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/2021-11/undp-unwomen-upitt-covid19-task-force-participation-en-v3.pdf>

<sup>15</sup> Brechenmacher, S and Hubbard, C, 2020, How the Coronavirus risks exacerbating women's political exclusion

<sup>16</sup> UN Women, 2020, COVID-19 and Women's Leadership: from an effective response to building back better.

<sup>17</sup> Remarks to the opening of the sixty-fifth session of the Commission on the Status of Women, <https://www.un.org/press/en/2021/sgsm20625.doc.htm>

## So how can parliaments advance equal participation of women in all aspects of parliamentary work?

The IPU states the following:<sup>18</sup>

- Parliaments are well-placed to champion the goal of gender equality – they aim to reflect society and so they must reflect the changing dynamics of their electorates.
- A gender-sensitive parliament is a parliament that responds to the needs and interests of both men and women in its composition, structures, operations, methods and work.
- A gender-sensitive parliament is one in which there are no barriers – substantive, structural or cultural – to women’s full participation and to equality between its men and women members and staff.
- It is not only a place where women *can* work, but also one where women *want* to work and contribute.
- A gender-sensitive parliament sets a positive example by promoting gender equality and women’s empowerment among society both nationally and internationally.

A further guide to realising gender equality in parliament states that for parliaments to be regarded as gender-sensitive, there must first be an acknowledgement that parliament is a gendered workplace and aside from increased numbers of women, making sure legislation is gender-responsive and undertaking oversight through a gendered lens, change in two specific “internal” areas are necessary. These areas are (i) ensuring a work-life balance, i.e. supporting members and staff in balancing work and family responsibilities; and (ii) preventing all forms of violence against women in parliamentary workplaces/spaces.<sup>19</sup>

While most discussions around gender-sensitive and responsive parliaments tend to focus on the oversight and legislative mechanisms MPs need to employ to undertake their work through “a gender lens”, it is important that the internal operations of the institution also reflect a commitment to gender equality.

*“To be gender-sensitive, parliaments need to do more than add women, gender equality policies and practices to their existing structures; they need to transform into institutions that continually work to eliminate gender inequality. Accordingly, parliaments need to change their internal culture, structures and procedures—both formal and informal—to create organisational environments that are conducive to the achievement of gender equality.”<sup>20</sup>*

When it comes to the creation of a more gender-responsive and gender-sensitive institution, conducive for the equal participation of women, it is important that parliament undertakes the following both during and beyond the pandemic to ensure that that the equal participation of women is advanced in all aspects of parliamentary work:

### What to do:

- Increase the number of women in parliament and achieve equal participation;
- Strengthen gender equality legislation and policy;
- Mainstream gender equality throughout all parliamentary work;
- Institute or improve gender-sensitive infrastructure and parliamentary culture;
- Ensure that responsibility for gender equality is shared by all parliamentarians, men and women;
- Encourage political parties to be champions of gender equality; and
- Enhance the gender sensitivity of, and gender equality among, parliamentary staff.

<https://aceproject.org/ace-en/topics/ge/ge10/default>

<sup>18</sup> Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2012, Plan of Action for Gender-Sensitive Parliaments, 127<sup>th</sup> IPU Assembly

<sup>19</sup> OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), 2021, Realizing Gender Equality in Parliament. A Guide for Parliaments in the OSCE Region

<sup>20</sup> OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), 2021, Realizing Gender Equality in Parliament. A Guide for Parliaments in the OSCE Region, page 15

### In terms of internal procedures and operations

- Promote and achieve equality in numbers of women and men across all of its bodies and internal structures.
- Develop a gender equality policy framework suited to its own parliamentary context.
- Mainstream gender equality throughout the work of parliament.
- Foster an internal culture that respects women's rights, promotes gender equality and responds to the needs and realities of MPs and staff – women and men – to balance work and family responsibilities.
- Acknowledge and build on the contribution made by male members who pursue and advocate for gender equality.
- Encourage political parties to take a proactive role in the promotion and achievement of gender equality.
- Equip parliamentary staff with the capacity and resources to promote gender equality; actively encourage the recruitment and retention of women to senior positions; and ensure that gender equality is mainstreamed throughout the work and operations of the parliamentary administration.
- Ensure the implementation of equal opportunities for women and men to influence internal parliamentary working procedures.
- Provide generous space on the parliamentary agenda for women's interests and concerns.
- Facilitate the entry of women into the political pipeline through capacity-building, training and awareness-raising, and provide targeted support to women facing multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination to participate in public life and politics.<sup>21</sup>

### In terms of parliamentary work

- Undertake a gender-mainstreaming approach: ensure a gender perspective in the development, implementation and evaluation of all legislation, policies, strategies, programmes.
- Implement gender budgeting: ensure gender-equitable distribution of resources that contribute to equal opportunities for all – link budgets to gender equity outcomes and monitor expenditure on programmes and initiatives aimed at improving the lives of women, e.g. expenditure relating to gender-based violence prevention and eradication.
- Advocate for targeted gender-responsive investments in areas that impact the lives of women, for example, basic social services, infrastructure, skill development and training.
- Fully implement existing commitments and obligations with respect to the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls, and the full and equal enjoyment of their human rights and fundamental freedoms.
- Ensure that decision-making bodies are gender-balanced and include gender experts
- Collect data on areas for intervention to ensure requisite information for planning and resource allocation.
- Ensure consistent advocacy and awareness about gender-equality—ensure adequate mechanisms and platforms for dialogue.

If women's participation is to be transformative, their voices need to be heard in a broad range of decision-making forums, from households to national parliaments

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<sup>21</sup> Galligan, Y and Meier, P, 2016, The gender-sensitive parliament: recognizing the gendered nature of parliaments

### 3. Combatting the economic consequences of COVID-19 on women

Globally and in all G20 countries, the COVID-19 crisis has disrupted economic activity and adversely impacted well-being. In June 2021, the G20 Labour and Employment Ministerial Declaration “Fostering an inclusive, sustainable, and resilient recovery of labour markets and societies” recognised that the pandemic had disproportionate consequences for women, hampering their economic empowerment and increasing gender inequality in employment in G20 countries. The COVID-19 crisis has impacted women in three critical ways:

- the economic crisis has predominantly affected sectors in which women are over-represented,
- mitigation measures to curb the spread of the virus have exacerbated unpaid care and domestic work burden, borne mainly by women, and,
- finally, lockdown have amplified the risk and severity of violence against women, especially domestic, and hindered their ability to seek safety, justice and support.

Therefore, the COVID-19 crisis threatens to undermine some of the progress made towards gender equality that has been accomplished in G20 countries over recent years.<sup>22</sup>

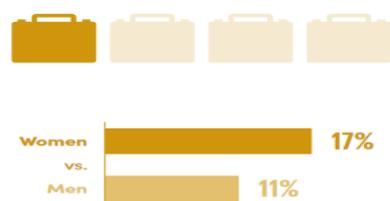
The impact of COVID-19 has and will continue to affect women disproportionately. Women tend to earn less, hold less secure jobs and are more likely to be employed in the informal sector. This results in less social protections, contributing to a lack of capacity to absorb or “bounce back” from economic shocks.

The International Labour Organisation states that the economic consequences of the pandemic have not fallen with equal severity on all shoulders – existing vulnerabilities have been exposed and inequalities entrenched. It acknowledges that job and income losses have been particularly severe for women. The high number of women on the frontline providing essential services and risking exposure to the virus, coupled with the large scores of women working in the hardest hit sectors, as well as informal employment and the increased burden of unpaid care work on women, raises the risk that the progress made on gender equality in many G20 countries over the past decades may be put on hold or even reversed.<sup>23</sup>

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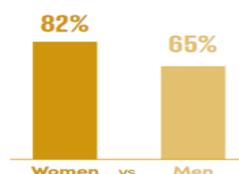
#### WOMEN WERE MORE LIKELY TO LOSE THEIR JOBS OR REDUCE THEIR PAID WORK

##### 1 in 4 people lost their jobs



##### 1 in 2 people saw work hours reduced

But independent women workers were especially affected



##### 3 in 5 people lost earnings



<sup>22</sup> OECD Development Centre for the W20 Italian presidency, 2021, Ending gender-based discrimination in G20 Countries: A frame for Action

<sup>23</sup> ILO-OECD paper prepared at the request of G20 Leaders Saudi Arabia’s G20 Presidency 2020, The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on jobs and incomes in G20 economies

<sup>24</sup> UNWomen, 2021, Women and Girls Left Behind: Glaring gaps in pandemic responses

- Globally, women are overrepresented in low-paid, precarious sectors, such as retail, tourism and food services, that have been hardest hit by the pandemic.
- The COVID-19 crisis cost women around the world at least \$800 billion in lost income in 2020, equivalent to more than the combined GDP of 98 countries.
- Globally, women lost more than 64 million jobs in 2020 — a 5 percent loss, compared to 3.9 percent loss for men.
- Although in absolute terms 64 million women and 80 million men have lost their jobs, the relative impact is higher on working women simply because there are less women in the labour market overall.
- Across the globe women have been more likely than men to drop out of the workforce or reduce their hours during the pandemic, largely due to care responsibilities.
- Even before the virus struck, women and girls put in 12.5 billion hours of unpaid care work each and every day — a contribution to the global economy of at least \$10.8 trillion a year, more than three times the size of the global tech industry.<sup>25</sup>
- Women make up 80% of domestic workers, of which 72% of domestic workers have lost their jobs as a result of the pandemic.
- In every region of the world, female-owned businesses experienced higher closure rates during the first year of the pandemic compared to male-owned businesses.
- UN Women estimates that there will be 121 women in poverty for every 100 men by 2030.
- These consequences won't disappear when the pandemic subsides: women are likely to experience long-term setbacks in work force participation and income. Impacts on pensions and savings will have implications for women's economic security far down the road.<sup>26</sup>
- It will take the global economy at least until 2023 to create the jobs lost to COVID-19, but many of these jobs are expected to be of low productivity and poor quality.<sup>27</sup>

### ***Some findings from South Africa***

- In terms of the 2021 Global Gender Gap Report, South Africa is ranked 18<sup>th</sup> overall out of 156 countries, however it is ranked 92<sup>nd</sup> in terms of Economic Participation and Opportunity.
- In March 2021, women's employment remained 8.4% below its pre-COVID level, while men's employment appeared to be back at pre-COVID levels.
- Stated in terms of employment-to-population ratios, among those 18 years and older, women's employment rate was 46% in February 2020 and 43.8% in March 2021, while for men the employment rates in February 2020 and March 2021 were 59.3% and 60.2% respectively.
- Women were less likely to have retained or gained employment either initially or by January 2021, and less likely to have remained employed over the whole period, compared to men.<sup>28</sup>
- There was an increase in "female necessity driven entrepreneurship" in 2021 (from 62.8% in 2020 to 91.2% in 2021).<sup>29</sup>
- The 2021/22 Global Entrepreneurship Monitor found that 59% of adults surveyed indicated that in 2021 it was more difficult to start a business than in the preceding year.
- 87.5% of adults aged 18-34 years and 80% of adults aged 35-64 cited "earning a living" as the motivation for undertaking an entrepreneurship activity/opportunity.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Oxfam, 2021, COVID-19 cost women globally over \$800 billion in lost income in one year,

<https://www.oxfam.org/en/press-releases/covid-19-cost-women-globally-over-800-billion-lost-income-one-year>

<sup>26</sup> US Global Leadership Coalition, 2022, COVID-19 Brief: Impact on Women and Girls

<sup>27</sup> World Economic Forum, 2022, The Global Risks Report 2022

<sup>28</sup> Casale, D and Shepherd D, 2021, The gendered effects of the COVID-19 crisis and ongoing lockdown in South Africa: Evidence from NIDS-CRAM Waves 1 - 5

<sup>29</sup> Mastercard, 2022, 2021 Mastercard Index of Women Entrepreneurs

<sup>30</sup> GEM (Global Entrepreneurship Monitor), 2022, Global Entrepreneurship Monitor 2021/2022 Global Report: Opportunity Amid Disruption

### *In terms of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs):*

- SMEs across South Africa represent more than 98 percent of businesses, employ between 50 and 60 percent of the country's work force across all sectors, and are responsible for a quarter of job growth in the private sector.<sup>31</sup>
- In South Africa, 59% of women-owned businesses worked in sectors hardest hit by the economic downturn such as retail, restaurants, food shops and domestic services.
- In addition, women entrepreneurs are/were more likely to be assuming childcare, home-schooling and domestic responsibilities than male counterparts, and this is having a significant impact on their productivity, stress levels and health.<sup>32</sup>
- A study undertaken by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Department of Small Business Development found that as of March 2020 only 27% of the micro and informal businesses were operational with 72% being temporarily closed and 1% of these businesses being permanently closed.<sup>33</sup>
- Only 14% of businesses, mainly offering essential services or operating illegally, remained open throughout the whole lockdown period.
- 45% of businesses were closed for less than 3 months and 85% of businesses were closed for less than 6 months but only 10% of businesses closed for 9 months or longer. By mid-June 2020, when beauty parlours were allowed to open, there was a slight increase with 45% of businesses being operational.
- Around 20% of businesses only managed to reopen in August 2020 under Level 2 lockdown and in December 2020, 87% of businesses were open.
- At the time of the interviews in February 2021, 8% had closed permanently - of these, female run businesses were slightly overrepresented with 52%.
- One in every two businesses that had to close due to the COVID-19 related lockdown measures has no plans to reopen.
- 60% of businesses with no plans to reopen have lost their capital, savings, stock or equipment.

It is thus clear that the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, and the policy measures to combat it, are having profound effects on the economic and social lives of citizens. They are threatening employment as well as the long-term livelihoods and well-being of millions around the world. South Africa has not been exempted from the socio-economic effects of the pandemic. The economy, which was already growing at a slow rate pre-COVID, has been in decline since it entered a stringent lockdown as the main public health response to curb the spread of the virus in March 2020.

### **So what actions are needed to minimise the economic consequences of the pandemic on women**

For the last 2 years the phrase "build back better" has been the slogan for recovery from the pandemic, but what does this mean?

United Nations President António Guterres remarks that "Pandemic recovery is our chance to engineer a reset, reignite the Decade of Action for the Sustainable Development Goals and chart a path to an equal future for women and men."

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<sup>31</sup> McKinsey & Company, 2020, How South African SMEs can survive and thrive post COVID-19

<sup>32</sup> McWalter, A, 2021, The COVID-19 Pandemic Challenges and Opportunities for Women Entrepreneurs, <https://www.accountancysa.org.za/feature-the-covid-19-pandemic-challenges-and-opportunities-for-women-entrepreneurs/>

<sup>33</sup> United Nations Development Programme, 2021, Impact of COVID-19 on informal and small businesses in South Africa

The OECD notes that returning to “business as usual” will not deliver a sustained long-term economic recovery that also improves well-being and reduces inequality – there is a need to focus on people-centred recovery that focuses on well-being, improves inclusiveness and reduces inequality.<sup>34</sup> A focus on marginalised and vulnerable populations is key.

For women in particular there is a need to increase social protection. Many women are unemployed or employed low-paid/insecure sectors and/or in the informal economy. Those who are unemployed are often responsible on social grants and remittances from family and friends for survival, a cycle which is likely to continue throughout their lifetimes. Those employed in the informal sector or in low-paying sectors vary rarely have income protection or other measures to sustain them in times of economic downturn.

While emergency relief measures such as temporary subsidies and cash transfers provided immediate relief for many women, beyond the pandemic women need to have access to decent work and non-discriminatory labour markets. More support for small and medium industries, through financing as well as business mentoring is important. Ensuring their participation in value chains and preferred procurement processes are also essential.

Upskilling and re-skilling of the female labour market through education and training opportunities is another mechanism to ensure that women move from low-paid and insecure jobs to those that are more stable and come with requisite protections – this would of course require the creation of more employment opportunities.

Addressing the care economy and women’s unpaid care work is an essential feature of economic recovery post COVID. Globally women were already undertaking the bulk of unpaid care work in their homes and communities before the onset of COVID-19. The pandemic exacerbated care inequalities.

The United Nations reminds us that before the pandemic, on average, women did three times as much unpaid care work as men — work that underpins economies and societies. With the closure of schools and care services, and weak health infrastructure, women’s unpaid workload has increased even further, restricting their ability to hold on to their jobs and re-enter the labour force, with impacts for their economic security, health and well-being.<sup>35</sup>

*Working parents, and mothers in particular, have had to juggle paid work with full-time childcare in the wake of school and day-care closures. The burden of caring for sick family members and collecting fuel and water, among other tasks that tend to fall disproportionately on women, have also increased during COVID.*<sup>36</sup>

## 5 BUILDING BLOCKS TO PUT IN PLACE

- Realise women’s equal rights fully, including by repealing discriminatory laws and enacting positive measures
- Ensure equal representation — from company boards to parliaments, from higher education to public institutions — through special measures including quotas
- Advance women’s economic inclusion through equal pay, targeted credit, job protection and significant investments in the care economy and social protection
- Enact an emergency response plan in each country to address violence against women and girls, and follow through with funding, policies and political will
- Give space to the intergenerational transition that is under way. From the front lines to online, young women are advocating for a more just and equal world — and merit greater support

<sup>34</sup> OECD, 2020, Building Back Better: A sustainable, resilient recovery after COVID-19

<sup>35</sup> United Nations, n.d., COVID-19, Inequalities and Building back better

<sup>36</sup> <https://www.unwomen.org/en/hq-complex-page/covid-19-rebuilding-for-resilience/care-work>

Providing adequate social services such as childcare for women, would assist in living the burden of unpaid care work which in turn could enable more women to enter the labour market should they wish to do so.

Chivil (2022) states clearly: **Childcare is not a private matter, but a public necessity.**<sup>37</sup>

A study looking at childcare among informal economy workers in Brazil, Ghana, India, South Africa and Thailand, revealed that many informal economy workers choose more flexible informal employment in order to care for their children, even if the work pays less. This undermines their productivity and lowers their earnings, as women informal workers cannot concentrate on their work while also taking care of a young child. For many informal workers, the ability to rely on extended family for child care is context specific and is not always a possibility. In addition, many adults in low income households are themselves working and cannot bear the cost of losing their income to care for children and other dependents.<sup>38</sup>

Given this context and impact of unpaid care work on women, provision of/access to childcare is essential to closing the gender gap in employment. Increasing women' participation in the workforce is vital to improving gender parity, ensuing financial security and generating economic growth.<sup>39</sup>

The UN Global Compact recommends that "among other things, companies should offer flexible work arrangements, support safe and appropriate child care options, as well as paid sick, family and emergency leave, and offer equal maternity and paternity leave. The current situation provides a chance to disrupt gender stereotypes, change traditional narratives, and show that leadership and decision-making, household chores, and caring for and teaching children can and should be shared responsibilities."<sup>40</sup>

While this kind of provisioning may be more difficult for informal workers who have no formal employment contract, it is also about providing the resources and accessibility to opportunities to establish childcare options in the communities where they live and work. Moussie (2016) highlights that investing in quality child care provision can have considerable positive economic and social impacts for women and men, children and societies. Child care provisioning is often regarded as a "triple dividend" - the benefits of extending quality child care provision can increase women's labour force participation, improve health and education outcomes for children and create decent work in the paid care sector that can spur economic growth.<sup>41</sup>



<sup>37</sup> Chivil, A, 2022, Alleviating the impacts of COVID-19 on women through economic development: a personal perspective

<sup>38</sup> Moussie, R, 2016, Child care from the perspective of women in the informal economy, A policy brief for the UN secretary-general's high-level panel on women's economic empowerment

<sup>39</sup> Ibid. at 37

<sup>40</sup> <https://unglobalcompact.org/academy/how-business-can-support-women-in-times-of-crisis>

<sup>41</sup> Ibid. at 38

#### 4. Role of Parliament in supporting opportunities of those disadvantaged by social identity

The World Bank indicates that:

*In every country, some groups confront barriers that prevent them from fully participating in political, economic, and social life. These groups may be excluded not only through legal systems, land, and labour markets, but also discriminatory or stigmatising attitudes, beliefs, or perceptions. Disadvantage is often based on gender, age, location, occupation, race, ethnicity, religion, citizenship status, disability, and sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI), among other factors. This kind of social exclusion robs individuals of dignity, security, and the opportunity to lead a better life. Unless the root causes of structural exclusion and discrimination are addressed, it will be challenging to support sustainable inclusive growth and rapid poverty reduction.<sup>42</sup>*

From the above it is therefore clear that social inclusion, rather than exclusion, is a fundamental tenet of democracy and sustainable development. The Constitution of South Africa affirms the democratic values of human dignity, equality and freedom and states that discrimination on the basis of race, gender, sex, pregnancy, marital status, ethnic or social origin, colour, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, conscience, belief, culture, language and birth is unconstitutional. Through the Bill of Rights, the Constitution promotes and advances social inclusion. However, law does not always translate into tangible outcomes and many citizens as individuals or groups, continue to feel marginalised and excluded. This can be as a result of treatment by and perceptions of others, as well as due to engagement with institutions.



Many rural and/or impoverished communities feel marginalised due to a lack of access to basic services, many youths feel excluded due to declining economic opportunities, many LGBTQIA+ people ostracised because of high rates of hate crimes and discrimination against them and women feel marginalised due to limited access to economic independence and increasing levels of violence against them. It must also be remembered that these “exclusions” may intersect making persons, groups or communities feel excluded on multiple levels.

Many persons and communities also continue to feel excluded as a result of race and class. Social identity informs each individual’s relation to power and privilege.<sup>43</sup> The World Bank notes that social exclusion often leads to lower social standing, often accompanied by lower outcomes in terms of income, access to employment and services and voice in both national and local decision-making.<sup>44</sup> Thus, if individuals, groups or communities feel disenfranchised or excluded, they also generally feel powerless. To this end they may be less willing to participate in decision-making processes or spaces of influence, i.e. they may not feel that the parliamentary arena is accessible to them or that they have any scope of influence.

<sup>42</sup> <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/social-inclusion>

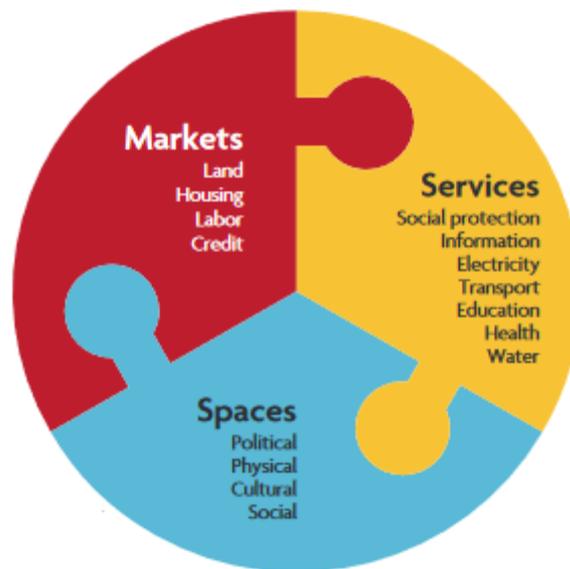
<sup>43</sup> Inclusion Boston, 2020, <https://www.ywboston.org/2020/10/your-full-self-social-identities-and-the-workplace/>

<sup>44</sup> World Bank. 2013. Inclusion Matters: The Foundation for Shared Prosperity.

In terms of the impact of COVID-19 on marginalised and disadvantaged persons or groups, indications are that among others:<sup>45</sup>

- COVID-19 will exacerbate the gender norms and inequalities that perpetuate different forms of violence against women and girls.
- The crisis risks exacerbating pre-existing inequalities for LGBTIQ+ people, especially those already experienced intersecting inequalities and social exclusion.
- COVID-19 is likely to entrench economic inequalities and disproportionately affect women's economic and productive lives unless action is taken.
- The COVID-19 pandemic is likely to have disproportionate, long-term effects on people with disabilities, exacerbating discrimination and pre-existing barriers to healthcare, livelihoods, social protection and education.

Generally, individuals and groups want to be included in 3 interrelated spheres, namely markets, services and spaces.<sup>46</sup>



When there is equitable access to these 3 domains, socially excluded individuals and groups see the opportunity for inclusion.

Using women as an example, if we consider that many women in South Africa are employed in the informal economy with little to no social and income protection and limited resources, giving a woman adequate access to land, housing, credit, employment, information and basic infrastructure and social services, could significantly empower her economically. This in turn could give her more bargaining and decision-making power and give her the confidence to enter various spaces with voice and agency to advocate for herself and other women.

To have a voice is to be a citizen. Having a voice means having the capacity to speak up and be heard and being present to shape and share in discussions, discourse, and decisions. Full and equal participation requires that everyone has a voice.<sup>47</sup>

<sup>45</sup> Parliament of the United Kingdom, 2020, SDDirect report: COVID-19, gender inequality and social exclusion: long-term issues, implications and lessons to be learnt, <https://committees.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/4461/pdf/>

<sup>46</sup> World Bank. 2013. Inclusion Matters: The Foundation for Shared Prosperity.

<sup>47</sup> World Bank Group, 2014, Voice and Agency: Empowering women and girls for shared prosperity

## So how can parliament support opportunities for those disadvantaged by social identity?

*Social inclusion is the creation of facilities or the provision of improved access to facilities to enable people to actively participate in society. Social inclusion is a vital component in building a sustainable society. Individuals and groups need to be and feel able to develop themselves and prosper.*<sup>48</sup>

The Parliament of South Africa provides a national forum for the public consideration of issues and facilitates the involvement of the public in the processes of Parliament. The access to the institution and its members and information provided to the public remain a vital focus of Parliament. Public participation activities include the People's Assembly, the Taking Parliament to the People programme, the Women's Parliament and the Youth Parliament (sectoral parliaments), public hearings and outreach programmes. Members of the public are also able to attend meetings, make submissions, representations and petitions and contact MPs. Through these mechanisms, parliament is creating spaces and opportunities for inclusion.

Other important factors that Parliament must consider include the following:<sup>49</sup>

- It is important that Parliaments are environments that facilitate genuine equality, and ought to be exemplary institutions leading the way towards ever greater diversity and inclusivity. Clear communication and declarations about inclusion and support for marginalised groups is important for the public to feel that the institution is approachable.
- Parliament has a key role in providing a trickle-down effect to wider society by putting issues of marginalised groups at the forefront of policy implementation. To this end oversight and scrutiny over policies, programmes and legislation is important to ensure that they do not exclude.
- As parliaments are one of the principal institutions of any functioning democracy, there is a sustained need for diversity and inclusion to be a priority. Institutions, like parliaments that are representative of the wider society, have greater legitimacy and authority and are undoubtedly more democratic.
- Good governance means acting in the interests of all citizens, and ensuring the experience of all citizens will be considered.
- Parliaments must aim to champion a plurality of voices and promote a sense of belonging. It is also important that the parliamentary make-up of both members and staff is reflective of the diversity of the country.
- Representation and access is key. Regular interaction with marginalised groups and/or civil society organisations representing these individuals or groups is important. Members of Parliament must also regularly interact with their constituencies to gauge (perceived) levels of inclusion and exclusion in communities.

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<sup>48</sup> <https://www.triodos-im.com/binaries/content/assets/tim/sri-theme-documents/transition-theme-pages/social-inclusion--empowerment--theme-pages.pdf>

<sup>49</sup> Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, 2022, Parliamentary workplace equality & diversity networks: case studies from the Commonwealth, Foreword by Hon Tsenoli

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