

Responses to the Covid-19 could exacerbate pre-existing and deeply entrenched discrimination against women and girls, say UN experts*

GENEVA (20 April 2020) – Women and girls will face greater discrimination and higher risk of death unless governments consider their specific needs in COVID-19 responses, a group of UN experts said in a [statement](#) today.

"Women are particularly exposed, with many on the frontlines in the COVID-19 fight, providing essential medical and other services, and keeping communities running," said human rights expert Meskerem Geset Techane, who currently chairs the UN Working Group on Discrimination against Women and Girls.

"Measures to mitigate the risks to health and life posed by COVID-19 must consider the specific risks faced by women and girls, based on factors such as their sex, gender, age, disability, ethnic origin, and immigration or residence status among others," Meskerem said. Otherwise, many different forms of discrimination they already face would be exacerbated.

"They face restrictions on the provision of health services essential to women and girls and are at greater risk of domestic violence while shelters do not have sufficient capacity for all victims who need protection. Femicides are being reported with alarming frequency," the UN expert said.

As well as providing universal health care for all women and girls, including uninterrupted access to a full range of sexual and reproductive health services, states must ensure access to support services, emergency measures and legal assistance for those at risk of or who are subjected to domestic and sexual violence, Meskerem said.

The disproportionate share of women's care responsibilities, due to cultural stereotypes on gender roles within the family, has increased significantly, affecting physical and mental health. "Women also face a higher risk of harm from the social and economic shocks linked to measures to curb the pandemic, as they are represented disproportionately in precarious, informal, poorly paid work, including domestic work and lack adequate social protection," the expert noted.

Some women already enduring discrimination are at particular risk of being further marginalised. Indigenous, migrant, and elderly women as well as women with disabilities lack inclusive information on prevention strategies and on how and where to get health services. Rural and poor women without access to clean water at home must collect water in crowded public spaces to cover basic needs.

Meskerem also said women were under-represented on COVID-19 response teams, policy spaces and decision-making. "At this critical time, States must ensure that policy decisions are taken with the equal and meaningful participation of women from diverse groups," the UN expert said.

"The crisis is an opportunity to address structural inequalities and deficits that have consistently held women back and re-imagine and transform societies. We recommend that women's voices be heard and their leadership recognised, so that the solutions they recommend can be implemented."

ENDS

(*) The [Working Group on discrimination against women and girls](#) was established by the Human Rights Council in September 2010. It is comprised of five independent experts: **Ms. Meskerem Geset Techane** (current Chair), **Ms. Elizabeth Broderick** (Vice Chair), **Ms. Alda Facio**, **Ms. Ivana Radačić**, and **Ms. Melissa Upreti**.

The Statement has been endorsed by: **Dubravka Šimonovic**, Special Rapporteur on [violence against women](#), its causes and consequences; **Leo Heller**, Special Rapporteur on the human rights to safe drinking [water and sanitation](#); **Rosa Kornfeld-Matte**, Independent Expert on the enjoyment of all [human rights by older persons](#); **Catalina Devandas Aguilar**, Special Rapporteur on the [rights of persons with disabilities](#); **Fernand de Varennes**, Special Rapporteur on minority issues, and **Leilani Farha**, Special Rapporteur on the [right to adequate housing](#).

The Working Group is part of what is known as the [Special Procedures](#) of the United Nations Human Rights Council. Special Procedures, the largest body of independent experts in the United Nations Human Rights system, is the general name of the Council's independent fact-finding and monitoring mechanisms. Special Procedures mandate-holders are independent human rights experts appointed by the Human Rights Council to address either specific country situations or thematic issues in all parts of the world. They are not UN staff and are independent from any government or organization. They serve in their individual capacity and do not receive a salary for their work.

For more information and **media requests**, please contact Alicia Pons at: apons@ohchr.org.

For media inquiries related to other UN independent experts please contact Xabier Celaya (+41 22 917 9445 / xcelaya@ohchr.org)

Follow news related to the UN's independent human rights experts on Twitter: [@UN_SPExperts](https://twitter.com/UN_SPExperts).

Concerned about the world we live in?
Then STAND UP for someone's rights today.
#Standup4humanrights
and visit the web page at <http://www.standup4humanrights.org>