



RESISTIRÉ

Reducing gendered inequalities
caused by COVID-19 policies

Ensuring gender-balanced decision-making and the involvement of civil society

RESISTIRÉ recommendations to policymakers and civil society organisations mitigate the gendered impacts of Covid-19, based on RESISTIRÉ findings.

20 December 2021

Several studies highlight the extent of women's under-representation in decision-making and the invisibility of their voices in policy responses to the COVID-19 pandemic.



› Background information

During the pandemic, while many women have mainly been working behind the scenes – as nurses, medical doctors and so on – the public domain has been disproportionately occupied by men, responsible for the important decisions affecting citizens' everyday lives (EIGE, 2020)¹

A greater **representation of women**, together with a focus on **diversity and inclusion**, in decision-making, can make a significant contribution in overturning the worst effects of Covid-19 responses on inequalities. A higher women's presence in decision-making means that women's interests are more likely to be addressed in policy discussions and outcomes.

As a 2020 [report](#)² from McKinsey & Company states, "companies that lead on diversity have taken bold steps to strengthen inclusion. Early signs suggest that the COVID-19 crisis could deepen these trends." It also argues that "The penalty for lagging on gender diversity is growing, while top quartile companies are more likely to be at an advantage".

¹ EIGE, 2020. Coronavirus puts women in the frontline [WWW Document]. European Institute for Gender Equality. URL <https://eige.europa.eu/news/coronavirus-puts-women-frontline> (accessed 6.25.21).

² <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/diversity-and-inclusion/diversity-wins-how-inclusion-matters>



› Policy mapping: main findings

This lack of women in the response to the pandemic is one of the main findings from RESISTIRÉ. **In many countries the relevant decision-making positions were mainly held by men**, as most of the pandemic-related measures identified in the European countries³ were created at the level of the national government (with some exceptions observed in countries with a federal system), sometimes with the support of expert committees created ad-hoc to deal with the emergency.

Similarly, an analysis of the **gender composition of 115 expert and decision-making Covid-19 task forces** from 87 countries found that **85.2% of these groups were made up of mostly males, 11.4% predominantly contained females** and only **3.5% of the groups had gender parity** (see Figure 1). The study found that men were also over-represented in global task forces to a similar extent as that of national ones. Thus, for example, the WHO's first, second and third International Health Regulations Emergency committees included 23.8%, 23.8% and 37.5% women, respectively (Van Daalen et al. 2020)⁴.

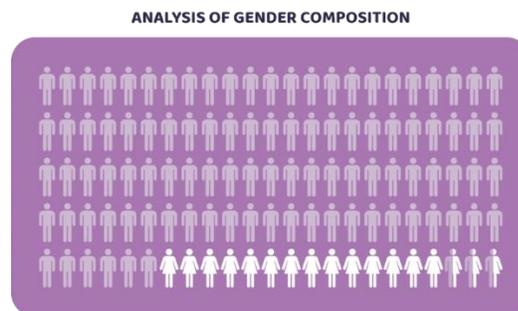


Figure 1: Composition of 115 expert and decision-making Covid-19 task forces from 87 countries
(based on Van Daalen et al. 2020 data)

Expert **women's voices have also been muted in the media**. The Global Institute for Women's Leadership at Kings College London analysed a sample of 146,867 articles published between March and July 2020. It found that just 5% of well-known STEM experts and 15% of well-known economists mentioned in these articles were women. Significant gender-gaps were also found in relation to references to politicians, as only 17% of those mentioned were women, meaning that for every mention of a female politician in an article about the Covid-19 crisis, there were five mentions of a male politician (Jones 2020)⁵.

³ The first cycle of RESISTIRÉ focused on the EU27 countries (excluding Estonia and Malta) along with Iceland, the UK, Serbia, and Turkey.,

⁴ van Daalen KR, Bajnoczki C, Chowdhury M, et al. (2020). Symptoms of a broken system: the gender gaps in COVID-19 decision-making. *BMJ Global Health* 2020; 5:e003549. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1136/bmjgh-2020-003549>

⁵ Jones, L. (2020). Women's representation and voice in media coverage of the coronavirus crisis.

<https://www.kcl.ac.uk/giwl/assets/covid-media-analysis.pdf>



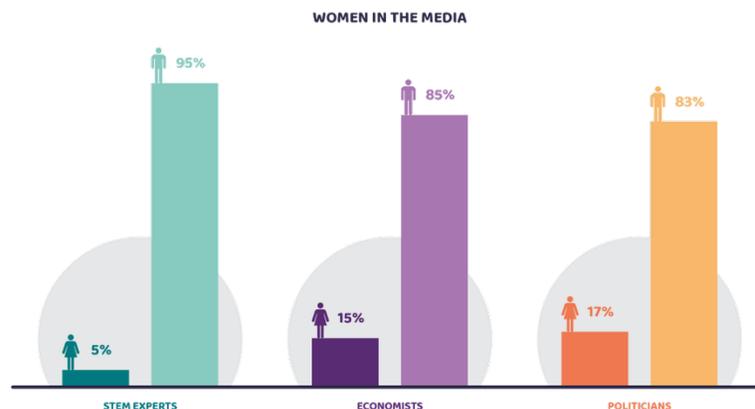


Figure 2: Percentage of well-known experts in different areas, divided by gender, mentioned in a sample of about 150 thousand articles published between March and July 2020 (based on Jones 2020 data)

In the UK, **43% of the government’s daily press briefings on the Covid-19 pandemic between March and May 2020 featured an all-male line up** with no female politician or expert present, with only one female cabinet member ever leading the briefing (Smith 2020)⁶.

Women’s organisations in civil society have also been excluded from decision-making around the responses to the pandemic. A rapid analysis of the gender makeup of COVID-19 response teams conducted by CARE in 30 countries (from both the global North and South) found that local women’s rights and women-led organisations and leaders were not included in decision-making around the response to the pandemic crisis, neither did they receive their share of funding. The report⁷ recommended that national governments should “work with diverse local women-led and women’s rights organisations, movements, and leaders to identify the barriers to women’s participation and leadership in decision-making structures and determine actions to address and dismantle those barriers”. It also recommended international NGOs to increase partnerships with women’s rights-and women-led organisations and to work with them to identify the barriers and possible solutions to their participation and leadership in decision-making structures.



⁶ Smith, Jessica (2020) Where are the women? Descriptive representation and COVID-19 in U.K. daily press briefings. *Politics and Gender*, 16 (4), 1-10. (doi:10.1017/S1743923X20000513)

⁷ <https://www.care.org/our-work/disaster-response/emergencies/covid-19/women-respond-leadership-covid-19-response/>



› Expert consultations: main findings



IRELAND

In Ireland, the persistent lack of women in leadership roles and the low levels of women’s representation in Irish politics have been put in the spotlight during the Covid-19 crisis. The consensus among experts in Ireland was that having more women in decision-making roles could have identified, anticipated and ameliorated the gendered effects of COVID policies. In particular, they noted an absence of women’s representatives of vulnerable groups in policy discussions.



TURKEY

In Turkey, women’s groups and support networks were the most effective forms of help during the pandemic crisis in Turkey. The policies connected to the pandemic have created new opportunities for women from different social backgrounds to meet and discuss women’s situation, including the rise of GBV and the withdrawal of Turkey from the Istanbul Convention.



UNITED KINGDOM

In Scotland, the Scottish Government has committed to developing a mainstreaming strategy and to improve data collection. Having visible female leaders pushing for gender equality, such as Nicola Sturgeon, has made a difference in bringing gender equality higher up on the agenda. However, what is particularly needed is greater gender competence within governmental delivery agencies and other decision-making bodies so that policies take women’s lives into consideration.



CZECH REPUBLIC

In Czech Republic, people in power tend to be men. Therefore, Covid-19 policies, such as the lockdown, have not taken into account the realities of women’s lives. Some of their consequences, such as increased care responsibilities, strongly impacted women. Women’s organisations were mostly not very active on these issues because they themselves were impacted so strongly by the lockdown policies, that they had very little energy left to focus on these issues. The

Czech Women’s Lobby did draw attention to the fact that the Economic Recovery Committee was extremely male dominated, which led to policies that were not taking women into account.



› Better Stories

Within RESISTIRE, we identify “Better Stories”, a term taken from Dina Georgis for promising practices that identify how a given societal situation can be ameliorated to improve existing practices.

Women’s representation in decision-making

In Lithuania, the effect of the government’s gender composition appears to be relevant when considering policies directed at women. In April 2020, information emerged about the situation of expecting mothers, who were receiving a somewhat lower maternity and childcare allowance due to being furloughed and lost work income. One member of the Parliament (an opposition MP) registered an amendment to the Act on Social Insurance for Sickness and Maternity that would make it possible to exclude the furlough period from calculations of the maternity and childcare leave allowances. There was little public attention to the issue and the amendment was not approved by the Parliament, with some MPs stating that the loss to family income would be insignificant and no exceptions should be made that could burden the state budget. The measure was approved only after the election of 2020 and the change of the government [which became more gender-balanced].

When public institutions collaborate with civil society organisations

In Denmark, the Minister for the Social and the Elderly held monthly meetings with civil society organisations for long periods during the pandemic and [...] the chairwoman and co-chairwoman of the Council for Ethnic Minorities participated in several meetings with the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Integration, the Minister of Health, and various other relevant authorities as well as NGOs.

In Sweden, a strong interaction was observed between public authorities, NGOs, and civil society. For instance, in relation to GBV the Association for municipalities and regions (SKR) began a review of the situation linked to COVID-19. Early contact was made with municipal sheltered housing in the metropolitan municipalities to get an idea of the situation and their preparedness. To better understand the situation on the ground, SKR initiated contact with SKR's women's peace network, the social manager network, and the network for development leaders for women's peace within the regional collaboration and support structures, RSS. Contact was also made with the police authority in Stockholm and the Finnish Shelter Services.



› Recommendations

Increase gender equality, diversity and inclusion in public authorities and decision-making bodies

1. Ensure gender parity in expert-decision making committees, task forces and advisory bodies.
2. Women should be represented at all levels of decision making. As our data show, having visible female leaders has a positive impact on gender equality. However, gender competence building, together with increased women's representation, should be implemented across government agencies and other decision making and implementing bodies.
3. Women and men from vulnerable groups should be represented in policy deliberations. Representation of women and men with a migration background, women and men from ethnic minority groups, as well as those representing people with different abilities, are among examples of such groups

Increase gender balance in media scientific and political communication

Scientific and political communication of the Covid-19 pandemic in the media cannot be the preserve of men alone, and women cannot be left with only minor and stereotypical roles in the communication process. More attention must also be given to different lines of communication in providing information to cover all segments of the population.

Collaborate with Civil society organisations (CSOs)



The collaboration between public authorities and CSOs should be strengthened. Country examples show (e.g. in Sweden) the strategic importance of collaboration between central institutions and organisations at the regional and local level, particularly those that are in contact with vulnerable groups of women and men. The activities of CSOs targeting specific groups of people are for public authorities an excellent

example of the need to adopt intersectional approaches when addressing issues related to the pandemic.



› About RESISTIRÉ

This factsheet is based on data collected within RESISTIRÉ's first research cycle which ran from 15 May to 30 June 2021. 31 national researchers worked with the consortium to map policies and societal responses, together with qualitative and quantitative indicators, related to the pandemic in the EU27 countries along with Iceland, the UK, Serbia, and Turkey.⁴ This research activity was completed with workshops and interviews with gender equality experts whose input informed the main findings from expert consultations.⁵

RESISTIRÉ is an EU-funded Horizon 2020 project the aim of which is to 1) understand the impact of COVID-19 policy responses on behavioural, social and economic inequalities in the EU27, Serbia, Turkey, Iceland, and the UK on the basis of a conceptual gender+ framework, and 2) design, devise and pilot policy solutions and social innovations to be deployed by policymakers, stakeholders and actors in different policy domains.

Find out more about the project at <https://resistire-project.eu>.



Discover all project outputs at <https://resistire-project.eu>.

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› Disclaimer

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