



RESISTIRÉ

Reducing gendered inequalities
caused by COVID-19 policies

The Missing Perspectives of Women in the National Recovery and Resilience Plans

**Recommendations to policymakers to mitigate the
gendered impacts of Covid-19, based on RESISTIRÉ
findings.**

The Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) deems gender equality to be a cross-cutting priority for the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP). Despite this, no specific budget has been allocated to the issue of promoting gender equality, and the issue has not been included among the 11 criteria used by the Commission to assess the plans. RESISTIRÉ analysis of the NRRPs shows that the perspective of women is not sufficiently represented in the plans and very few measures have been taken to concretely address women's specific needs or the problems they face. Given these shortcomings in the design of the NRRPs, it is imperative that the European Commission take special care to ensure that Monitoring and Evaluation pay special attention to those elements of the performance system that deal specifically with issues related to gender equality.

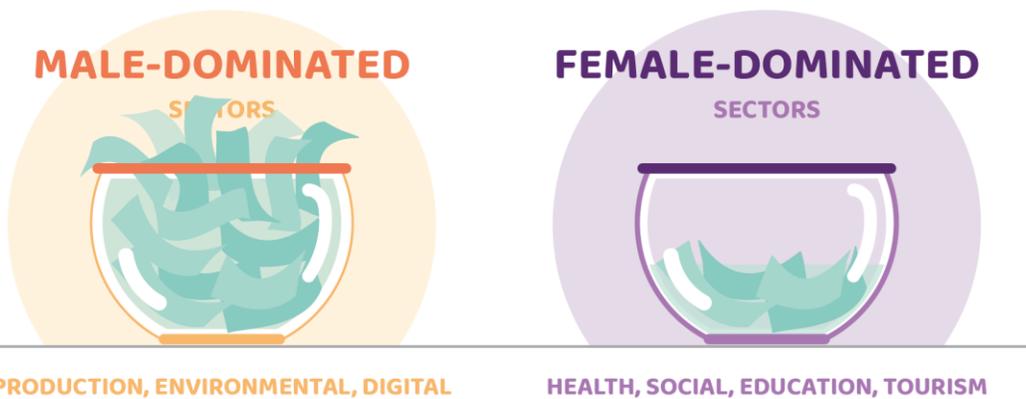
> Recommendations

Include women and CSOs in designing crisis response plans

In order to properly address specific gender+-related challenges and propose effective solutions, CSOs active in gender+ equality should be involved in the process of policymaking. The **participation of civil society in policymaking** is crucial to keep in touch with the real dynamics in society (see [factsheet no. 8](#)). Furthermore, a gender balance should be ensured in all advisory, expert, consultative, and decision-making bodies involved in the development of crisis response plans.

Invest more in gender-responsive budgeting

To consider gender equality as a cross-cutting priority in the socioeconomic recovery from the crisis, specific funds have to be allocated to policies that address the problem of gender+ inequalities. **The allocation of resources should focus not just on typically male-dominated sectors** (digital, environmental) but also on professions that are mainly performed by women (e.g. healthcare, tourism, education, etc.). Fiscal policies should be designed in such a way as to advance gender equality with a view to a short- and long-term recovery.

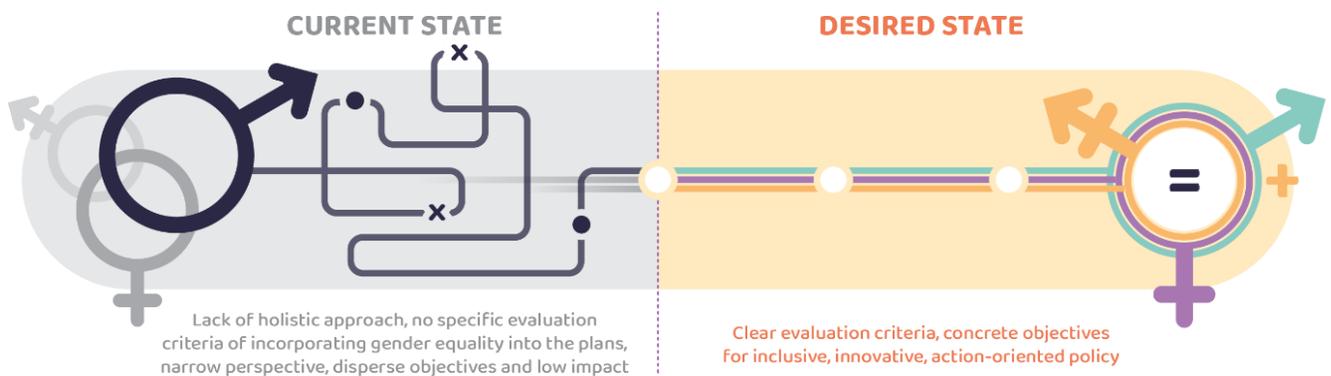


Dismantle gender stereotyping in policymaking

The solutions aimed at combating unemployment and gender+ inequalities in the labour market should not rely solely on proposing additional training and reskilling programmes dedicated specifically to women. **More attention should be devoted to the structural factors that hinder women's participation in the labour force**, such as obstacles connected to paid work and care work, unequal care responsibilities and parental leave policies, insufficient support for single-parent families, etc. **It is necessary to move from solutions that focus on fixing women to structural solutions.**

Include concrete measures and their monitoring and evaluation in implementation strategies

More concrete measures and specific solutions must be included in the recovery policies so as to avoid a 'box-ticking' approach being applied to the effort to promote gender+ equality. The **regulations governing the distribution of funds** intended to support the socioeconomic recovery from the crisis must tie **concrete mechanisms and criteria of gender mainstreaming to concrete actions, measures, and responsibilities**, beyond general rhetoric and contextual information.



The **monitoring and evaluation process that the European Commission envisages** in relation to developments in country expenditures **must also pay special attention to gender inequality issues** as set out in the Delegated Regulations 2021/2105 and 2021/2106 underpinning the Recovery and Resilience Scoreboard.

Assess the consequences of NRRPs for gender equality

It is crucial to understand in advance the impact that policies for socio-economic recovery will have on gender equality issues. To this end, **the gender impact assessment is a fundamental tool that can no longer be excluded in policy design**. At the same time, this assessment must be **carried out carefully and correctly** and not as a way to identify ex-post indirect positive effects for women in measures that were not designed to target them (as was the case with several of the NRRPs).



> Problem Statement

It is now well established that the **socioeconomic crisis resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic** had a **strong gender dimension**. For instance, a recent study published in *The Lancet*¹ found that between March 2020 and September 2021 **women and girls were more likely than** men and boys to have reported: losing **their job**; needing to leave their job to **take care of others**; **dropping out of school**; and an **increase in gender-based violence**.

Specific policies have been designed to stimulate and support the **socioeconomic process of recovering** from the pandemic in Europe. In particular, EU Member States agreed to create the Next Generation EU (NGEU), a financial stimulus tool (€806.9 billion in current prices). The **Recovery and Resilience Facility** (RRF) is the key instrument through which most (€723.8 billion) of the NGEU funds are to be distributed to Member States, provided that they design a **National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP)** that receives a positive assessment from the European Commission and is approved by the European Council.

Despite the need to address the socioeconomic impacts of the pandemic, most of the NRRPs appear to have been designed by **piecing together economic reforms that decision-makers had** drafted before the crisis and that were awaiting new sources of funding. The RRF's rules **required gender mainstreaming** to be taken into account in the creation of plans, but **without defining the specific criteria for its evaluation**. This regulatory framework seems to have pushed many policy makers to include a cursory reference to gender issues in reforms and investments that were not meant to be gender-sensitive when they were conceived. The result of this process is that **there are numerous vague general reflections** on the importance of gender equality and equal opportunities and there has been an effort to identify ex-post indirect positive effects for women in measures that were not originally designed to target them. In addition, even where measures to mitigate gender inequalities can be identified, they are **rarely linked to issues that emerged during the pandemic**.

¹ Flor, L. S. et al. 2022. 'Quantifying the Effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Gender Equality on Health, Social, and Economic Indicators: A Comprehensive Review of Data from March, 2020, to September, 2021.' *The Lancet* 0 (0). [https://www.thelancet.com/article/S0140-6736\(22\)00008-3/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/article/S0140-6736(22)00008-3/fulltext) (7 June 2022).

This is a huge missed opportunity to address not only gender equality issues in relation to the recovery but specifically the **economic benefits of investing in gender equality measures**. For example, Figure 1 shows how investing 2% of GDP in the care sector instead of the construction sector can have a great impact not only on the unemployment rate of women but on the general unemployment rate as well².

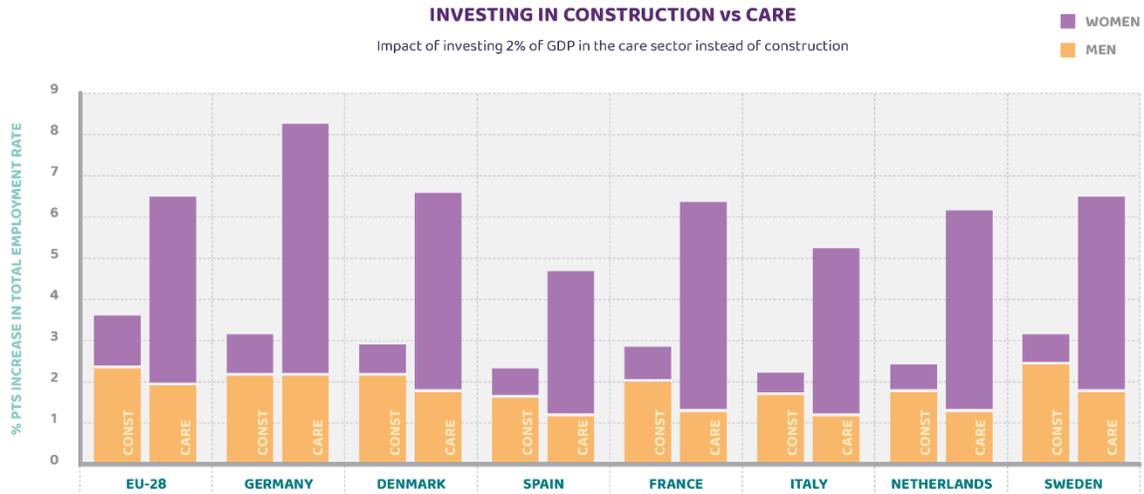


Figure 1: How investments in the care sector vs the construction sector influence the employment rate of men and women (based on Klatzer & Rinaldi 2020²)

The lack of attention given to gender equality issues in the design phase of the NRRPs can to some extent be overcome by monitoring (ex post) how measures are implemented. In the performance framework,^{3 4} as part of the monitoring and reporting mechanism for RRF expenditure, there are some elements that deal specifically with information relevant to gender equality (e.g. flagging national measures focused on gender equality; reporting at set intervals on the situation of specific gender-disaggregated indicators; and assessing how the plans tackle inequalities between women and men) that can help to address this problem of insufficient attention to the issue.⁵

² Klatzer, E., Rinaldi, A. (2020). 'Next Generation EU Leaves Women Behind. Gender Impact Assessment on the EC Proposal for the #nextGenerationEU.' https://alexandrageese.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Gender-Impact-Assessment-NextGenerationEU_Klatzer_Rinaldi_2020.pdf

³ https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=uriserv%3AOJ.L_.2021.429.01.0079.01.ENG&toc=OJ%3AL%3A2021%3A429%3ATOC

⁴ https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=uriserv%3AOJ.L_.2021.429.01.0083.01.ENG&toc=OJ%3AL%3A2021%3A429%3ATOC

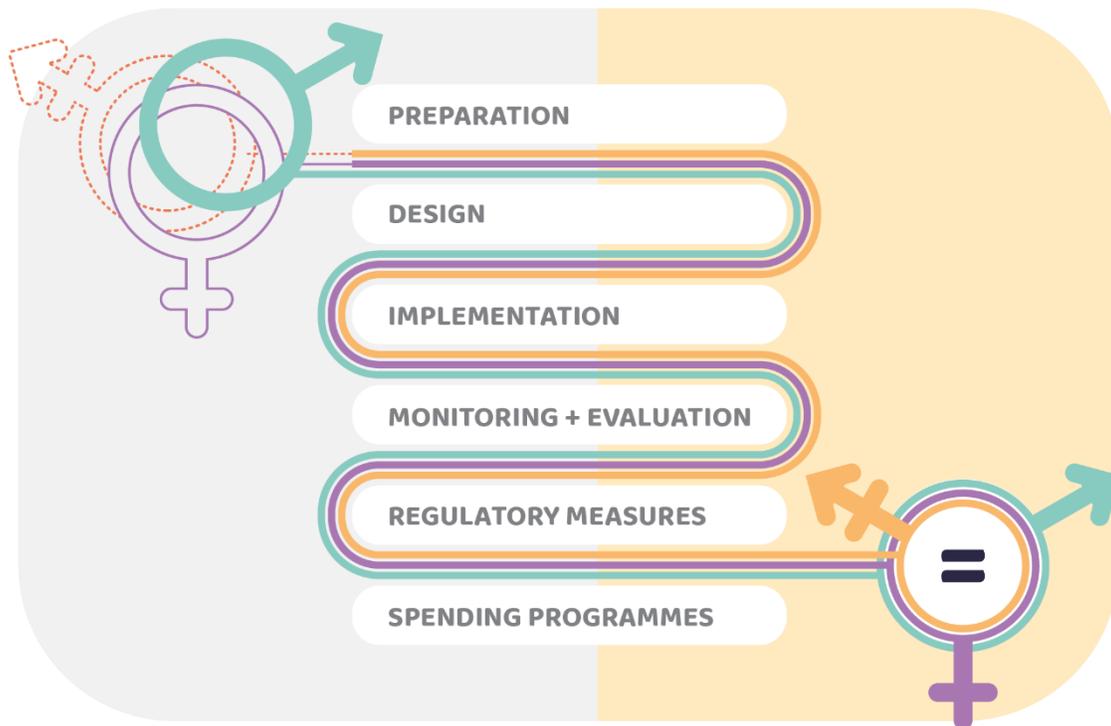
⁵ Sapala, M. 2021. 'Gender Equality in the Recovery and Resilience Facility.' <https://policycommons.net/artifacts/1860837/gender-equality-in-the-recovery-and-resilience-facility/2609286/> (10 April 2022).

> Insights from RESISTIRÉ

Gender mainstreaming has not been translated into concrete solutions

The analysis of the NRRPs conducted by RESISTIRÉ underscored the extent to which these documents mainly deal with **gender+ issues on the level of general reflections or descriptions of a given context**, without going beyond that to link them to concrete solutions or proposals for action. Many Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) in different European countries have noted that the **plans lack a gender-sensitive approach** and focus excessively on male-dominated sectors, and that mainstreaming gender in those sectors is difficult.

GENDER MAINSTREAMING IN POLICY



Even if many documents contain descriptions of the main problems related to gender inequalities and sometimes emphasise how important it is to find solutions to them, **the NRRPs do not include any concrete measures**, especially ones that would bring about real structural change.

In Austria, the feminist network Frauering expressed frustration at **how the NRRP** neglected women even after the women’s groups submitted their proposals. In Croatia, the gender



equality expert of the World Bank considered the plan **a missed opportunity for gender mainstreaming**. Feminist organisations in Hungary voiced concern about the **lack of data disaggregated by sex**.

In Spain, feminist and women's associations expressed concern about the **limited funds allocated to social policies and policies on gender equality**. The Portuguese Platform for Women's Rights **questioned** the monitoring processes, the **institutions involved in the drafting**, and the **effectiveness of the measures and funding** for women and gender problems.

Gender impact assessments are still not taken seriously in policy design

Research shows that feminist/women's organisations were not involved or consulted at all in the creation of at least 16 of the 26 NRRPs, and in only 6 instances was it possible to verify that a **gender impact assessment⁶ (GIA) of the NRRP had been performed**. There are several **instances where the GIA appears to be trying to identify the positive effects of a policy on women** and other vulnerable groups that would not normally be expected.

For instance, in Sweden, a measure to improve the energy efficiency of buildings is described as having a positive impact on men's employment, since men make up the majority in the sector. But it is also explained that the measure will support women and workers with a foreign background as well, because they are the ones most at risk of losing their job in this sector: the measure will help them to keep their position and will help combat a decline in employment in this sector.

6 out of 26

**The number of NRRPs for which it is certain
that a gender impact assessment has been carried out**

⁶ The European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) defines a gender impact assessment as '... an ex-ante evaluation, analysis or assessment of a law, policy or programme that makes it possible to identify, in a preventative way, the likelihood of a given decision having negative consequences for the state of equality between women and men. The central question of the GIA is: Does a law, policy or programme reduce, maintain or increase the gender inequalities between women and men?' (EIGE 2017, p. 8)



Despite a surge in gender-based violence, NRRPs ignore the issue

Only 8 plans consider the domain of gender-based violence (GBV), which comes as a surprise given the stark increase in the number of reported cases (see [factsheet no. 6b](#)). For instance, the GBV experts consulted by RESISTIRÉ identified the **lack of funding for measures related to GBV as a possible obstacle to a fair recovery**. As one of the experts explained, increased funding is of key importance for fighting GBV, and **crisis resilience funds should be made available for women’s organisations**.

In addition, **women’s shelters are not regarded as ‘essential services’** in every country, which raises the question of whether the recovery funds will be made available to these shelters at all. The following quote from an interview with a victim exemplifies the **lack of attention devoted to GBV by policies designed during the pandemic**:

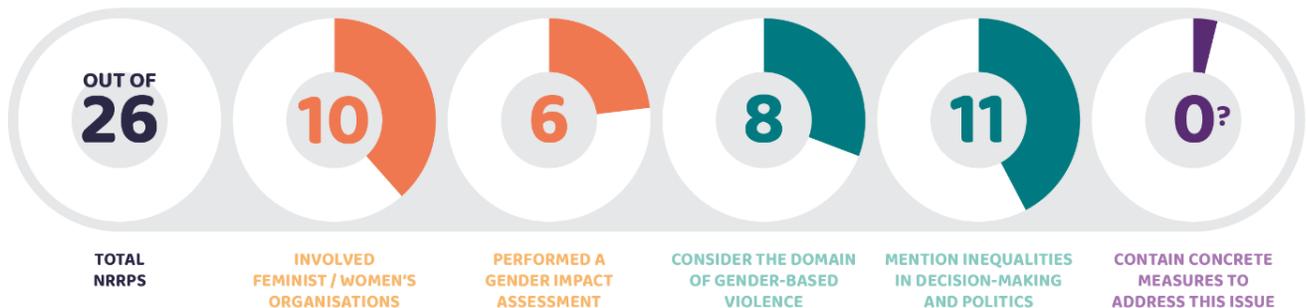
“The government's awareness-raising and increased emphasis on domestic violence in COVID-19 has not resulted in any actions from the government. Women like me have been forced to leave their children in the hands of perpetrators. This needs to change, so I am fighting with other women in pressuring the authorities to take action.”

Woman aged 37, Iceland

NRRPs continue to exclude women from policy design

Furthermore, **inequalities in decision-making and politics** are mentioned in **only 11 plans**, although the pandemic highlighted once again the exclusion of women from decision-making processes (see [factsheet no. 2](#)). In addition, very few, if any, of these 11 plans contain **concrete measures to address this issue**.

NRRPs: EXCLUDING WOMEN FROM POLICY DESIGN





Measures aimed at women and girls are often grounded in gender stereotypes

Many **of the measures** identified in the plans addressing gender issues have to do with activities concerning the **relationship between women, education, and the labour market**. There are many measures that propose education, reskilling, and tutoring in order to combat unemployment and labour market segregation. These solutions appear to be driven grounded in **implicit assumptions and stereotypes** that see women's access to the labour market, lower wages, or difficulties in career progression as simply the result of a **lack of skills and education on the part of women** or the need to learn (male) management skills, and they fail to address these as embedded in structural gender+ inequalities.





> Better Stories

Within RESISTIRÉ, we identify 'Better Stories', a term borrowed from Dina Georgis to refer to promising practices that identify how a given societal situation can be ameliorated to improve existing practices.



SPAIN

In the Spanish plan, **gender equality and the reinforcement of social and territorial cohesion represent two central axes of the document**. In particular, the Gender Equality axis is composed of **transversal measures** aimed at **fighting female unemployment**, reforming the **long-term care system**, improving **educational proposals** and **equal opportunities**, and reducing the **digital divide**.

In addition, gender equality and equal opportunities are **incorporated in all the administrative procedures** involved in the plan's development and processes, such as data collection for policy design, public procurement, funding, and consultation bodies. The gender dimension of each of these components is analysed. All **decision-making forums and consulting bodies** involved in the implementation and monitoring of the current plan are expected to **include organisations or experts on the gender aspects of different fields**.



UNITED KINGDOM

In Northern Ireland, the Women's Policy Group prepared a COVID-19 **Feminist Recovery Plan (FRP)**.⁷ The plan contains a set of **recommendations that** cover six main pillars: economic justice, health, social justice, equality, the implications of Brexit, and examples of international best practice. The FRP provides a **roadmap** for different governmental bodies to use to **address all the issues that impacted women** during the pandemic. The recommendations represent an

interesting example of how CSOs can provide decision-makers with a comprehensive framework (based on field experience) for a gender-sensitive response to crisis.

⁷ <https://wrda.net/feminist-recovery-plan/>



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ITALY

In the Italian plan, a **gender impact assessment** was conducted with the aid of a specific model ('MACGEM-IT') used to understand the **impact of the measures on women's employment**. The same model will also be used to **monitor the plan's implementation**. The analysis shows that the **plan's actions, being a part of the National Strategy for Gender Equality 2021-2026, could lead to a more significant increase in female employment than male employment (+ 1.2%)** over the last three years of the plan's implementation (while in the first two years male and female employment evolve similarly).



> About RESISTIRÉ

This factsheet is based on data collected within RESISTIRÉ's second research cycle which ran from December 2021 to 28 February 2022. In this research 31 national researchers worked with the consortium to map policies, societal responses, and qualitative and quantitative indicators relating to the pandemic in EU-27 countries, along with Iceland, the UK, Serbia, and Turkey.⁴ This research activity was accompanied by 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>.



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Contact us: resistire_eu@esf.org

> Authorship and Contributions

Authors: M. Linková (ISAS), A. Kolasinska (ISAS), R. Cibin (ISAS), N. Wuiame (YW), S. Clavero (TUD)

Coordination and revision: M. Linková (ISAS), A. Kolasinska (ISAS)

Infographics: G. Romeo (YW)

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