



## **WOMEN AND THE IMPACT OF COVID-19**

The PERC Women committee is extremely concerned about the gender impact of Covid19, which is hitting hard on all European people and workers. However, as experienced during and after the past economic crisis, some will be more affected than others. The Covid-19 crisis is exposing inequalities and especially gender related inequalities: between men and women and between women of different classes and regions.

### ***Coronavirus puts women in the frontline***

At the frontline of this coronavirus pandemic are the healthcare workers; most of the nurses and healthcare workers in the PERC region are women. Their workload is very demanding, often taking an emotional toll. Yet their profession is one of the most undervalued, and under-paid jobs in the EU. The public expenditure in public health has been reduced in the last ten years; also investments in infrastructure declined.

Women are at the frontline also in other sectors than health and care, such as in the service sector. According to the ILO, the majority (58.6 per cent) of employed women worldwide work in the service sector. Women in commerce, shops, pharmacy provision, cleaning services that ensure crucial to the communities during this crisis, are highly exposed. However, they are experiencing not only difficult working conditions but also serious and actual risks for their own health, due to the lack of adequate personal protection equipment and sanitary supplies.

### ***Concern for severe job losses in women-dominated professions and sectors***

The closure or near-closure of many businesses could have a severe effect on many women-dominated professions. Flight attendants, tour operators, sales assistants, hotel cleaners and hairdressers are often already in precarious jobs and will probably not be paid nor entitled to paid sick leave. These people are likely to have difficulty paying for basic necessities such as groceries, rent and bills in the coming days and months. EIGE's research shows that a quarter of women employees across the EU are in a precarious job. For migrants, the situation is even worse. Nearly one in three non-EU born women (35 %) and one in four men (24 %) work in precarious jobs.

It is time to address the gender pay gap and the women segregation in low paid sectors and precarious jobs, tackling low wage levels and gender-related low job quality. It is fundamental that member states engaged in financial efforts to maintain employment levels in the mid-term also demand and monitor that companies respect the agreements in the long run in a gender perspective.

Investments in public quality and accessible care services was crucial before the Covid19 and must remain a top priority to cope with the needs of the population in time of pandemic as well as in normal conditions. Care and service sectors must become opportunities for more and high-quality quality employment.

### ***Women in decision making.***

The response from policymakers must consider the different experiences faced by women and men during a pandemic to ensure that everyone gets the help they most need. There is a big need for sex-disaggregated data to fully understand how women and men are affected by the virus. Not only for infection rates, but also the economic impacts, the distribution of care work and the extent of domestic violence

Proper representation of women into decision making at all levels is needed. Incorporating the voices of women into preparedness and response efforts to Covid-19 is absolutely urgent.

### ***Unpaid care work for women will increase***

Unpaid care work will increase; Even without a crisis, caring responsibilities usually fall heavily on women. Now with the closure of schools and workplaces, their unpaid workload is likely to further increase. If older relatives get sick, they will also need looking after. The situation for single parents can be even more difficult.

Recognition and qualification for unpaid care work is necessary, to allow women to be fully part of the labour market, the social protection system and the society equally. Investments in public quality and accessible care services was crucial before the Covid19 and must remain a top priority to fight unpaid care work and create new quality employment.

### ***Domestic workers extremely vulnerable and especially migrant domestic workers***

For Europe, official (Eurostat) figures estimate 26 million domestic workers. However, much domestic employment is not officially registered, and research estimates a further one million undocumented - often migrant – domestic workers in Europe alone. Of course, the huge majority of them are women.

Isolated, often undeclared, poorly organised, domestic workers are severely exposed to the pandemic consequences. The situation is particularly concerning for non-EU migrant workers, especially women, often undeclared and even undocumented.

All domestic workers, especially migrant workers, must receive recognition, income protection and the support of national social services.

### ***Women are at risk of poverty, social exclusion, inadequate earning and household income***

States must engage financial resources necessary to face women's needs in term of income support and ensure adequate minimum income schemes.

### ***Social isolation for many women means domestic abuse***

Domestic abuse increases in times of crisis, and women stuck at home with a violent partner are now exposed to them for longer periods of time, making it more difficult to call helplines.

States and all stakeholders must engage in spreading information concerning the helplines and other services assisting and protecting women in case of domestic violence. The importance of seriously tackling domestic violence in all member states with binding severe laws as prescribed by the Istanbul Convention must be at the top of the list for policy makers.

Furthermore the ratification of ILO Convention C190 and Recommendation 206 must be a priority on the political agenda. More than ever these difficult times and rising numbers of domestic violence

show that a global answer is needed and the relevance of these two instruments could not be stronger. For the first time a global instrument includes the protection in cases of domestic violence linked with the world of work – and calls for concrete action undertaken by member states and employers to mitigate impacts of domestic violence on the world of work. This is the chance to protect all our workers, whether informal or formal, to protect throughout the workplace!

***PERC Women's Committee***

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