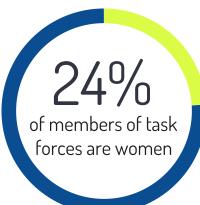## Women remain absent: COVID-19 task force participation

In 2020, as the COVID-19 pandemic spread throughout the globe, countries rushed to create governance and advisory mechanisms to help tackle the epidemic and its socio-economic consequences. Women have been at the center of the COVID-19 response, occupying crucial positions as educators, frontline medical workers, and care providers, yet remain they significantly underrepresented in COVID-19 planning and decision-making.
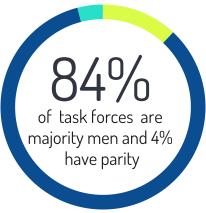
To monitor the extent of women's inclusion in the COVID-19 response, the UNDP/UN Women COVID-19 Global Gender Response Tracker, in partnership with the Gender Inequality Research Lab (GIRL) at the University of Pittsburgh, has developed a unique dataset that monitors women's representation and leadership in COVID-19 task forces. The dataset contains sex-disaggregated data on 334 task forces in 187 total countries, including data on task force composition in 137 countries and leadership in 179 countries.

What is a COVID-19 task force?
A COVID-19 task force is any executive branch institution (temporary or permanent) created by a national government in response to COVID-19. The tracker includes all task forces for which sex-disaggregated data on leadership or composition was found, regardless of task force composition or function. It excludes international or subnational task forces, as well as agencies that were created prior to COVID-19 (new COVID-19 specific subcommittees within pre-existing institutions are included in the dataset)(1).

24% of members of task forces are women

19% of leaders of task forces are women; 5% are woman/man co–chaired

84% of task forces are majority men and 4% have parity

Global overview
Overall, the data reveal that women are significantly underrepresented in membership and leadership in COVID-19 task forces. Of the 225 task forces with sex-disaggregated composition data, women make up only 24% of members and are not at all represented on 12% of all task forces(2). The data on women's leadership is even more stark. Of the 334 COVID-19 task forces with leadership data, women lead only 19% of task forces across 179 countries. In total, only 4.4% of task forces achieve gender parity while 84% of task forces are dominated by men(3). Countries with highest levels of women's representation include Andorra (52%), Argentina (53%), and South Africa (40%). A full list of countries and their overall share of women's participation in COVID-19 task forces can be found in the Appendix.

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Women remain absent: COVID-19 task force participation

Regional trends:

Women's level of participation in COVID-19 task forces varies significantly by region, with women best represented in Europe, North America, Australia and New Zealand (32%), Latin America and the Caribbean (29%) and sub-Saharan Africa (20%). Rates of women's leadership on COVID-19 task forces is even lower – ranging from 8-27%, with Europe, North America, Australia, and New Zealand and East Asia, South-East Asia and Oceania registering the highest proportion of female leads.

Region	Total task forces identified for the Tracker	Task forces with composition data	Task forces with leadership data	Average share of women on task forces	Share of women task force leaders
Central Asia and Southern Asia (8 of 14 countries and territories)	26	9	25	17%	8%
East Asia, South-East Asia and Oceania (17 of 45 countries and territories)	37	22	37	15%	22%
Europe, North America, Australia and New Zealand (38 of 58 countries and territories)	92	72	86	32%	27%
Latin America and the Caribbean (30 of 52 countries and territories)	84	60	76	29%	20%
Northern Africa and Western Asia (18 of 25 countries and territories)	38	27	37	16%	8%
Sub-Saharan Africa (26 of 53 countries and territories)	57	35	54	20%	17%
Global Average (137 of 247 countries and territories)	334	225	315	24%	19%

Despite these overall discouraging trends, a few countries have created task forces to respond to the specific needs and challenges faced by women and diverse populations:

Fiji created the COVID-19 Response Gender Working Group through the Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation. It brings together ministry officials, civil society, and development organizations, including UN Women, to study the effects of COVID-19 on Fijian women and girls, and to promote long-term recovery. Fiji has also created a Gender Based Violence Working Group.

The Technical Taskforce of Corona in Pregnancy was created in **Lebanon** by the Ministry of Public Health to monitor the relationship between pregnancy and COVID-19. The task force brings together public health officials and medical experts to provide guidance on good clinical practices and decision-making based on scientific evidence.

Chile has created two task forces with an explicit mandate to address women's economic security. The Board of Economic Reactivation for Women targets sectors that have been impacted by COVID-19 and promotes women's entrepreneurship. The Technical Working Group on Women and Construction promotes the integration of women into the construction industry, a historically male-dominated field.

The COVID-19 Health Equity Taskforce in the **United States** brings together members from a range of racial, ethnic, and minority population groups, including immigrants, individuals with disabilities, LGBTQ+ individuals, and Tribal governments. Duties of this task force include advising government on topics including equitable COVID-19 response and culturally-aligned outreach to underserved populations.
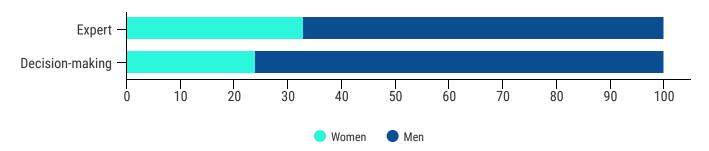
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Task force types

Women are better represented on task forces that serve an advisory function (33%) compared to those with decision-making authority (24%). In fact, women are completely absent from 13% of decision-making task forces (20 of 154) and 8% of expert-advisory task forces (6 of 71) worldwide.

Almost all task forces in the dataset are focused on public health (44%), economic (12%) or multi-sectoral (37%) responses(4). Women make up 30% of public health task forces compared to roughly 24% of economic and multi-sectoral task forces. While women's relatively higher rate of representation on public health task forces is a good sign, it still falls significantly short given that women make up 70% of healthcare workers globally(5).

What are the implications?

Across the board, women are being left out of high-level discussions on COVID-19 response and recovery. Given the low rates of women's participation in COVID-19 governance, it is not surprising that the UNDP/UN Women COVID-19 Global Gender Response Tracker has found that only 42 out of 219 countries and territories (19%) have a holistic gender-sensitive policy response, addressing women's economic security, unpaid care work, and violence against women and girls. To ensure that women's health and socio-economic needs are being met, it is crucial that governments actively ensure equal participation to decision-making institutions as a pre-condition to democracy and development, particularly in times of crisis.

(1) The methodological guidelines for data collection on COVID-19 Task Forces were established by Gender Inequality Research Lab (GIRL) at the University of Pittsburgh, through their ongoing partnership with UNDP on Gender Equality in Public Administration. The data were compiled by GIRL and UN Online Volunteers, with coordination by the tracker team, and validated by UNDP/UN Women with the support of country offices. Findings should be interpreted with caution. This is a living dataset with task forces being regularly added and updated. There may be data gaps or biases due to lack of available information or underreporting. The existence of COVID-19 task forces does not necessarily correspond to the quality of government response, as many countries have pre-existing institutions that oversee pandemic response. Additional details on the methodology can be found in our methodological note here: https://data.undp.org/gendertracker/. To provide information on new task forces to be included in the UNDP/UN Women COVID-19 Global Gender Response Tracker please contact covid.gender.helpdesk@undp.org.
(2) Country and regional averages are based on a simple average of all task forces in a country. The number of task forces included in the dataset per country ranges from 1 to 14 and includes 137 countries. Data disaggregated by sex is not available for all countries.
(3) These figures are based on the UN Secretary General's System-Wide Strategy on Gender Parity, which considers parity to be within the 47%-53% margin, recognizing that this should not be a ceiling for women's representation given their historical discrimination in decision-making positions. Task forces dominated by men are those with less than 47% women.
(4) The remaining 7% of task forces focus on education, public health enforcement, anti-corruption, or other.
(5) World Health Organization, "Gender Equity in the health workforce: Analysis of 104 countries."

Appendix: Country-level task force composition data

Country	Task forces with composition data	Average share of women on task forces (%)
Central and Southern Asia		
Bangladesh	1	13
Bhutan	2	15
India	1	13
Kyrgyzstan	1	43
Nepal	1	0
Pakistan	1	8
Sri Lanka	1	33
Tajikistan	1	9
East Asia, South-East Asia and Oceania		
American Samoa	2	35
Cambodia	3	12
China	2	14
China, Hong Kong Special Administrative Region	1	40
Fiji	1	25
Guam	1	33
Indonesia	1	10
Japan	1	17
Lao People's Democratic Republic	1	0
Myanmar	2	9
Northern Mariana Islands	1	10
Papua New Guinea	1	0
Philippines	1	0
Singapore	1	9
Thailand	1	0
Timor-Leste	1	40
Viet Nam	1	7

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Appendix: Country-level task force composition data (continued)

Country	Task forces with composition data	Average share of women on task forces (%)
Europe, North America, Australia and New Zealand		
Albania	1	73
Andorra	3	52
Australia	1	44
Austria	1	37
Belarus	1	9
Bulgaria	1	33
Canada	6	47
Czechia	1	0
Estonia	2	63
Finland	5	51
France	2	30
Gibraltar	2	5
Greece	1	31
Guernsey	1	0
Holy See	1	0
Hungary	1	7
Iceland	1	60
Ireland	2	58
Isle of Man	1	0
Italy	4	19
Jersey	1	50
Latvia	2	41
Luxembourg	1	38
Monaco	1	20
Montenegro	1	32
Netherlands	1	57

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Appendix: Country-level task force composition data (continued)

Country	Task forces with composition data	Average share of women on task forces (%)
Europe, North America, Australia and New Zealand (continued)		
New Zealand	7	45
North Macedonia	1	20
Poland	3	37
Portugal	2	46
Russian Federation	2	18
San Marino	1	25
Serbia	1	26
Spain	1	43
Switzerland	2	25
Ukraine	1	0
United Kingdom	2	30
United States	4	30
Latin America and the Caribbean		
Antigua and Barbuda	3	36
Argentina	2	53
Bahamas	2	35
Barbados	1	38
Belize	1	89
Bermuda	1	33
Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	1	25
Brazil	1	11
Chile	6	28
Colombia	1	22
Cuba	1	33
Dominican Republic	2	37
Ecuador	1	26

Appendix: Country-level task force composition data (continued)

Country	Task forces with composition data	Average share of women on task forces (%)
Latin America and the Caribbean (continued)		
El Salvador	1	0
French Guiana	1	38
Grenada	1	29
Guatemala	1	0
Guyana	1	27
Haiti	2	12
Jamaica	14	24
Martinique	1	29
Paraguay	2	39
Peru	1	13
Saint Lucia	2	50
Sint Maarten (Dutch part)	1	42
St. Kitts and Nevis	2	15
St. Vincent and the Grenadines	1	8
Trinidad & Tobago	1	14
Uruguay	3	18
Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)	2	35
Northern Africa and Western Asia		
Algeria	1	0
Armenia	2	14
Azerbaijan	1	3
Bahrain	1	21
Cyprus	1	44
Egypt	3	29
Georgia	1	29
Iraq	1	4

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Appendix: Country-level task force composition data (continued)

Country	Task forces with composition data	Average share of women on task forces (%)
Northern Africa and Western Asia (continued)		
Israel	1	0
Jordan	1	9
Kuwait	1	10
Lebanon	4	30
Libya	2	22
Morocco	2	19
Oman	1	10
Qatar	1	6
Saudi Arabia	1	0
Turkey	2	29
Sub-Saharan Africa		
Benin	1	0
Botswana	1	0
Burkina Faso	2	26
Burundi	1	0
Central African Republic	1	20
Chad	1	11
Comoros	1	6
Côte d'Ivoire	1	20
Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)	1	16
Djibouti	2	13
Eswatini	2	26
Ethiopia	2	38
Gabon	1	13
Guinea	2	16

Appendix: Country-level task force composition data (continued)

Country	Task forces with composition data	Average share of women on task forces (%)
Sub-Saharan Africa (continued)		
Kenya	1	19
Lesotho	1	74
Malawi	2	15
Mauritania	1	17
Mauritius	1	8
Namibia	1	38
Niger	1	8
Nigeria	1	8
Rep. of Congo	1	20
South Africa	4	40
Zambia	1	28
Zimbabwe	1	33