

Joint Leadership Statement on Gender- Based Violence and COVID-19 of the Generation Equality Forum Action Coalition on Gender-Based Violence

1. **We the co-leaders of the Generation Equality Forum Action Coalition on Gender-Based Violence**

2. Note with alarm and call upon all actors to immediately respond with targeted and effective actions to the emerging evidence that multiple forms of gender-based violence ('GBV'), in particular intimate partner violence, have intensified during the COVID-19 pandemic. The pervasive, endemic nature of gender-based violence against women and girls is rooted in structural gender inequality and discrimination. All forms of violence against women and girls are interconnected and have common root causes, both expressing and reinforcing structural inequalities of power. GBV is a women's human rights violation of pandemic proportions which was prevalent before the COVID-19 crisis, and if not addressed with a gender-transformative approach, will persist once this crisis has passed, with serious consequences and life-threatening impacts for women and girls around the world who will pay the highest price. Interventions must be responsive to the needs of, and address the vulnerabilities of young women and adolescent girls as well as for those who face multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination on the basis of, for example, ethnicity, race, class, disability, sexual orientation and gender identity.

3. Further we call upon all actors to recognize that male violence against women is a social mechanism by which women and girls are silenced and forced into a subordinate position when compared to men. All forms of GBV against women and girls are institutionally embedded, reinforced and enabled, and are linked to a continuum of violence that can take many forms and affect all areas of women's lives: from the private/family sphere, to the workplace and the public space, including public institutions and online space. The safety of women and girls travelling to and from school or work, their freedom of movement and their right to be free and safe in the city, are fundamental concerns for governments and institutions at all levels.

Response and early recovery actions

4. We stand with the 146 Member States and observers who answered the United Nations Secretary-General's call to make prevention and redress of violence against women and response to GBV a key part of national response to COVID-19; and encourage them to implement the actions outlined. We call for additional Member States and all other relevant stakeholders to stand with us in answering this call to action.



We urge all actors to:

5. Recognize GBV as a global long-standing emergency, addressing it with absolute urgency and with the political will, resources, and accountability mechanisms required to respond to other emergencies of this scale.
6. Provide core sustainable and multi-year funding for women and girl led and women's rights Organizations as well as women's human rights defenders and peacebuilders, at every stage of response and recovery from COVID-19, and ensure full, effective and meaningful leadership and participation of women and women's rights organizations.
7. Move beyond a siloed approach and integrate the elimination of gender-based violence across all ministries beyond those of the family, women or social welfare ministries. Fund line ministries in sectors that have a critical role to play in policy development and programme implementation.
8. Ensure accountability for GBV is shared widely across the Global Humanitarian Response Plan through concrete actions and implementation targets, and mandate implementation of the minimum standards on the provision of essential support services (e.g., health, including mental health; police; justice and social protection and welfare services). This accountability includes tackling sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment perpetrated by the aid sector. As GBV is both an indicator predicting armed conflict as well as preventing reconciliation, security and peace, we commit to ensuring that the GBV Action Coalition works in synergy with the Call to Action for the Protection from GBV in Emergencies complements and strengthens the commitments identified in the 2021-2025 Roadmap.¹
9. Innovate and adapt evidence-based GBV prevention and response activities as proposed in the interagency RESPECT framework for preventing violence against women (2019), working with all rights holders and with different sectors, in a comprehensive manner, as modelled in the Spotlight Initiative, including; women, girls, adolescent girls and young women, couples, parents, families, communities, workplaces, authorities, schools, community, traditional and faith leaders, the security sector, and decision makers amongst others, to strengthen and to sustain the efforts to stop violence before it starts, including by questioning and addressing gender social norms in order to promote gender equality, human rights, intersectionality and non-discrimination in a transformative way.
10. Recognize as essential, and fund comprehensive services for GBV survivors including women and girl specialized services such as, sexual and reproductive health services, helplines, shelters, safe

¹ https://1ac32146-ecc0-406e-be7d-301d317d8317.filesusr.com/ugd/49545f_a1b7594fd0bc4db283dbf00b2ee86049.pdf



accommodation, first-line support and clinical care for rape, and intimate partner violence and other support services and referral and reporting mechanisms, as an integral part of response and recovery from COVID-19, including in conflict and humanitarian settings.

11. Given the increase of risk of harm to women and girls as a result of GBV in the context of COVID-19, provide urgent funding to front-line support service providers to operate during the pandemic and to address the long-term consequences of gender-based violence for victims.
12. As a part of broader and comprehensive evidence-based prevention strategies and related efforts to transform social norms, with the view to building back better after COVID-19, support the partnership of men and boys' organizations with women's and girl's rights activists and organizations to transform harmful social norms and promote gender equality and non-acceptability of violence against women and girls, and foster men and boys commitment to gender-equality and to becoming agents of change.
13. Ensure the health system plays its role in prevention of and response to GBV, in line with the World Health Organization's COVID-19 technical guidance on maintaining essential health services and systems, and the global plan of action on strengthening health systems in addressing violence against women and girls and against children (World Health Assembly resolution 69.5) endorsed by 193 Member States. Services should be survivor-centered and of quality. They need to be accessible to all women and girls, including women and girls facing multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination and violence based on age, race, class, caste, disability status, migration status, sexual orientation and gender identity and expression, among others.
14. Improve access to justice for women and girl survivors of GBV including survivors of sexual violence and deal with any backlog of cases that may have been created due to lockdown measures related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Pay special attention to adolescent girls and young women, including through expansion of legal aid and rights' awareness. Strengthening gender-responsive policing and address impunity for all forms of GBV.
15. Ensure that girls, including adolescent girls, and young women can safely return to and stay in school and educational institutions, which can be transformative in preventing gender-based violence including; online violence and harmful practices such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation, as well as trafficking and exploitation, supporting healthy, equitable relationships from a young age.
16. Implement gender-sensitive social protection and safety nets which have been proven effective at mitigating the impact of GBV. Social protection and safety nets can empower women, prevent girls from



dropping out of school or from child, early and forced marriages. They can support women who wish to leave abusive relationships to build resilient futures.

17. Recognize that women's labour force participation, economic empowerment and financial independence is crucial to address and to eradicate gender-based violence. This is especially critical in the context of COVID-19 and related economic impacts. Ensure that all women, especially low-income and marginalised women have access to safe, sustainable livelihoods and income generating activities, and protect their rights as labourers. Fund women's economic empowerment programmes to enhance their livelihoods, through skills development, access to technology, grants and widening their market opportunities.
18. Address the various risks and use of digital and mobile technologies in perpetrating harm and violence toward women and girls. By ensuring the safety of digital spaces through the development of legislative and political frameworks to prevent and combat violence against women and girls, in collaboration with the development of relevant, ethical digital technology solutions as well as through GBV prevention and response efforts.
19. Encourage the international community and member states to strengthen coordinated, safe and ethical data collection, reporting, and use to better understand the impact of COVID-19 on gender-based violence against women and girls and on the capacity of services to respond and to provide support to survivors. Encourage also data disaggregation – by sex, age, disability, location, income, social group, ethnicity and other relevant characteristics – to track impact on and response to support the poorest and most excluded. Ensure that women's rights organizations are partners in the collection of this data, and that data are used to inform policies and interventions.
20. Call upon International financial institutions, the private sector, philanthropic organizations and the wider UN system to ensure that funding for gender equality is included in multilateral investment and financing, including by providing funding for women-led and specialist services alongside loans. Commit to build upon and further support existing global initiatives, such as the EU/UN Spotlight Initiative.
21. Call on Member States to enact and promote not only national legislation and policies related to GBV in the context of COVID-19, but to also enable, support and monitor regional and local governments to institute legislation and policies aimed at reducing the prevalence and impact of GBV in the context of COVID-19, including those related to transformation of social norms and strengthening of prevention programmes and support services, in urban or rural contexts through viable gender transformative financing and budgets.

Looking forward: We the co-leads

22. Will work to stop any reversal of the hard-won progress on advancing gender equality and women's and girl's empowerment due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Efforts to '*build back better*' after the COVID-19 pandemic must have women and girls' agency at their heart and tackle the longer-term structural and root causes of gender-based violence. Success is recovery from COVID-19 that delivers more gender-equitable, egalitarian, fairer, cleaner, healthier, more inclusive, and more resilient economies and societies, that accelerates progress towards the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Paris Agreement, leaving no one behind.

23. Stand in solidarity with the co-leads and membership of all the Generation Equality Forum Action Coalitions, acknowledging that progress on one area of gender equality—e.g. addressing gender-based violence—is inextricably interlinked with progress in others and that we must galvanize action across the board to meet all of the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030, in particular Goal 5, to achieve gender equality and empowerment of all women and girls, and to fulfil the commitments made to women and girls at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing 25 years ago.

Kenya

The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

Iceland

Uruguay

The European Commission

The Ford Foundation

OutRight Action International (NY, USA)

ABAAD Resource Center for Gender Equality (Lebanon)

Breakthrough (India)

Las Niñas Lideran (Guatemala)

YES Trust (Zimbabwe)

Global Coalition on Inclusive and Safe Spaces and Cities for Women and Girls (Global)

World Health Organization (WHO)

The United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women)