W7 Policy Asks – Foreign Affairs and Development Track Consultation Document

Summary

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted and exacerbated long-standing structural gender inequalities. At the same time, it has also exposed how women and girls who experience other forms of intersecting discriminations have disproportionately borne the pandemic’s impacts – whether as frontline responders, through increased unpaid care work, due to restricted access to social protection and public services, or as a result of their employment in vulnerable sectors.

Appropriate policy responses must understand and propose solutions that take into account the gendered consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, alongside the multiple other systems of inequality in existence. Without such an analysis, the ambitions of a universally equal and just recovery will be severely hampered, thus causing a prolonged and unnecessarily difficult recovery for billions of women and girls around the world. We call on Foreign Affairs Ministers to recognise that gender equality, and the fulfilment of the rights of women and girls in all their diversity are addressed across all priority areas.

In this briefing we have focused on the following priority areas for action:

1. **Women’s economic empowerment and COVID-19 economic recovery**  
   Ensure that COVID-19 economic recovery plans are equitable and just, providing governments – especially those in the Global South – with the resources needed for a just and sustainable recovery, and recognising the centrality of the care economy to any economic recovery efforts.

2. **Violence against women and girls**  
   Recognise that violence against women and girls is a shadow pandemic and prioritise appropriate funding to address this important issue.

3. **Girls’ education**  
   Tackle the full range of structural barriers that are preventing girls from accessing and completing a quality education.

4. **Women, peace and security**  
   Ensure the implementation of the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda through funding, participation of women and girls, and implementation of commitments.

5. **Health, including sexual and reproductive health and rights**  
   Provide equitable access to vaccines, protect health and care workers, and safeguard women’s sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR).

6. **Open and democratic societies**  
   Enable women and girls in all their diversity to fully participate in political decision-making whether on COVID-19 recovery, economic policy, peace and security, or the climate crisis. Promote decolonisation of relationships between the Global South and North, as a means of correcting historic legacies, and address global structural racism to ensure truly democratic societies.

7. **The climate crisis**  
   Provide financial support for gender-just climate action.
Women’s economic empowerment and just COVID-19 economic recovery

The pandemic has amplified existing gender, racial, social and economic inequalities across societies, while poverty and inequality between countries is set to rise.\(^1\) Women and girls in all their diversity are more likely to work in the sectors most impacted by COVID-19, particularly in the informal sector, with limited access to social protection.\(^2\) The pandemic has also brought to the fore the centrality of public health and care services to human wellbeing, alongside the historically undervalued role of women’s unpaid care work. To build back better for all, rapid and long-term measures are urgently required to give governments the fiscal and policy space to provide universal access to social protection, invest in the care economy, and promote decent work, especially in the informal sector.

Building on the G7 Taormina road map, which seeks to reduce the gender employment gap across G7 countries by 25 per cent by 2025, and in line with the emerging framework of the Generation Equality Forum’s Action Coalition on Economic Justice and Rights, co-led by Germany, we call on Foreign Affairs Ministers to take the following actions:

- Avert a major global debt crisis and increase fiscal space for equitable economic recovery in countries in the Global South through the cancellation of all outstanding sovereign debt across private, bilateral and multilateral creditors. The creation of a sovereign debt work-out mechanism, under the aegis of the United Nations, and the issuing of special drawing rights are both crucial for achieving this.
- Use their position within international financial institutions to promote democratic and inclusive global economic decision-making on sustainable and equitable recovery, and ensure that the international financial institutions respect the policy space of national governments.
- Commit to fair, sustainable trade and investment policies and practices, subject to international human rights standards and in line with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and exclude trade and investment provisions that protect investors at the expense of women workers. This requires supporting the establishment of a UN binding treaty on business and human rights with a focus on women’s human rights.
- Recognise the central role that public care services will play in economic recovery by ending harmful donor conditionality that constrains governments’ ability to fund social infrastructure, and instead encourage governments to invest an additional 2 per cent of GDP in social infrastructure, including robust gender-responsive public health and care services that improve the provision of care, reduce women’s unpaid care burdens and create decent work for women in the public sector.\(^3\)
- Recognise the importance of the care economy in securing prosperity for all.
- Finance a global social protection fund to kickstart universal, publicly funded national protection schemes for low-income countries.\(^4\)
- Promote decent work by ratifying, funding and enforcing ILO conventions on collective bargaining and freedom of association, as well as Convention 189 on Domestic Workers and Convention 190 on the elimination of violence and harassment in the world of work, throughout G7 supply chains.

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● Review and revise national trafficking laws to align with the UN Palermo protocol and eliminate loopholes in other relevant legislation leaving room for abuse. Prosecute and punish persons or groups trafficking girls and young women or subjecting them to forced labour and abuse, especially in the informal economy.

● Adopt gender-responsive budgeting, informed by gender impact assessments.

● Ensure economic empowerment initiatives reach the most marginalised women affected by crisis and conflict, in line with the joint G7/G5 Sahel communique commitments and the Biarritz Declaration for a G7 and Africa Partnership (Annex 1 – Promoting women’s entrepreneurship in Africa, agreed by the G7 in 2019).

**Violence against women and girls/gender-based violence**

Violence against women and girls (VAWG), including intimate partner violence and harmful practices such as female genital mutilation (FGM) and early and forced marriage, has intensified to what has been called a shadow pandemic. The COVID-19 crisis has highlighted the reality of limited social protection and underfunded, understaffed and poorly coordinated essential services to address VAWG. At the same time, however, the pandemic must not overshadow other forms of gender-based violence (GBV) that affect women and girls in all their diversity, such as human trafficking for sexual exploitation.

In line with the Generation Equality Forum’s Action Coalition on GBV, co-led by the UK, we call on Foreign Affairs Ministers to take the following actions:

● Commit to increasing funding dedicated to GBV prevention, mitigation and response to a minimum of 1 per cent of official development assistance (ODA), including investing in the creation and implementation of national action plans to end GBV, as well as ongoing research – recognising practice-based evidence from women’s rights organisations and research generated in the Global South.

● Prioritise GBV prevention, mitigation and response as essential services in pandemic responses by recognising access to shelters and comprehensive and inclusive support services for all women and girls facing violence, abuse and exploitation – including access to safe abortion – as life-saving services. Acknowledge increased VAWG as a cross-cutting risk to non-delivery in other priority areas.

● Ensure that GBV programmes are informed and led by specialist women’s rights organisations and ring-fence a minimum of 25 per cent of GBV funding for women’s rights and feminist organisations in-country, ensuring this funding is accessible, core, long-term and flexible for their self-defined priorities.

● Ratify (without reservation), promote and support the implementation of the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention).

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5 Due to pandemic-related disruptions in prevention programmes, an estimated 2 million FGM cases and 13 million cases of child marriage could occur over the next decade that would otherwise have been averted. See UNFA (2020) “Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on family planning and ending Gender-Based Violence, Female Genital Mutilation and Child Marriage” https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/resource-pdf/COVID-19_impact_brief_for_UNFPA_24_April_2020_1.pdf


Girls’ education

COVID-19 has created an unprecedented education emergency. In addition to school closures, impoverished girls face increased unpaid care responsibilities caused by the pandemic as well as a growing risk of early and forced marriage, unintended pregnancy and consequently extreme poverty, all of which impede their access to education. An estimated 20 million secondary school-aged girls will never return to their classrooms.8

We therefore call on Foreign Affairs Ministers to recognise the importance of girls’ education in the following ways:

- Ensure that commitments on ODA for education prioritise the countries and children that are furthest behind, and commit to measures that protect and further expand publicly-funded education budgets, recognising that this is most likely to reach the most marginalised children, in particular girls.
- Prioritise removing the structural barriers that prevent girls from accessing and completing education, including negative attitudes towards girls’ education or disability; adolescent pregnancy; harmful practices like FGM or early and forced marriage; high rates of violence against girls in schools and communities; menstruation stigma and lack of access to period products; lack of water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) infrastructure, including single-sex toilets in schools and WASH facilities closer to home; and well-documented increases in unpaid domestic and care work.
- Prioritise holistic support for girls to stay, and achieve, in school. This can be realised by investing in well-evidenced interventions to support girls’ achievements, including girls’ clubs and safe spaces, supportive women mentors, gender equitable school environments, working with parents and caregivers, and access to WASH facilities and menstruation products.
- Increase access and quality of comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) for all children and young people both in and out of school. Invest in training of those delivering CSE to ensure it is non-discriminatory, rights-based and gender-transformative. CSE is a key vehicle to educate children and young people about their rights and provide quality health information to end unintended early pregnancy and HIV infection. It also helps to empower young people to recognise and challenge harmful gender norms and practices, such as early and forced marriage and VAWG, and promote gender equality.
- Make the right to quality education for all children a reality, including children with disabilities. Disaggregate data by disability and use it to monitor progress and better inform and adapt policies and actions. towards the realisation of SDG 4. Use disability tags such as the OECD-DAC marker to track funding for inclusion.
- Ensure the meaningful participation of girl-led groups and girl activists in key global decision-making processes on all aspects of their lives, including education, through collaborative partnership models, ensuring accessible information and providing funding to support participation.
- Provide a clear pathway for children and young people to re-enter education systems, recognising that school closures can exacerbate gender inequalities. Establish systems to keep all girls engaged in learning during school closures via radio programming, free internet access or other methods. For those out of school, finance catch-up classes and accelerate efforts to close the digital divide.9

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Interim document prior to the W7 Summit  
25 March 2021

Conflict and Women, Peace and Security

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated existing conflict, insecurity and fragility, with profound impacts on those already affected by multiple existing crises, including the sustained underfunding of gender-responsive public services and social protection. Long-term responses to the pandemic should take into account how COVID-19, along with future pandemics and crises, impact conflict dynamics that are in themselves are gendered.  

In line with the emerging Women, Peace and Security and Humanitarian Action Compact, as part of the Generation Equality Forum, we call on the G7 WPS Partnership Initiative and Foreign Affairs Ministers to take the following actions:

- Recognise the lack of funding for gender equality in fragile and conflict-affected states (FCAS) by committing to the OECD-DAC Gender Equality Marker 2 on at least 15 per cent of ODA and ensuring that 10 per cent directly reaches women’s rights organisations in FCAS. This should be done through long-term, core, flexible funding for their self-defined priorities. Efforts to reach these targets should be monitored and evaluated and made publicly available for transparency, accountability and learning.
- Ensure that G7 member states’ WPS National Action Plans focus on both domestic and international concerns, and ensure that the G7 WPS Partnership Initiative meetings are inclusive of civil society, including women’s rights and girl-led groups, networks and movements from G7 states and FCAS.
- Enable the participation, leadership and influence of diverse women’s and girls’ rights organisations and groups, including those from LGBTQIA+ communities, in conflict and disaster preparedness, as well as COVID-19 response and recovery decision-making spaces. Only fund peace processes that include at least 50 per cent women and girls, including those from diverse communities facing intersecting barriers to gender equality, including civil society delegations. Evidence shows that peace agreements are more likely to succeed if women have been involved in the process.
- Implement, monitor and publicly report on existing commitments on women’s and girls’ leadership and rights and preventing sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment made in the G7 Whistler declaration in 2018 and reaffirmed in 2019.

Health, including sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR)

Alongside equitable access to vaccines globally, recognising the role of women health workers will be central to equitable COVID-19 recovery. Women make up 70 per cent of the global health workforce and can face violence in performing their roles, a risk that may now be amplified with contested access to finite supplies of COVID-19 vaccines. They also do the majority of paid and unpaid care work. Even before the pandemic, at least half the world’s population were not receiving essential health services, a state of affairs that has

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significantly worsened as countries’ health systems strain during the crisis. Additionally, essential women’s health and SRHR services—access to contraception, prenatal and maternal care, and safe abortion—are often the first to be deprioritised in the face of crisis.

In line with the emerging framework produced by the Generation Equality Forum’s Action Coalition on Bodily Autonomy and SRHR, co-led by France, we call on G7 leaders to take the following actions:

- **Ensure that every woman, youth and adolescent girl**, regardless of their financial situation, nationality, sexual orientation, race, religion, status as a parent or any other form of discrimination, **has access to free, timely, non-judgemental and accessible SRHR services and contraception in a nearby location**.
- **Safeguard girls’ and women’s essential SRHR during the pandemic, including access to services, supplies and information.**
- **Advocate for safe, legal and accessible abortion services** as part of the human right to healthcare and ensure the pandemic is not used as an excuse to restrict access to SRHR.
- **Ensure an age- and gender-responsive approach** to the design of universal health coverage models and implementation to support health systems and services that are available, accessible, acceptable, and of good quality for all. Support dedicated health budgets for adolescent SRHR services to remove user fees and out-of-pocket payments for health services.
- **Ensure equitable global access** to COVID-19 diagnostics, vaccines and medication, including through COVAX, and support the roll-out of effective mass vaccination programmes that use a gender and diversity lens to reach the most vulnerable and marginalised. Ensure that excluded groups, including refugees, internally displaced people, migrants, ethnic minorities and stateless populations are included in national vaccination programmes.
- **Ensure health and care workers**, who are overwhelmingly women, are paid a living wage and have access to safe and decent working conditions.

**Open and democratic societies: Women’s leadership and participation**

Open democratic societies require the meaningful participation and leadership of women and girls in all their diversity. This is especially critical given the continuing impact of structural racism, which has historically excluded many from democratic processes; the shrinking space for civil society globally; and sustained attacks on women’s rights and women human rights defenders. Moreover, as the COVID-19 recovery unfolds, it is essential to ensure women, girls and marginalised communities have a meaningful voice in all decision-making, putting equity at the centre of recovery ambitions. Open societies also require commitment and funding for gender analysis mainstreamed across all other areas of ODA.

In line with Agenda 2030, and the emerging framework produced by the Generation Equality Forum’s Action Coalition on Women’s Leadership and Feminist Movements, co-led by Canada, we call on the G7 Foreign Ministers to support open and democratic societies in the following ways:


16 A 10 per cent drop in the provision of essential reproductive health services due to COVID-19 could translate to an additional 15 million unintended pregnancies, 28,000 maternal deaths, and 3.3 million unsafe abortions a year across 132 low- and middle-income countries. See Riley, T., E. Sully, Z. Ahmed, and A. Biddlecom. 2020. ‘Estimates of the potential impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on sexual and reproductive health in low and middle-income countries’, *International Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health* 46, 73–76. [https://www.guttmacher.org/sites/default/files/article_files/4607320.pdf](https://www.guttmacher.org/sites/default/files/article_files/4607320.pdf)
● Commit to achieve 20 per cent of ODA for gender equality as a ‘principal’ and 100 per cent as a ‘principal’ or ‘significant’ objective within five years.¹⁷
● Guarantee space for meaningful participation by women’s and girls’ rights organisations, in all their diversity, and other civil society groups that are not traditionally allowed a seat at the table. Ensure that they are represented and heard in governance and decision-making processes related to COVID-19 response and recovery.
● Increase flows of funding to women’s rights and girls’ rights organisations and movements, recognising the barriers that marginalised women – including LGBTQIA+ communities – face.¹⁸ Currently, only 1 per cent of international aid earmarked for gender equality reaches women’s rights organisations globally.¹⁹ Of this, a tiny amount – only 0.5 per cent – reaches Southern women’s and girls’ rights organisations.²⁰ This proportion needs to be substantially increased.
● Acknowledge the role that structural racism plays in undermining democratic freedoms and agree a plan to decolonise ODA as a means of correcting historic legacies.
● In line with commitments by Canada and France, along with a number of non-G7 countries, adopt feminist approaches to foreign policies that centre human rights, prioritise decolonising relationships between the Global South and North, promote the peaceful resolution of conflicts in foreign policy doctrine, and ensure security, diplomacy and trade levers contribute to internationally agreed goals and human rights commitments.²¹

The climate crisis

The world’s richest nations are the most responsible for the climate crisis, which impacts on the rights of all women and girls, undermines efforts to combat poverty and inequality, and fuels food insecurity, fragility and conflict. Even before COVID-19, the climate crisis had increased economic inequality between rich and poor countries by 25 per cent.²²

Women and girls are more likely to experience climate impacts, yet their experiences and leadership are undervalued in responses. Women and girls are critical agents of change and their leadership is essential to understanding climate impacts and developing effective mitigation and adaptation responses that leave no one behind.

We call on Foreign Affairs Ministers to respond with the following actions:

● Step up financial support for gender-just climate action by ensuring that at least 20 per cent of climate funding aims to achieve gender equality as a principal

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¹⁸ Between 2017 and 2019, bilateral and multilateral donors committed over US$1 billion to support gender equality. Few of those resources have reached feminist movements, who are the real drivers of transformative and sustainable change. For decades more than 99 per cent of official development assistance for gender equality has gone to large mainstream organisations or governments, or stayed within development agencies themselves. See Lever, E., K. Miller, and K. Staszewska. 2020. *Moving more money to the drivers of change: how bilateral and multilateral funders can resource feminist movements*. Amsterdam: AWID and Mama Cash.[https://www.mamacash.org/media/publications/movingmoremoney_mama_cash_awid_cmi.pdf](https://www.mamacash.org/media/publications/movingmoremoney_mama_cash_awid_cmi.pdf)


objective and 100 per cent as a significant objective. Ensure this funding is accessible to local and national women’s rights organisations. In addition, commit in 2021 to working towards a new ambitious agreement on climate finance, with a post-2025 goal where all finance is gender-responsive, the majority is grant-based and at least 50 per cent is for adaptation.

- **Increase levels of climate finance accessed by local and national women’s rights organisations, including indigenous groups.** Address legal, structural and cultural barriers to women’s leadership and meaningful participation in decision-making and policymaking around climate change mitigation and adaptation.

- **Ensure that both COVID-19 recovery plans and economic stimulus packages lead in implementing the Paris Agreement,** including its commitment that all climate actions promote gender equality. Prioritise phasing out fossil fuels and subsidies, and actively seek to reduce gender and other inequalities by investing in the care economy and reducing barriers for women and marginalised groups to access decent jobs in clean energy sectors.

- **Endorse, finance and fully implement the UNFCCC five-year enhanced Lima work programme on gender and its gender action plan.** Incorporate gender considerations into climate change plans at all levels – local, national, and international – including but not limited to nationally determined contributions.

- **Develop and implement accountability mechanisms** to hold corporations hosted in G7 states responsible for environmental degradation and attacks on women human rights and environmental defenders.

- **In response to the growing debt crisis,** set up an automatic interest-free moratorium on debt payments for developing countries experiencing climate disasters.

### For more information

The W7 is a group of civil society organisations promoting gender equality and women’s rights within G7 processes. This is an interim document prepared in consultation with groups from the W7 and the G7 Global Task Force Gender Working Group in advance of the W7 Summit. The full W7 Communique will be produced after the Summit on April 21st and 22nd 2021.

For more information please visit the [W7 2021 website](#) or contact Sophie Efange, Gender and Development Network Policy Manager ([Sophie.Efange@gadnetork.org](mailto:Sophie.Efange@gadnetork.org)).

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