

The Importance of Inclusivity in Response to COVID-19

In Brief

- Research has shown that pandemics and other disastrous events can compound and exacerbate existing inequalities for minorities, including women and other sexual and gender minorities.
- Women are more likely to be front line workers, leaving them exposed to infection from the virus. Individuals living with disabilities also face unique challenges due to the pandemic.
- Racialized communities have been disproportionately impacted by COVID-19.
- The pandemic offers governments and businesses among other institutions the possibility to rebuild more inclusive and resilient economies.

Context

Despite the grim economic outlook, the COVID-19 pandemic presents an opportunity for governments to rebuild resilient and inclusive economies. The pandemic [has ushered in an age of unprecedented spending that can be marshalled to build more resilient countries](#). This recovery has the potential [to make workplaces more inclusive](#). The economic response to COVID-19 ought to consider how issues of inclusivity can be addressed. Policy should include consideration for its impact on vulnerable groups like gender and racial minorities and [people living with disabilities](#). However, recent surveys show that people are increasingly optimistic that [workplaces will accelerate equity in response](#) to the COVID-19 pandemic. Governments around the world have responded to the pandemic by [revamping welfare states](#), making benefits more generous.

Perspectives

The global pandemic has shed light on the many gender inequalities that exist in modern Western societies. While more men are dying from COVID-19 than women, research has shown how pandemics can [compound existing inequalities for women, sexual and gender minorities, among other at-risk populations](#). Women represent [70% of workers in the health and social sectors](#) and are more likely to be exposed to the virus. Women generally have [less access to social protection and are disproportionately represented](#) in the informal economy. Moreover, in the health sector, there remains an [11% gender pay gap](#) after accounting for occupation and working hours. It is also true that times of crisis lead to raised stress amongst families.

The COVID-19 pandemic [has exposed an association between race, ethnicity, culture, and socioeconomic status and health outcomes](#). Data from the CDC shows that [racialized groups in the United States are not only more likely to contract COVID-19](#) but also more likely to be hospitalized or die as a result of the virus. While the [Canadian Public Health Agency](#) has not published data for COVID-19 cases and deaths by ethnicity, data from the [City of Toronto](#)



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shows that racialized groups comprise 83% of COVID-19 cases in the city despite only comprising 52% of the population.

[People living with disabilities](#) are often forgotten when considering the impact of COVID-19. For people living with disabilities, [the pandemic poses unique challenges](#). For individuals with vision, hearing, and cognitive disabilities, conventional news outlets may not be easily accessible, making information on the virus challenging to acquire. Social distancing and handwashing may not be possible for people with certain types of physical disabilities. The pandemic can worsen mobility challenges associated with physical disabilities.

Policy Approaches

Governments play a crucial role in achieving and maintaining socially equitable gender roles, and several policy options can reduce gender inequalities. Since women have an increased presence among essential workers, governments must [address their specific needs](#). Governments may also wish to consider how the [caregiving system can be restructured](#) to afford women meaningful opportunities to participate in the labour force. By [implementing high-quality and affordable childcare and improving care for elders](#), governments can expand labour force participation for everyone, regardless of gender.

The World Health Organization published [a list of considerations to ensure that people living with disabilities](#) can enjoy equitable access to necessities like health services, water, and public health information, among several others. Policymakers may choose to ensure public health information is easily accessible, that support networks for people living with disabilities are maintained, and increase the attention paid to people living with disabilities that are in high-risk situations.

The overall response to the pandemic has been enormous, with [the global stimulus spending tripling that for the 2008 financial crisis in early June](#). Significant portions of these funds have been directed towards strengthening existing social safety nets. The World Bank found that as of July, [176 countries have implemented a combined 638 social assistance programs](#), the majority of which are in the form of cash and in-kind transfers. These [social safety nets are a vital component of the response to COVID-19](#), as the pandemic threatens the livelihoods of millions of people around the world.





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