



United Nations Population Fund
Sub-regional Office for the GCC Countries

The Socio-economic Impact of the COVID-19 Outbreak on Omani Women

The way forward, the Engagement
of the UN System in the Response
Process



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Table of Contents

1. Introduction	1
2. The Oman Gender Development Index	3
3. Impact on Sustainable Development Goals	5
4. The Economic Impact	8
4.1. Working Women	9
4.2. Self-employed Women	12
4.3. Women in the Handicrafts Industries	13
4.4. Women and the Job Search	13
4.5. Social Protection for Women	14
5. Impact on Health Workers	16
6. The Burden on Women	19
6.1. The Ministry of Social Development Support for Women	21
6.2. Supporting Women with Disability and Special Needs	21
6.3. The Impact on Adolescent Girls	23
6.4. Women Vulnerable Groups	24
7. Response to the COVID-19 Outbreak in Oman	27
7.1. Response “as One”	27
7.2. A Gender-Lens Response	27
7.3. Health and Socio-economic Responses to the Pandemic	29
7.3.1 The Health Impact Mitigation Response	29
7.4.2 The Socio-economic Impact Mitigation Response	33
7.4.3 Regional Response	37
Resources	39
Annexes	42

1. Introduction

Affecting over 199 countries at differing rhythms with varying predictable as well as unimaginable health, political, economic and social effects, the COVID-19 aggressive virus outbreak still continues to spread around the world in the spring of 2020. In his message on Women and COVID-19 on April 9th, António Guterres, the UN Secretary-General, stated that *“the COVID-19 pandemic affects everyone, everywhere. But it affects different groups of people differently, deepening existing inequalities. Early data indicates that the mortality rates from COVID-19 may be higher for men. But the pandemic is having devastating social and economic consequences for women and girls”*.¹

Gita Gopinath, Economic Counsellor and Director of the IMF’s Research Department, confirmed recently following the global lockdown in response to the coronavirus, *“the magnitude and speed of collapse in activity that has followed is unlike anything experienced in our lifetimes.”*²

As the consequences of COVID-19 have begun to be felt around the world, Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries have provided stimulus packages to support citizens and strengthen businesses. The United Arab Emirates (\$27 billion), Qatar (\$23 billion) and Saudi Arabia (\$13 billion) have all announced or begun to implement economic stimulus plans. It is in this context that Oman recently revealed a \$20 billion incentive package for financial institutions to fight the impact of COVID-19 on the economy.³

The United Nations Sustainable Development Group (UNSDG) immediately called for a rapid health response in order to contain coronavirus transmission and put an end to the COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, the UN stressed that countries should address the various **“Social and Economic Dimensions”** of the pandemic and pay particular attention to the effects on *women, youth, low-wage workers, small and medium enterprises, the informal sector and vulnerable groups who are already at risk*.⁴

The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) stressed that policies and interventions in response to the health emergency caused by the **“COVID-19 Pandemic”** must be multidimensional in order to address a variety of existing needs and vulnerabilities. Specifically, the UNFPA urged that, within an overall response, the protection of women and girls needed to be at the center of response efforts.⁵ Given the consequences

¹ <http://webtv.un.org/watch/ant%C3%B3nio-guterres-un-secretary-general-on-women-and-covid-19/6148473419001/?term=>

² <https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/04/1061712>

³ Regional Emergency Response to Mitigate the Impact of COVID-19, ESCWA, 2020.

⁴ Shared Responsibility, Global Solidarity: Responding to the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19, United Nations Sustainable Development Group (UNSDG), March 2020.

⁵ COVID-19: A Gender Lens; Protecting Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights, and Promoting Gender Equality, Technical Brief, United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), March 2020.

of the Ebola outbreak between 2014 and 2016, the UNFPA understands the importance of the disparate effects of health emergencies on gender when considering policies and interventions.

The UN Country Team Oman including the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) Sub-Regional Office for GCC Countries is committed to integrate the work of humanitarian agencies across in the COVID-19 response across Oman. In addition to the immediate COVID-19 response to implement, the UN Country Team Oman will work closely with the Government of Oman implement long-term recovery plans. The Country Team Oman will work with the Government of Oman to scale up their activities in response to the new challenges created by the COVID-19 pandemic. The objective of this paper is to identify the way forward – identifying socio-economic problems and weaknesses and proposing recommendations and studies - in regards to the socio-economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Omani women and the UN system's response process.

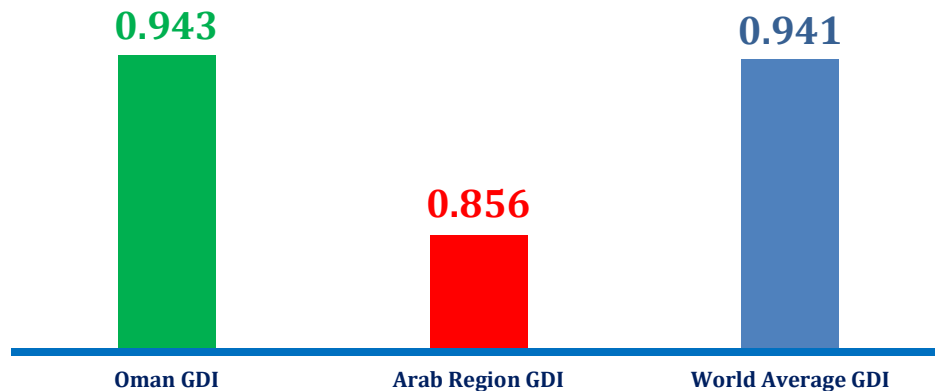
2. The Oman Gender Development Index

An ESCWA 2020 policy paper looking at “the Impact of COVID-19 on Gender Equality in the Arab Region” strongly suggested that a United Nations response to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on Arab women must consider gender norms and social biases that could discriminate against women in either the public or private spheres.⁶ The policy paper used the Gender Development Index (GDI) as a preliminary indicator of the vulnerability of Arab women compared to the world average GDI.

“Gender equality and women’s rights are essential to getting through this pandemic together, to recovering faster, and to building a better future for everyone”. António Guterres (UN Secretary-General) on Women and COVID-19.⁷

The response to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic should consider gender norms in Oman and the vulnerability of Omani women. One can get a general multi-scale view gender vulnerability and development levels for Omani women from a comparison of the GDI scores of Oman with the region (Arab States) and the world (see Figure 1) (UNDP – Human Development Index).⁸

Figure 1: The Gender Development Index (GDI) in Oman, the Arab Region and the world



The Gender Development Index indicates a high level (0.943) of gender equality in Oman (see Box 1), effectively showing that the Human Development Index for Omani Women is very close to the human development index for Omani men.

⁶ The Impact of COVID-19 on Gender Equality in the Arab Region, Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), 2020, Policy Brief No.4.

⁷ <http://webtv.un.org/watch/ant%C3%B3nio-guterres-un-secretary-general-on-women-and-covid-19/6148473419001/?term=>

⁸ Human Development Indicators: <http://hdr.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/OMN>

The high GDI for Oman mainly reflects three dimensions of equality in Oman; health, education and power over economic resources (see Box1). The health dimension shows equality in terms of life expectancy at birth for men and women in Oman (represented as an index of equal access to health services between Omani men and women).

Regarding education, the index indicates that there are no significant inequalities between Omani women and men in terms of expected years of schooling during childhood or during adulthood (25+). Ensuring equality in education in Oman is the main pillar for equal access to economic opportunities.

The third dimension in the GDI index, equal access to economic resources and national income, also reflects high levels of equality between men and women in Oman.

The higher GDI value in Oman compared to the overall Arab region suggests a reduced negative impact on Omani women. What is more, Oman could potentially nullify the differentiated gender effects of the health crisis with more gender sensitive response.

Box 1: Gender Development Index (GDI)

GDI is the ratio of female to male Human Development Index HDI. An Index measures gender inequalities in achievement in three basic dimensions of human development:

Dimension 1: Health; measured by female and male life expectancy at birth.

Dimension 2: Education; measured by female and male expected years of schooling for children, and mean years for adults aged 25 years and older.

Dimension 3: Command Over Economic Resources; female and male estimated Gross National Income (GNI) per capita.



3. Impact on Sustainable Development Goals

*“A hard truth is that we could have been better prepared for this crisis. The MDGs [Millennium Development Goals] and the SDGs [Sustainable Development Goals] could have put us on track towards a world with access to universal health coverage and quality health care and more inclusive and sustainable economies”.*⁹

The United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA)¹⁰ indicated that country preparedness in response to COVID-19 relies on solid commitments to, and progress of, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In other words, those countries that have most advanced in regards to SDGs will experience a reduced negative impact in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic. Given that Oman has already seen significant progress with SDGs, it may be a step forward in the region in the fight against COVID-19. The table below details some of the specific SDGs-related achievements and good practices of Omani government.

However, it is probable that the COVID-19 pandemic will have deep and undesirable consequences on the advancement of SDGs and the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. In March 2020, UNDESA identified the expected effects of the pandemic on the implementation of 10 SDGs (see Table 1). In light of the negative effects of this crisis, it is important that the Omani government not only preserve SDGs advances but continue to work on furthering the reach of these goals.







Table 1: Potential Impact on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

SDG	Potential Impact of COVID-19	Focus on Oman ¹¹
 <p>1 NO POVERTY</p>	<p>Loss of income, leading vulnerable segments of society and families to fall below poverty line</p>	<p>Does not apply to Oman as it is beyond this stage. Number of people living at a 1.9 \$ purchasing capacity daily is zero. Source: First Voluntary National Review of The Sultanate of Oman 2019 Oman is ranked as a high human development country, ranking 5th in the Arab region and 48th out of 189 countries globally.</p> <p>Source of Oman Status: The Official Oman eGovernment Services Portal (Omanuna) www.omanportal.gov.om</p>
 <p>2 ZERO HUNGER</p>	<p>Food production and distribution could be disrupted</p>	<p>Oman ranks 29th out of 113 countries according to the Global Food Security Index 2018. Total locally produced foods make up 58% of total food consumption. Local production from the agriculture and fisheries sectors comprise 49% of the total value of food consumption in 2018.</p> <p>Source of Oman Status: The Official Oman eGovernment Services Portal (Omanuna) www.omanportal.gov.om</p>

⁹ <https://unsdg.un.org/sites/default/files/2020-03/SG-Report-Socio-Economic-Impact-of-Covid19.pdf>

¹⁰ Shared Responsibility, Global Solidarity: Responding to the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19. United Nations Sustainable Development Group - Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA). (March 2020).




¹¹ This represents only a part of the entire SDGs.

SDG	Potential Impact of COVID-19	Focus on Oman ¹¹
 <p>3 GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING</p>	<p>Devastating effect on health outcomes</p>	<p>The Index Value of the Health coverage in Oman is 75%, according to the World Health Organization. The percentage of vaccination coverage against childhood diseases is (100%) since 2010. There are 20.1 doctors, 43.7 nurses, 3 dentists, 5.4 pharmacists for every 10,000 Omanis. Source of Oman Status: The Official Oman eGovernment Services Portal (Omanuna) www.omanportal.gov.om</p>
 <p>4 QUALITY EDUCATION</p>	<p>Schools are closed for most Omanis; remote learning is less effective and not accessible to all</p>	<p>According to the Global Innovation Index 2018, Oman ranks 19 out of 126 in terms of education expenditures relative to GDP. According to the Global Innovation Report 2018, Oman has the most scientists and engineers per capita compared to 126 other countries. Source of Oman Status: The Official Oman eGovernment Services Portal (Omanuna) www.omanportal.gov.om</p>
 <p>5 GENDER EQUALITY</p>	<p>Women's economic gains are at risk. Increased levels of violence against women. Women account for the majority of health and social care workers exposed to COVID-19</p>	<p>Within the Omani workforce in 2018, there was an increase in the percentage of female participation in the public sector (to 48.1% in 2017) and in the private sector (to 27.6%). The number of female employees in senior, middle-level, and direct administrative positions reached (21%) in 2018. A total of 65 Omani Women Associations exist in the 11 governorates.¹²</p>
 <p>8 DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH</p>	<p>Economic activities suspended; lower income, less work time, unemployment for certain occupations</p>	<p>There were more than 35,000 SMEs in Oman in 2018. The National Workforce Index (special needs employees) increased to 11% working in the private sector in 2018. Unemployment rate as of February 2020 is 3.7%. Source of Oman Status: The Official Oman eGovernment Services Portal (Omanuna) www.omanportal.gov.om</p>
 <p>10 REDUCED INEQUALITIES</p>	<p>An impact on SDGs 4, 5, 8, and 11 will effect SDG 10 regarding the reduction of inequalities</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 47% female students. • 75% female teachers. • 56% female students in higher education. • 50.3% lands distributed to Omani women.¹³
 <p>11 SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES</p>	<p>Population living in slums face higher risk of exposure to COVID-19 due to high population density and poor sanitation conditions</p>	<p>The Ministry of Housing has created several social housing programs to support citizens from low-income families and provide adequate housing. The Muscat Governorate hosts the highest population density (364% people/square kilometre), followed by the governorates of North Al-Batinah (96%), South Al-Batinah (80%) and South Al-Sharqiyah (26%).¹⁴ New cities: Madinat Al-Irfan (http://www.smartoman.om)</p>

¹² Omani Women, National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI), Social Statistics Series No.3, 2019.

¹³ Omani Women, National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI), Social Statistics Series No.3, 2019.

¹⁴ Population Statistics, National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI), Issue 8-2019.

SDG	Potential Impact of COVID-19	Focus on Oman ¹¹
	<p>Reduced commitment to climate action; However, a reduced environmental footprint due to the decrease in production and transportation</p>	<p>Oman has managed to reduce the consumption of ozone-depleting substances to 0% (or at least to levels lower than those required by the Montreal Protocol).</p> <p>Source of Oman Status: The Official Oman eGovernment Services Portal (Omanuna) www.omanportal.gov.om</p>
	<p>Conflicts prevent the implementation of effective measures for fighting COVID-19; those in conflict areas are most at risk of suffering devastating losses from the health crisis.</p>	<p>Oman has ratified conventions to protect human rights, reduce inequalities, and ensure equal opportunities for all segments of the society.</p> <p>The Sultanate of Oman is ranked 47th in the Global Competitiveness Report 2018.</p> <p>The State Audit Institution was the 1st place winner in the United Nations Public Service Award (UNPSA) in the “Preventing and Combating Corruption in Public Service” category in 2013.</p> <p>Source of Oman Status: The Official Oman eGovernment Services Portal (Omanuna) www.omanportal.gov.om</p>
	<p>Potential backlash against globalization; but also an opportunity to highlight the importance of international cooperation for public health</p>	<p>Oman has encouraged open and free international trade with the other countries by joining the World Trade Organization (WTO) in the year 2000. Since then, Oman has been freely trading worldwide with the 161 other WTO member countries.</p> <p>As a member of the Gulf Cooperation Council, Oman has also signed bilateral free trade agreements with the USA, the European Free Trade Association. The FTA with the USA has allowed trading of goods and services between Oman and the US without tariff and nontariff barriers.</p> <p>Source of Oman Status: The Official Oman eGovernment Services Portal (Omanuna) www.omanportal.gov.om</p> <p>On the regional level, the Sultanate cooperates with the Gulf Cooperation Council in exchanging experiences and knowledge and capacity building. It also hosts the GCCSTAT that issued its first report on the progress in achieving the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals within the GCC.</p> <p>Source: First Voluntary National Review of The Sultanate of Oman 2019</p>

Source of potential impact on SDGs: Shared Responsibility, Global Solidarity: Responding to the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19, United Nations Development Group (UNSDG), March 2020.

Source of Oman Status:

First Voluntary National Review (VNR) of The Sultanate of Oman, 2019, United Nations High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development July 2019

The Official Oman eGovernment Services Portal (Omanuna) www.omanportal.gov.om

Omani Women, National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI), Social Statistics Series No.3, (2019).

4. The Economic Impact

The economic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic began as soon as countries announced confinement or general quarantine measures in order to minimize the spread of the coronavirus among people. These measures resulted in either the slow-down or the complete shutdown of economic activities. As revenues decreased with the loss in economic activities, businesses have grown increasingly burdened by operational like wages.

The London Business School pointed that these measures would result in unequal working conditions and opportunities between types of workers across industries. For example, high-skilled labour would be able to work from home (education, financial services) while low-skilled workers, like drivers, cleaners, logistical workers and retail workers, would have to continue working or loose their jobs with the decrease in activity. Therefore, worker skill levels and sectors of work relate directly to the ability to withstand a brief unemployment spell during the current health crisis.¹⁵

Oman Supreme Committee Protection of Workers' Rights

Oman Supreme Committee issues a decision not to end the services of the Omani workforce and postpone the payment of bank loans and financing loans without interest for Omani workers whose salaries reduced. The decisions include providing paid annual leave to their workers in closed sectors due to the current conditions.

The Supreme Committee issued a number of decisions regarding Omani workers whose wages are affected by the spread of the Corona virus:

- Postponing the repayment of bank loans and various financing loans due to them during the period of reducing wages and rescheduling loans without interest and without additional fees.
- Postpone the payment of electricity, water and sewage bills until the end of June 2020, and allow installments due for installments due later
- Those who are entitled to them according to the income category shall be included in the beneficiaries of the fuel subsidy card.

Source: <https://timesofoman.com/article/3013839/oman/government/supreme-committee-issues-decision-regarding-services-of-omani-workforce>

The depth of the economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic will depend on the duration of its effects locally, regionally and globally. Furthermore, given the effects of past pandemics, it is likely that the duration and impact of the effects on economic security will be greater on women than on men.¹⁶

A UN Women paper on *COVID-19 and Implications for Inclusive Economic Empowerment* (2020) highlighted that attention should be focusing on women given their vulnerable position in the economy. The paper categorised women into different economic categories: working women, women small business entrepreneurs, and women rural producers. It also added

¹⁵ The economics of a pandemic: the case of Covid-19, London Business School, 2020.

¹⁶ Policy Brief: The Impact of COVID-19 on Women, United Nations System – Ethiopia, 2020. <https://ethiopia.un.org/sites/default/files/2020-04/Policy%20Brief%20on%20COVID%20impact%20on%20Women%209%20April%202020.pdf>

specific vulnerable women group categories: elderly women, women beneficiaries of public assistance, women living with disabilities, women experiencing intra-family violence.

4.1. Working Women

In line with the **Oman 2040 Development Vision and Sustainable Development Goals**, the Omani government has supported the participation of women across the economy through the provision of job opportunities in all fields. As a result, Omani women have managed to work and access all sectors of the economy at an accelerated rate during recent years. Omani women have specifically contributed through their increased participation in the private sector (see below).

Omani Women in the Economy

Omani Women in the Workforce:

In 2014 women represented only 31.5% of the labour force. However, by 2018, the percentage of women in the labour force had grown to 40.5%.

Omani Women in the Public Sector:

In the context of increased female participation in the labour force, female presence in the public sector increased to 59%, of which 21% occupy managerial positions.

Omani Women in the Private Sector:

Around 65,042 women participate in the private sector in Oman. This is a result of an increase in participation from 23% in 2014 to 26% 2018.

Source: Omani Women, National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI). Social Statistics Series No.3, 2019.

While the COVID-19 pandemic will have an impact on various economic activities, recent studies by ESCWA and partner UN agencies show that manufacturing and services economic activities in the Arab region will be affected the most. Since a large ***portion of women are engaged in these sectors, they will probably endure most of the consequences*** (ESCWA, 2020).¹⁷

In order to reduce the impact on women workers, ***more attention will need to be given to economic activities were Omani women represent a large portion of the workforce.***

A large majority of Omani women work in the “*Wholesale and retail trade, repair of motor vehicles, motorcycles, personal and family goods*” sector (19.5%), the “*construction*” sector (18%), and the “*financial liaison*” sector (12.3%). Indeed, as the first round of layoffs occurred since the pandemic began, these sectors, as well as retail, hospitality and tourism, were among those most affected by the economic slowdown.¹⁸

¹⁷ The Impact of COVID-19 on Gender Equality in the Arab Region, Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), Policy Brief No.4, 2020.

¹⁸ Policy Brief: Impact of COVID-19 on Women, UNSDG, April 2020.

**Table 2: Portion of Omani women in Private Sector
by Economic Activities**

Economic Activity	Number of Omani Women	Portion of Omani Women
Real estate, rental and commercial activities	2,996	37%
Agriculture, hunting and forestry	350	31%
Fishing	0	0%
Mining and quarrying	2,455	8%
Manufacturing industries	6,315	21%
Electricity, gas and water supply	463	12%
Constructions	11,683	20%
Wholesale and retail trade, repair of motor vehicles, motorcycles, personal and family goods	12,671	34%
Hotels and restaurants	2,916	32%
Transport, storage and communication	4,760	21%
Financial liaison	7,983	47%
Education	4,650	65%
Health and social work	5,078	24%
Community and personal services activities	2,719	50%
International organizations and bodies	3	38%
Total	65,042	26%

Source: National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI). Data Portal: <https://data.gov.om/byvmwhe/labour-market>.

Although opportunities for working women in the official economy have suffered from the economic effects of the pandemic, there appears to be room for potential growth in other sectors, like internet services and online retail (MOODY's, March 2020).¹⁹

In order to offer adequate employment opportunities for women, government economic policy should pay close attention to the reorientation of economic activities in the market. Given that *Omani women could play a larger role in the economy through engagement in internet services and online retail, government policies and UN agency interventions could concentrate on such evolving sectors to ensure future opportunities for women in the economy.*

To better comprehend the vulnerability of economic activities to the negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the financial analysis company, MOODY's, created a heat-map that represents expected exposure levels for each type of economic activity (please see annex1). The model shows three levels of impact: low, medium and high. Using this model as a reference, one could extrapolate to predict the expected impact of the economic slowdown on Omani women workers in the private sector (see Table 3).

¹⁹ COVID-19 IMPACT HEATMAP, Coronavirus heats travel-driven sectors, disrupts supply chain, MOODY's, 2020.

Table 3: Level of Expected Economic Impact on Omani Women by Economic Activities

Economic Activity	Number of Omani Women	Potential Impact
Real estate, rental and commercial activities	2996	Low Exposure
Agriculture, hunting and forestry	350	Moderate Exposure
Fishing	0	Moderate Exposure
Mining and quarrying	2455	Moderate Exposure
Manufacturing industries	6315	Moderate Exposure
Electricity, gas and water supply	463	Moderate Exposure
Constructions	11683	Low Exposure
Wholesale and retail trade, repair of motor vehicles, motorcycles, personal and family goods	12671	High Exposure (Non Food Goods) Low Exposure (Food Goods)
Hotels and restaurants	2916	High Exposure Low Exposure for Restaurants' Delivery
Transport, storage and communication	4760	Low Exposure
financial liaison	7983	Moderate Exposure
Education	4650	Moderate Exposure Low Exposure for Online Education
Health and social work	5078	Moderate Exposure Low Exposure for Online health sales
Community and personal services activities	2719	Moderate Exposure
International organizations and bodies	3	Low Exposure
Total	65042	

Source: National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI). Data Portal: <https://data.gov.om/byvmwhe/labour-market>

Therefore, in order to protect women from unemployment in the medium and long-run, **governments and UN agencies** should concentrate their support and interventions on mitigating the negative impact on economic activities with the high/medium exposure sectors. Policy-makers and UN agencies can also take advantage of the potential new employment opportunities arising in *online health and social work as well as in online education*.

4.2. Self-employed Women

Entrepreneurs – Alraffd Beneficiaries

Women represent approximately 28% of entrepreneurs in Oman. Al-raffd fund supports women entrepreneurial activities and business creation accelerators. Of the 3,372 total supported entrepreneurs up until 2018, 34.2% of them were women (1,150 women). Among this group, 40% were based in Muscat and 13.5% in Al-Dakhelya.²⁰

Both self-funded and Alraffd beneficiary entrepreneurs will be affected directly by this outbreak, facing significant challenges repaying the investment fund.

These women had the courage to break with social norms and confront the difficulties of entering the market. Many of their businesses are still at the start-up stage. Therefore, it is imperative to promote situation analyses and creative solutions for their businesses as soon as possible. A **situation analysis can provide more information** regarding the possible next steps to take to mitigate negative impact on businesses. Knowing the entrepreneur’s “source of capital” and “type of business”, for example, can enhance and orient policies and measures on the micro level, a strategy that often results in better impact than just implementing macro-level policies.

“For those women who choose entrepreneurship either out of necessity or desire, they must equitably benefit from measures to provide liquidity and other assistance for their businesses”. (COVID-19 and Implications for Inclusive economic empowerment, UN Women, 2020)

If these businesses go bankrupt or closed there may be a significant negative impact on future women entrepreneurs, resulting in women preferring to look for more secure jobs (in the public sector, for example) or simply exit the workforce. In summary, if these effects are not mitigated, women will face more difficult time entering the labor market and creating enterprises in the post-pandemic world.

As a temporary solution to the economic slowdown during this pandemic, governments have widely implemented social assistance interventions in the form of “cash-transfer programs”²¹. A “Policy Brief: Impact of COVID-19 on Women” recommends that interventions and support programs have to incorporate “sex-disaggregated data, a gender lens and specific programs targeting women”.

For example, these programs should target economic activities that employ a high portion of women; through adequate access to loans and grants, in order to help these economic activities survive this critical period while keeping women employed. In addition, these programs should also attempt to reach women who are unemployed or who are working in the informal sector.²²

²⁰ Omani Women, National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI), 2019, page 46.

²¹ Regional Emergency Response to Mitigate the Impact of COVID-19, ESCWA, 2020.

²² Policy Brief: Impact of COVID-19 on Women, UNSDG, April 2020.

4.3. Women in the Handicrafts Industries

Considered often as micro businesses, Handicraft work will be heavily influenced by the economic slowdown. And given that the tourism sector is not functioning at all, the Handicraft sector will suffer impact quickly and directly.

In Oman, developing and preserving culture and heritage is one of Oman's main priorities. As a result, the Public Authority for Craft Industries was established to provide a variety of services and support mechanisms (marketing, financing etc...) for handicrafts. Furthermore, the handicrafts sector employs 21,557 craft workers, of which 18,935 (88%) are women. Of these women, 32% live in Dhofar while 21% of them live in Shamal Al Sharqiyah.

As mentioned before, the tourism sector will be impacted severely by the effects of the present pandemic in the short and medium. As a result, women who are in the handicrafts industry will face a significant challenge in terms of employment in the following months. Therefore, it is essential that policy actions mitigate these effects not only in order for women to continue to work but also to preserve Omani national cultural heritage.

4.4. Women and the Job Search

In Oman, the percentage of women looking for jobs is higher (7.1%) than men (0.8%). Broken down by age groups, women between the ages of 25-29 are most likely to be looking for jobs (16.7%), followed by women younger than 25 (13.8%) (see Table 4).²³

These tendencies will continue and probably be exacerbated in the coming years. To counter them, this will require special attention beyond the current mechanisms of absorbing women graduates and unemployed women.

Table 4: Omani Girls and Women Unemployment Rate by Age Group (February 2020)

Age Group	Unemployment Rate (%)
Less than 25	22.8
25 – 29	33.3
30 – 34	13.0
35 – 39	1.3
Above 40	0
Total	13.2

Source: Monthly Statistical Bulletin, National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI), March 2020. Issue 31. Page 24.

²³ Omani Women, National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI), Social Statistics Series No.3, 2019.

Table 5: Omani Girls and Women Unemployment Rate by Educational Level (February 2020)

Educational Level	Unemployment Rate (%)
Less than General Diploma	0.8
General Diploma	16.5
University Diploma	26.3
University	25.0
Master Degree, Ph.D.	1.3
Total	13.2

Source: Monthly Statistical Bulletin, National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI), March 2020. Issue 31. Page 24.

4.5. Social Protection for Women

The effects of COVID-19 on the economy will directly impact the job market, individual and family income, businesses in general and remittance flows in the Arab region, resulting overall in a smaller middle class. Hence, the consequences of this pandemic will significantly affect vulnerable sub-groups such as women and youth.²⁴

In this context, the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) highlighted the importance of social safety nets, such as unemployment insurance, as well as inclusive social protection systems in the Arab region. If social protection measures are not implemented during the economic slowdown, workers in the informal economy, for example, will be acutely exposed to poverty and food insecurity.

The Omani government, through the Public Authority for Social Insurance, provides insurance programs for Omanis who work in Oman, in the GCC, and outside the Arab region. In 2013, the Omani social protection system expanded to include persons in the “self-employed” category. *The purpose of this system²⁵ is to serve as a complementary incentive mechanism for Omani workers to participate in the “self-employed” category through various schemes and programs.*²⁶ The number of insured employees under this system is 369 employees as of February 24, 2020.²⁷

However, these systems might not be enough if the objective is to protect women from unemployment, reduced income levels, poverty and increasing gender inequalities. According to the “Policy Brief: The Impact of COVID-19 on Women”: *“social protection policies that aim to safeguard and benefit women’s rights and lives, need not only to be more sensitive to needs, such as health insurance, paid sick and maternity leave, pension payments and unemployment benefits for self-employed women. But policies must also consider women in the informal economy, especially if unpaid”.*

In this context, policy implemented by the Oman Public Authority for Social Insurance, such as the “open category” beneficiaries from the Self-Employed Social Insurance System (see the

²⁴ Mitigating the Impact of COVID-19 Poverty and food insecurity in the Arab Region, ESCWA, 2020.

²⁵ The “Social Insurance System for Self-Employed Omanis and the like” was put into effect by royal decree no. 44/2013.

²⁶ Public Authority for Social Insurance: <https://www.pasi.gov.om/en/Pages/InsuranceSystems/SelfServicesSystem.aspx>

²⁷ Takaful Insurance, Public Authority for Social Insurance and Oman Newspaper, attachment Issue No. 108. March 2020.

last category of beneficiaries in Box 2), is an example of the flexibility needed in social safety protection systems to support women who are not considered to be in the informal sector.

Box 2: Beneficiaries of Self-Employed Social Insurance System

- Business-owners: any natural person employing one or more employees.
- Liberal professionals such as lawyers, doctors, engineers, accountants, and auditors.
- Nationals registered in accordance with the Commercial Register Law as working in the fields of trade, industry, commerce, or finance and the like who work on their own account.
- Partners in all commercial companies, except joint stock companies.
- Nationals who are self-employed, for example, as fishermen or in public transportation.
- Nationals who engage in business activities that require a permit or license from competent authorities.
- Other nationals may benefit from the provisions of this law, subject to approval by the Board and the Ministry of Finance and subject to a decision issued by the Minister. The decision should set the date when the provisions of the law take effect.

Source: Public Authority for Social Insurance: <https://www.pasi.gov.om/en/Pages/InsuranceSystems/SelfServicesSystem.aspx>

Policies to mitigate the negative economic effects

In addition to government cash and credit support programs aimed at mitigating the negative economic effects of the current crisis, UNFPA and UN agencies can support government through the following actions proposed:

- ➔ Provide gender analysis and sex-disaggregated data to inform national policies, including measures related to the COVID-19 response.
- ➔ Provide recommendations regarding the implementation of low transaction costs programs.
- ➔ Suggest policies with respect to programs that specifically aim to provide income for women disproportionately represented in sectors affected by COVID-19 quarantine and lockdown measures.
- ➔ Identify women within the informal sector and beyond in order to administer appropriate support.
- ➔ Advise governments on the most effective ways to put cash directly in the hands of women through, for example, the expansion of cash transfer programs; advise on term-conditionality; advise on the use and implementation of mobile banking to ensure women can both access and control funds directed to them.
- ➔ Support the design of fiscal stimulus programs aimed at directly supporting women.
- ➔ Ensure the inclusion of gender expertise as input into analysis and response plans.
- ➔ Ensure gender sensitivity in social protection plans and emergency economic schemes.
- ➔ Conduct analysis on women entrepreneurs and rural women to mitigate negative impact.
- ➔ Develop detailed analyses on potential promising sectors based on current economic and social transformations.
- ➔ In the medium term, estimate impacts on unemployment among women, and forecast the future capacity of the economy to absorb university and technical school graduates.

5. Impact on Health Workers

UN agencies and international organizations stress on the importance of protecting women working in the health sector given that they face significantly higher risks as the frontline of the COVID-19 response. Indeed, women represent approximately 70% of health workers around the world.²⁸

Women also represent the majority of public health workers in Oman (60.3%). Given the significance of their work as well as their vulnerability in the context of this crisis, women deserve the best support and care not only in terms of access to *appropriate Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) but also to social protection systems in case they cannot continue to work.*

Omani Women in Public Health Sector

Women public sector health workers are 16,699 representing 60.3% of workers in public health sector; Ministry of Health (NCSI, Data Portal: <https://data.gov.om/OMHLTH2016/health>).

Omani Women in Private Health Sector

In the private sector, the case is very different, where women are not the majority. Only 24% of health workforce are women (5,078) (NCSI, Data Portal: <https://data.gov.om/byvmwhe/labour-market>). Like other economic activities, private sector health systems might not be working properly during the lockdown.

Referring specifically to the contraction of COVID-19 by women, Dr. Shadha S. Al-Raisi, Director of Non-Communicable Diseases at the Ministry of Health in Oman, affirmed that “present figures and data do not necessarily show women to be as vulnerable to infection, or more affected by the virus, as men. Our figures show the contrary, that more men than women have been diagnosed with COVID-19, as was previously announced by H.E. the Minister of Health”.

Dr Al-Raisi further specified that ministry’s interventions are specifically targeting the elderly as well as people with non-communicable diseases since these are amongst the most vulnerable groups to COVID-19. Other measures implemented by the ministry of health include:

- Public service announcements targeted specifically towards mothers, offering advice and instructions on: how to cope with social distancing and how to encourage children to take preventative measures; such as hand washing and the use of hand sanitizers.
- The development of a guideline by the department of Maternal and paediatric health regarding the management and care of pregnant women during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Responses as of April 9, 2020 through email questionnaire.

²⁸ Gender equity in the health workforce: Analysis of 104 Countries, WHO, 2019, In addition to, COVID-19: A Gender Lens: Protecting Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights, and Promoting Gender Equality, UNFPA, 2020. Technical Brief. Available at: https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/resource-pdf/COVID-19_A_Gender_Lens_Guidance_Note.pdf

Table 6: Health Infrastructure Indicators

Hospitals	81
Hospital Beds	6,823
Health Centers (With Beds)	55
Health Centers (Without Beds)	130
Extended Health Centers	22

Source: Monthly Statistical Bulletin, National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI), Issue 31, Page 37, March 2020.

The Sultanate of Oman has taken strict measures to fight the COVID-19 pandemic, including the creation of a Supreme Committee to follow up on the development of the pandemic. In addition, the Omani government developed a plan for a public health emergency response to COVID-19. The government of Oman is also increasing and extending the scope of examination in all Governorates in order to facilitate the early detection and isolation of cases.²⁹

As part of the Omani government's continued efforts to mitigate the pandemic and ensure the continuity of services to the population, the Royal Hospital launched a **virtual clinic phone service**, which enables remote communication between patients and doctors. The service, which includes security measure to ensure privacy, allows doctors to send text messages at any time during the day. This allows for regular situation assessments as well as the development of appropriate treatment plans.³⁰

It is evident that the use of and demand for health and medical equipment and supplies rises during such pandemics. However, given the global reach of the COVID-19 pandemic, supply chain efficiency has suffered significantly **due to a global lockdown that influences import/export efficiency** (IPPF and IMAP, 2020).

To face the potential shortage of medical supplies and equipment, the Omani government has launched trade missions to increase and accelerate the **transport and import of supplies and equipment from china**.³¹

In parallel, the **Omani government has prioritized regional cooperation**. During a virtual meeting of Ministers on April 4th, GCC countries agreed to ensure continued regional cooperation, setting up a ministerial-level "Task Team" to **coordinate and monitor trade flows**. Additionally, GCC countries agreed to implement a COVID-19 regional system to monitor COVID-19 related statistics in the GCC countries as dashboard for infection data.³²

²⁹ https://timesofoman.com/article/3014155/oman/health/covid-19-health-minister-pays-field-visits?utm_campaign=layout&utm_source=article_page&utm_medium=layout_related_articles

³⁰ https://timesofoman.com/article/3014140/timestv/oman/Videos/virtual-clinic-service-launched-in-oman?utm_source=Speakol_Ads&utm_medium=referral

³¹ <https://timesofoman.com/article/2971370/oman/health/oman-sends-plane-to-import-medical-equipment-from-china>

³² <https://geogcc.gccstat.org/portal/apps/opsdashboard/index.html#/917d2690711b402192af82b7398e470c>

Measure addressing the consequences of the pandemic on gender inequalities

Given that United Nations agencies considerations and aim to address the consequences of the pandemic on gender inequalities, the United Nations could work to support governments in:

- Strengthening health care systems from a gender perspective.
- Provide policy advice and support the procurement of health equipment and supplies.
- Advocacy and awareness raising with respect to the unequal effects of the pandemic on women compared to men.
- Ensuring the continued availability of health services and support for girls and women, including the availability of online health support.
- Assist health providers in awareness campaigns and technical support for pregnant women.
- Support the development of a medical waste system to manage waste as a result of this crisis.
- Provide a continued flow of data and experiences from other countries for comparison and decision-making.

6. The Burden on Women

The United Nations expects a multidimensional impact on women as a result of the specific mitigation measures implemented by governments to confront the pandemic (General quarantine or confinement, school closings etc...). In addition to socio-economic impacts, the United Nations has declared the pandemic **a threat on gender equality achievements**.³³

*“The COVID-19 global crisis has made starkly visible the fact that the world’s formal economies and the maintenance of our daily lives are built on the invisible and unpaid labor of women and girls. With children out of school, intensified care needs of older persons and ill family members, and overwhelmed health services, demands for care work in a COVID- 19 world have intensified exponentially”.*³⁴

In addition, the **need for psychosocial and mental health support** is expected to drastically increase as a result of social distancing measures that cause situations like social isolation and symptoms like anxiety. **Women will face an extra burden given the increased amount of unpaid time they will spend child-rearing, family-caring and housekeeping.** Moreover, women will suffer the consequences of **being on the frontlines of the fight against the pandemic, as they interact more with people in their communities**, contributing to care work and community activities.³⁵

“The expectation that women stay home and perform care work for dependent individuals in the Arab region may result in more women leaving the labour market, and being forced into further untenable work arrangements.”

The Impact of COVID-19 on Gender Equality, ESCWA, Policy Brief No.3, 2020.

*“Girls and adolescent girls are also impacted by the care work burdens of COVID-19: Recent data shows that adolescent girls spend significantly more hours on chores compared to their male counterparts. School closures do not just mean that girls are taking on more chores at home, it could also lead to millions of more girls dropping out of school before they complete their education, especially girls living in poverty, girls with disabilities or girls living in rural, isolated locations... Evidence from past epidemics shows that adolescent girls are at particular risk of drop out and not returning to school even after the crisis is over”.*³⁶

World Health Organization published a paper on mental health and psychosocial considerations during the COVID-19 outbreak, as this time of crisis is generating stress throughout the

³³ Leaving No One Behind in the Time of COVID-19. Preliminary mapping of potential socio-economic impacts of Covid-19 and guidance for policy responses in Egypt through a vulnerability lens, the UN System – Egypt, April 2, 2020.

³⁴ <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/policy-brief-the-impact-of-covid-19-on-women-en.pdf>

³⁵ COVID-19: A Gender Lens; Protecting Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights, and Promoting Gender Equality, United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), Technical Brief, March 2020.

³⁶ Policy Brief: The Impact of COVID-19 on Women. <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/policy-brief-the-impact-of-covid-19-on-women-en.pdf>

population.³⁷ On another note, The United Nations Sustainable Development Group (UNSDG) also expects an increase in levels of Gender Based Violence (GBV) in some countries.³⁸

In the Omani context, Royal Decree 42/2005 approved the Sultanate's ratification to join the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Woman (CEDAW)³⁹ and the legal framework is strict in this regard (see Box 3 on legal framework). In addition to monitoring human rights violations and providing assistance in resolution and settlement, the Oman Human Rights Commission (OHRC) engages in advocacy and awareness raising regarding human rights and provides an open hotline for complaints related to any type of discrimination or human rights violations.⁴⁰

Box 3: Legal Framework in Place Protecting Against Gender-based Violence

The following articles from Basic Constitutional Law afford protection from gender-based violence (GBV):

- The 'Social Principles' of the Constitution are justice, equality, and equal opportunities (Article 12).
- The family is the basis of society, and the Law regulates the means of protecting the family, safeguarding its legal structure, reinforcing its ties and values, providing care for its members, and creating suitable conditions for the development of their capacities and capabilities (Article 12).
- All citizens are equal before the law, and they are equal in public rights and duties. There shall be no discrimination between them on the grounds of gender, origin, colour, language, religion, sect, domicile, or social status (Article 17)

The main laws relevant to gender justice are:

- Civil Pension Fund Law, Royal Decree 26/86
- Social Insurance Law, Royal Decree 72/91
- Basic Law of the State, Royal Decree 101/96
- Personal Status Law, Royal Decree 32/97
- Criminal Procedures Law, Royal Decree 97/99
- Civil and Commercial Procedures Law, Royal Decree 29/2002
- Labour Law, Royal Decree 35/2003
- Civil Service Law, Royal Decree 120/2004
- Mediation and Reconciliation Law, Royal Decree 98/2005
- Law on Combating Trafficking in Persons, Royal Decree 126/2008
- Civil Transaction Law, Royal Decree 29/2013
- Child Law, Royal Decree 22/2014
- Nationality Law, Royal Decree 38/2014
- Penal Code, Royal Decree 7/2018

Source: Gender Justice & The Law. (2018) United Nation Development Programme (UNDP). Publication was developed by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in collaboration with the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for West Asia (ESCWA). https://arabstates.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/Oman%20Country%20Assessment%20-%20English_0.pdf

³⁷ <https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/mental-health-considerations.pdf>

³⁸ Shared Responsibility, Global Solidarity: Responding to the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19, United Nations Sustainable Development Group (UNSDG), March 2020.

³⁹ <https://www.ohrc.org/english/core-treaties/>

⁴⁰ <https://www.ohrc.org/english/chairmans-message/>

6.1. The Ministry of Social Development Support for Women

The government of Oman established the Family Protection Unit, including a shelter protection system to protect women, children, and trafficking survivors from abuse. The shelter protection system provides basic lodging, psychological counselling, legal services, and medical care. In addition, Oman has implemented hotlines for long-time abuse survivors (2009).⁴¹

The Ministry of Social Development (MoSD) also provides support to Omani Women's Associations that aim to improve the status of women in society. The government has correspondingly formed a committee to monitor the country's compliance with the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). The National Committee to Combat Human Trafficking is responsible for developing a plan to combat human trafficking. The Omani Commission for Human Rights has adopted a position towards combating Gender-Based Violence (GBV).⁴²

In 2001, the Ministry of Social Development established the Department of Family Counselling and Guidance in order to contribute to the multi-faceted work of the social work system, provided by the Ministry of Social Development to citizens through its directorates, departments and divisions in various regions and states in the Sultanate. The primary task of this department is to provide guidance and counselling services to individuals and families in order to confront the various psycho-social challenges that may threaten family structure and unity as a result of economic, educational and social changes.⁴³

The department provides guidance and counselling services by means of home meetings, office or home visits and via free phone calls. The department also organizes prevention and awareness programs related to social and psychological societal issues.

Dar Al-Wefaq is an established shelter center and support space for women. It conducts social research for beneficiaries, and assesses psychological status in addition to conducting medical examinations. Based on an evaluation, the centre provides treatment and rehabilitation plans.⁴⁴

6.2. Supporting Women with Disability and Special Needs

The Omani state already provides support programs and services that permit disabled persons to remain semi-autonomous. While disabled people in Oman remain autonomous by using a "disabilities-card" to acquire many needed services⁴⁵, the COVID-19 outbreak will have particular effects on people with disabilities and special needs beyond their traditional needs. As a result, the specific effects on the disabled *need to be considered, given the different impacts surrounding detection and access to treatment for women and men, as well as for their overall wellbeing*".⁴⁶

UN Women proposes the adoption of urgent protective measures to support women with disabilities during the pandemic, including the establishment of monitoring systems with emergency hotlines and social service-based house calls and check-ups. In addition to

⁴¹ https://arabstates.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/Oman%20Country%20Assessment%20-%20English_0.pdf

⁴² https://arabstates.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/Oman%20Country%20Assessment%20-%20English_0.pdf

⁴³ <https://www.mosd.gov.om/index.php/en/family-development-2/family-counselling-and-guidance>

⁴⁴ <https://www.mosd.gov.om/index.php/ar/2018-02-17-09-35-08>

⁴⁵ Omani Women; Partnership and Development, NCSI and MoSD, 2019.

⁴⁶ COVID-19: A Gender Lens, UNFPA, 2020.

government and civil society-related organizations, telecommunications companies could also collaborate to ensure inclusivity and accessibility to hotlines.⁴⁷

In term of an adequate policy response to the pandemic, Oman’s government has a unique opportunity to continue to build upon it’s existing overall legal framework for ensuring equal rights and treatment for people with disabilities (check Box 4).

Box 4: Laws and Regulation supporting Persons with Disabilities

- The Disabled Care and Rehabilitation Law issued by the Royal Decree No. 63/2008
- The International Agreement for the Rights of the Disabled accredited by the Royal Decree No. 121/2008
- The organizational statute for establishing disabled rehabilitation centres issued by the Ministerial Decision No. 124/2008
- Disabled card issuance statute issued by the Ministerial Decision No. 94/2008
- The National Committee for Disabled Care issued by the Ministerial Decision No. 1/2009 headed by the Minister and the membership of a number of the Excellences the Undersecretaries of the concerned ministries, a representative from the private sector, a representative from the disabled rehabilitation centres and a representative from the disabled. The Committee shall assume its authorities stated in article No. (14) of the disabled care and rehabilitation law.
- The specialized sub-committees emerging from the National Committee for Disabled Care: They are 8 sub-committees that were formed in pursuant with the Ministerial decisions. They are headed by the excellences of the Undersecretaries of the concerned ministries except for the health services committee and the financial affairs committee. These committees are (the education committee, rehabilitation, training and employment committee, transport and communication committee, health services committee, appropriate environment committee, sports committee, media committee and the financial affairs committee).
- Form the observation committee on the national level to enhance and activate the International Agreement on the Disabled Rights in pursuant with the Ministerial decision No. 124/2010

Source: <https://www.mosd.gov.om/index.php/en/special-care-2/persons-with-disabilities>

There are three Special Rehabilitation Centres for persons with disabilities in the governorate of Muscat: Muscat Autism Centre, Innovation Centre for Rehabilitation and Ro'a Center for Rehabilitation. In addition, there are ten Rehabilitation centres affiliated to the Care of the Disabled Children Association.⁴⁸

Given the present circumstances, the UN country team Oman should build on the existing systems that support women and girls with disabilities by aiding government in establishing “monitoring systems, including emergency hotlines and social service-based house calls and check-ups”. **These systems will help the government and UNCT Oman identify appropriate needs of women and girls with disabilities and develop the required emergency response.**

⁴⁷ COVID-19 and Implications for Inclusive Economic Empowerment in Caricom: Policy and Programme Considerations, UN WOMEN, (2020).

⁴⁸ <https://www.mosd.gov.om/index.php/en/special-care-2/special-rehabilitation-centers>

6.3. The Impact on Adolescent Girls

The United Nation Sustainable Development Group (UNSDG) recognizes that girls and adolescent girls will be particularly impacted by the ‘care work burdens’ of COVID-19. For example; adolescent girls spend significantly more hours on chores compared to their male counterparts. Moreover, the UNSDG argues that current negative impacts will overload the burden of young women at home in addition to forcing them to drop out of education paths: “*school closures do not just mean that girls are taking on more chores at home, it could also lead to millions more girls dropping out of school before they complete their education*”.⁴⁹

The UNSDG also notes that the probability of these negative impacts are higher for adolescent girls living in poverty, young women with disabilities, and young women living in rural or secluded locations. These young women also risk more difficulties reintegrating education after the end of the pandemic.⁵⁰ Overall, adolescent girls will lose educational and work opportunities given their lack of skills, education and knowledge.

Young women and girls are also expected to suffer anxiety and mental health problems. Therefore, the UN country team in Egypt has proposed the strengthening of digital communication channels to keep adolescents and youth informed and provide mutual support networks in addition to providing online, interactive psycho-social and mental health counselling services tailored to adolescents.⁵¹

The measures taken during this pandemic to stop virus spread will force unusual life styles for everyone, imposing restrictions on movement, for example, that affect most of the population. However, these restrictions will have greater negative impacts on young women and girls since, as the UNSDG indicates, young women and girls are at higher risk of partner violence and other forms of domestic violence during the pandemic.⁵²

UNFPA expects that protection systems for women and girls might weaken or break down during such pandemic; including community structures. With changing dynamics during the outbreak, specific mitigation measures should be implemented to protect women and girls from the risk of intimate partner violence.⁵³ Consequently, this could end up with increasing early marriage rates.⁵⁴

“Continuity of care must be ensured in case of severe facility service interruption or other disruption in access for women and girls of reproductive age. Obstacles and barriers must be addressed, enabling women’s and girls’ access to services, including psychosocial support services, especially those subject to violence or who may be at risk of violence in quarantine.”

Source: COVID-19: A Gender Lens. UNFPA. 2020.

⁴⁹ Policy Brief: the Impact of COVID-19 on Women, UNSDG, April 2020.

⁵⁰ Policy Brief: the Impact of COVID-19 on Women, UNSDG, April 2020.

⁵¹ Leaving No One Behind in the Time of COVID-19. Preliminary mapping of potential socio-economic impacts of Covid-19 and guidance for policy responses in Egypt through a vulnerability lens, the UN System – Egypt, April 2, 2020.

⁵² Shared Responsibility, Global Solidarity: Responding to the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19, United Nations Sustainable Development Group (UNSDG), March 2020.

⁵³ COVID-19: A Gender Lens, UNFPA, 2020.

⁵⁴ <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/04/09/covid-19s-devastating-impact-children>

6.4. Women Vulnerable Groups

Women Group	Interventions and Measures	The Case of Oman
Elderly Women	<p>Prioritization of social assistance to elderly women without an income.</p> <p>Source: COVID-19 and Implications for Inclusive Economic Empowerment in Caricom: Policy and Programme Considerations, UN WOMEN, 2020.</p>	<p>Elderly men and women who cannot count on family or relatives for care are able to access the Elderly Social Care Housing System. In total, there are 42 Omanis in Elderly Care Housing, out of which 12 are women.⁵⁵</p>
Elderly women with pensions	<p>A reassessment of pension sums is necessary given the anticipated increases in caring responsibilities and increased household, medical, food and utility expenditures. It will be important to ensure that women in moderate economic situations do not fall below the poverty line.</p> <p>Source: COVID-19 and Implications for Inclusive Economic Empowerment in Caricom: Policy and Programme Considerations, UN WOMEN, 2020.</p>	<p>As of January, 2020, 83,671 Omani women receive government pensions, of which 2,444 (29%) women are older than 50. Pension sums for all women are above the minimum wage (325 OR). The lowest pension bracket is around 325-400 OR (1,382 women receive this amount).⁵⁶</p>
Women Beneficiaries of Public Assistance	<p>Food security is an immediate challenge for women who receive public assistance. Support is required for women who do not hold bank accounts and who need receive public assistance payments without bank fees.</p> <p>Source: COVID-19 and Implications for Inclusive Economic Empowerment in Caricom: Policy and Programme Considerations, UN WOMEN, 2020.</p>	<p>A total of 76,377 Omani families benefit from Social Security, of which 77% are women and girls, 8% are divorced women, and 8% are widows.⁵⁷</p>
Rural Women	<p>Measures that encourage local food production in order to mitigate food security threats must also account for women farmers and agri-business entrepreneurs throughout the supply chain - from primary production to marketing and sale of raw produce and processed goods.</p> <p>Source: COVID-19 and Implications for Inclusive Economic Empowerment in Caricom: Policy and Programme Considerations, UN WOMEN, 2020.</p>	<p>The Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries (Department for Rural Women) provides free services to women in rural areas with limited income. After a target group evaluation, women can receive animal and agricultural project grants. These services target:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⇒ Women working in agriculture and animal husbandry. ⇒ Families who receive Social Security with limited income. <p>(Omanuna, Rural Women Department Services)</p> <p>In addition to 59 branches of Omani Women Associations,⁵⁸ four Rural Women Development Centers support rural women and raise awareness</p>

⁵⁵ Omani Women, National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI), Social Statistics Series No.3, Page 40, 2019.

⁵⁶ Monthly Statistical Bulletin, National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI), Issue 31, Page 22, March 2020.

⁵⁷ Omani Women, National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI), Social Statistics Series No.3, Page 38-39, 2019.

⁵⁸ <https://www.mosd.gov.om/index.php/ar/2013-12-29-09-44-45/2013-12-29-09-44-31>

Women Group	Interventions and Measures	The Case of Oman
		around social, cultural, economic issues. In 2015, these associations counted 215 rural women members. ⁵⁹
Pregnant Women	<p>Pregnant women with respiratory illnesses require priority treatment due to the increased risk of adverse outcomes. Antenatal, neonatal and maternal health units must be separated from areas that have hosted identified COVID-19 cases.</p> <p>Source: COVID-19: A Gender Lens, UNFPA, 2020.</p>	<p>The number of women visiting clinics for pregnant women has increased from 71.3% in 2014 to 75% in 2018.</p> <p>During the same period, the maternal mortality rate has decreased from 18.3 to 15.1 for every 100,000 births.⁶⁰</p>
Women Living with Disabilities	<p>Urgent protective measures: Governments should collaborate with organizations working with disabled people in order to establish monitoring systems, including emergency hotlines and social service-based house calls and check-ups.</p> <p>Telecommunications firms could also collaborate to ensure that hotlines are fully inclusive and accessible.</p> <p>Source: COVID-19 and Implications for Inclusive Economic Empowerment in Caricom: Policy and Programme Considerations, UN WOMEN, 2020.</p>	<p>Programs and services already exist that provide disabled persons with the tools necessary to remain independent. In Oman, disabled persons can acquire needed services using a “disabilities-card”, which allows them to receive many useful services.</p> <p>In 2018, 31,727 people held a disabilities-card, of which 35% were girls and women.⁶¹</p>
Abused Women	<p>Moving women support services online, in addition to stepping up advocacy and awareness campaigns that also target and educate men at home.</p> <p>Source: Policy Brief: the Impact of COVID-19 on Women, UNSDG, April 2020.</p>	<p>The Sultanate of Oman has worked to eliminate all types of discrimination against women, including discrimination occurring in the context of marriage and with families. Both Royal decrees and laws exist which aim to bring justice for women in all matters related to marriage.</p> <p>Both family and women's associations provide premarital education programs, lectures, and seminars. The Ministry of Social Development Family offers counselling and advisory services through in-person guidance or by phone. Individuals can also receive psychological, social and economic counsel.</p> <p>In 2014, there was one recorded case of abuse, while 4 cases were registered in 2018. These cases were addressed in Dar Al-WEFAQ by judicial order.⁶²</p>

⁵⁹ Omani Women, National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI), Social Statistics Series No.3, Page 49, 2019.

⁶⁰ Omani Women, National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI), Social Statistics Series No.3, Page 10, 2019.

⁶¹ Omani Women; Partnership and Development, NCSI and MoSD, Page 47, 2019.

⁶² Omani Women, National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI), Social Statistics Series No.3, Page 52-53, 2019.

In the current situation, Dr Al-Balushi, Dean of the College of Law at Sultan Qaboos University (SQU), recommends the following in order to better support Omani women:

- Increased prevention and support activities for women vulnerable to HIV due to the nature of the care work they provide at homes for elderly and paediatric patients.
- Ensure continued health care access for women of reproductive-age.
- The involvement of Omani women's associations in awareness-raising campaigns.
- Provide financial compensation (i.e. unemployment payments) to women affected by the virus during the economic shutdown period; to women workers in general and specifically in the Handicrafts industries.

Dr. Rashid Al-Balushi, suggests that, both in the present and future, it will be particularly beneficial to set health care policies that take gender equality in health justice into account. Omani women have an equal role in contributing to the design of responses to epidemics, which is why it is vital to ensure their equitable involvement in decision-making throughout health care efforts.

The Sultan Qaboos University could contribute in raising awareness of women's rights in the context of several pieces of legislation covering aspects of health in Oman. It is also important to develop partnerships between educational and health institutions in order to spread awareness and educate women about how to best deal with crises and epidemics.

Dr Al-Balushi recommends that, in order to support Omani women during and after the pandemic, the UN agencies in Oman including World Health Organization in partnership with the Omani Ministry of Health can engage in the following initiatives and activities:

- Conduct qualitative analysis and provide accurate data on women and their conditions during the outbreak period in order to provide appropriate health support, especially for pregnant women and women with HIV.
- Support national initiatives to contain the virus and limit its spread by providing medical support.
- Provide technical services and work with local partners and civil society organizations to raise awareness regarding prevention methods.
- Provide and establish health research centres for women, especially rural women.

Dr. Rashid bin Hamed Al-Balushi
Dean of the College of Law
Sultan Qaboos University
Response as of April 20, 2020 via email questionnaire.

7. Response to the COVID-19 Outbreak in Oman

In the fight against the pandemic, preventing negative socio-economic effects on the life of women is, from a medical standpoint, as important as preventing the spread of the virus.

7.1. Response “as One”

Unprecedented in recent history, the COVID-19 pandemic has become a global crisis affecting millions of people around the world and severely punishing vulnerable populations. A response to this crisis requires:

- ⇒ **The united and coordinated efforts of UN agencies;**
- ⇒ **Ensuring close and continued coordination with government;**
- ⇒ **Encouraging engagement by all national level actors;**
- ⇒ **The promotion of regional and international coordination.**

It is vital to apply the humanitarian, development and peace nexus approach through organizational coherence, collaboration, synergy and partnerships to assist government responses; governments, NGOs and other aid agencies need to work on jointly agreed goals to make the most of comparative advantages.

Source: COVID-19: A Gender Lens, UNFPA, 2020.

On a national level, it is important to prioritize the scaling up of health system preparedness and responses in addition to increasing investments in the healthcare sector. Due to the magnitude of this crisis, **coordinated, decisive and innovative policy actions** are required by all of the world’s leading economies. In addition to strong national leadership, this means maximizing financial and technical support for the most vulnerable countries and populations.

Partnerships are paramount in order to accelerate the global response to COVID-19 on the local, national and global levels. Given that local governments are on the frontline of the fight against the pandemic, their capacity to respond rapidly will depend on their financial support they receive from national governments and other actors. **Local and national authorities must maintain constant dialogue and coordination in order to implement effective measures.**⁶³

7.2. A Gender-Lens Response

During this time of crisis, stress and panic will develop throughout certain communities.⁶⁴ Although the impact of additional pressures will be general, employed, self-employed, unemployed and elderly women will bear considerably more stress as a result of increased work in the home environment (caring for the house, the family, the children, and the elderly etc...)⁶⁵.

⁶³ Shared Responsibility, Global Solidarity: Responding to the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19, United Nations Sustainable Development Group (UNSDG), March 2020.

⁶⁴ Mental Health and Psychosocial Considerations during the COVID-19 Outbreak, World Health Organization (WHO), 2020.

⁶⁵ COVID-19: A Gender Lens, UNFPA, 2020.

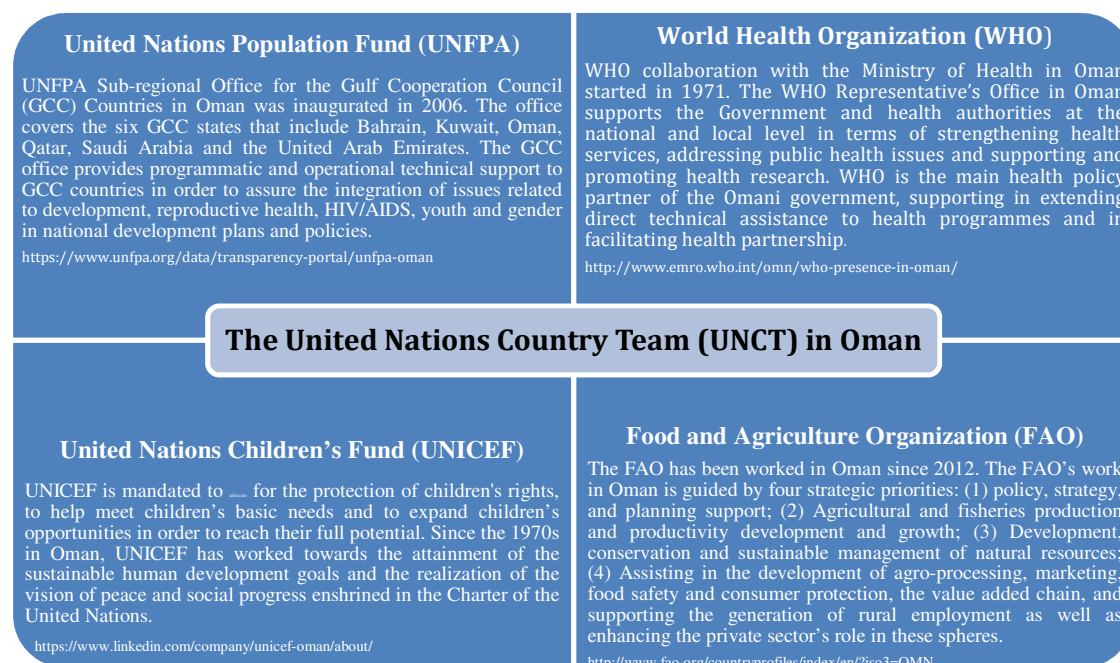
Main Conclusion: *“The COVID-19 pandemic and its social and economic impacts have created a global crisis unparalleled in the history of the United Nations—and one which requires a whole-of-society response to match its sheer scale and complexity. But this response, whether at the national or international level, will be significantly weakened if it does not factor in the ways in which inequalities have made all of us more vulnerable to the impacts of the crisis. Or, if we choose to simply repeat past policies and fail to use this moment to rebuild more equal, inclusive and resilient societies.”*

Source: Policy Brief: The Impact of COVID-19 on Women, United Nations Sustainable Development Group (UNSDG).

Addressing the gender impact of the COVID-19 response is essential for inclusive development and sustainability. The UNSDG has highlighted the main pillars to consider during the response:

- ✓ *Include women and women’s organizations at the heart of the COVID-19 response;*
- ✓ *Transform inequities of unpaid care work into a new, inclusive care economy that works for everyone;*
- ✓ *Design socio-economic plans with an intentional focus on the lives and futures of women and girls.*

Alongside WHO Oman, the UNFPA GCC office might be able to lead the response to the COVID-19 outbreak in Oman, leveraging UNFPA community-engagement experience and know-how in coordination with the Omani government in order to mobilize youth, women and religious actors and networks.⁶⁶ At the same time, UNFPA’s sub-regional office for GCC countries can ensure cooperation and information flow between GCC countries.



⁶⁶ COVID-19: A Gender Lens, UNFPA, 2020.

7.3. Health and Socio-economic Responses to the Pandemic

During such a global crisis, it is essential that any “response match the unique nature of the crisis and that the magnitude of the response match the scale of the crisis”. There is consensus on the fact that no one nation can overcome this crisis alone. Only a coordinated, global response will effectively address a global health and human crisis of this magnitude. In this context, the United Nations Sustainable Development Group (UNSDG)⁶⁷ has called for the following actions:

- An Immediate health response to effectively contain the transmission of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) disease and end the pandemic. This response must be a “large-scale, coordinated and comprehensive multinational response that may cost up to 10% of global GDP”.
- Given the disproportionate and unequal effects of this crisis, the response must focus attention on vulnerable groups including women, youth, workers in the informal sector, SMEs and low-wage workers.

7.3.1. The Health Impact Mitigation Response

The UN Development Coordination Office (UNDCO), together with the WHO, requested Resident Coordinators and UN Country Teams (UNCTs) to provide updates on the COVID-19 epidemiological situation and introduce the COVID-19 Strategic Preparedness and Response Plan (SPRP). As a priority, the following public health preparedness actions and responses should be considered in the UNCTs current and upcoming response plans:⁶⁸

- Ensure country-level coordination, planning, and monitoring;
- Encourage and implement risk communication and community engagement;
- Provide surveillance and rapid-response teams;
- Ensure case investigations and management;
- Monitor points of entry;
- Activate and equip national laboratories;
- Infection prevention and control;
- Provide operations support and logistics.

The WHO realizes that the Omani health system is an attractive model for piloting global health strategies and initiatives by the WHO and other agencies.⁶⁹ The UNCT in Oman has developed the eight pillars of the Omani system, in-line with their knowledge of country capacities and plans. These pillars should guide the UN-Government cooperation.

⁶⁷ Shared Responsibility, Global Solidarity: Responding to the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19, United Nations Sustainable Development Group (UNSDG), March 2020.

⁶⁸ COVID-19 Strategic Preparedness and Response Plan: Operational Planning Guidelines to Support Country Preparedness and Response, World Health Organization (WHO), 2020.

⁶⁹ <http://www.emro.who.int/omn/who-presence-in-oman/>

Pillar 1: Country-level coordination, planning, and monitoring

Establish National Public Health Emergency Team and Management Mechanisms

- ➔ Ensure coordination with government counterparts and build a unified team using existing relationships. For example:
 - The UNFPA can coordinate with the Ministry of Social Development (including Omani Women Association), Social Protection, and National Centre of Statistics and Information.
 - The WHO can coordinate with the Ministry of Health as well as the Oman's Supreme Committee for Dealing with COVID-19.
 - UNICEF can collaborate with the Ministry of Education and related children NGOs (such as children First).
 - The FAO can coordinate with the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, especially the Department for Rural Women.

The UN agencies, in collaboration with the government of Oman have been preparing an Operational Plan and Estimate of Available Resources in order to identify system flaws and gaps. These plans should include detailed assessments of vulnerable populations, especially women. In addition to establishing monitoring and evaluation systems to assess the success and effect of planned measures.

- ➔ UN agencies continue its coordination with the government to develop the best approach to establish an Incident Management Team that includes UNCT, Government, and Civil Society Organizations.

This coordination should include the identification of mutual Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for joint plans.

- ➔ The UNCT and the government of Oman have been reviewing the situation on a regular basis to decide whether to incorporate modifications into plans in addition to related linked KPIs. Furthermore, it is vital that actors organize to learn from their actions and plans in response to the COVID-19 outbreak in order to better prepare for future crises.

Pillar 2: Risk communication and community engagement

Promote community-based communication networks to create trustworthy information channels and mitigate misinformation.

- ➔ Support the government of Oman in identifying efficient community-based networks (through religious leaders, community leaders, social media influencers, women groups, youth groups, traditional leaders, labour unions, business unions, schools, farmer's unions, CSOs, NGOs etc...).
- ➔ Support the government in enlarging outreach within Omani communities, with a focus on women, children, and elders (following national public health containment recommendations).
- ➔ Establish a mechanism to survey communities and collect feedback in order to enhance community-based approach responses accordingly and develop evidence-based evaluations for future applications and programs.

Pillar 3: Surveillance, rapid response teams, and case investigation

Support data collection, monitoring and analysis of the COVID-19 Outbreak in Oman

- Support the Omani government in investigating cases and identifying system flaws and gaps.
- Enhance existing systems by training and equipping rapid-response teams to investigate cases, especially high-risk groups like the elderly and pregnant women.
- Provide timely epidemiological and social science data, analysis, and reports to disseminate on regional and international levels.

Pillar 4: Points of entry

Support Oman government in allocating efforts and resources at points of entry (POEs) to focus on supporting surveillance and risk communication activities

- Develop and implement a POEs emergency plan.
- Provide and implement regional and international best practices in staff training.
- Cooperate with the government to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of readiness and response measures at points of entry, and propose appropriate improvements.

Pillar 5: National laboratories

Provide support to access relevant reference laboratories, protocols, reagents, and supplies

- Share and educate on standard operating procedures and adaptation strategies.
- Support in developing and implementing plans to link laboratory data with key epidemiological data for timely data analysis.
- Help in developing quality assurance mechanisms and M&E systems to ensure data quality. Findings and results should be shared in order to improve and adapt methods and mechanisms.

Pillar 6: Infection prevention and control

Support in enhancing infection prevention and control (IPC) practices in communities and health facilities

- Assess IPC risk capacity at all levels (healthcare system, public places, and in-house). In addition, review and update existing national IPC guidelines and develop community guidelines on IPC. Furthermore, develop and implement a plan to monitor healthcare personnel exposed to confirmed cases of COVID-19. Develop a national plan to manage PPE supply.
- Document all cases of healthcare-associated infections, and develop visual diagnosis material (educational material in appropriate language) for family members and patients.
- Support improved access to hygiene in public areas, healthcare facilities and in the home. Provide IPC risk assessment-based support and training.

Pillar 7: Case management

Provide guidance on case prioritization and vulnerable populations care (elderly people, patients with chronic diseases, pregnant women, female healthcare workers and children).

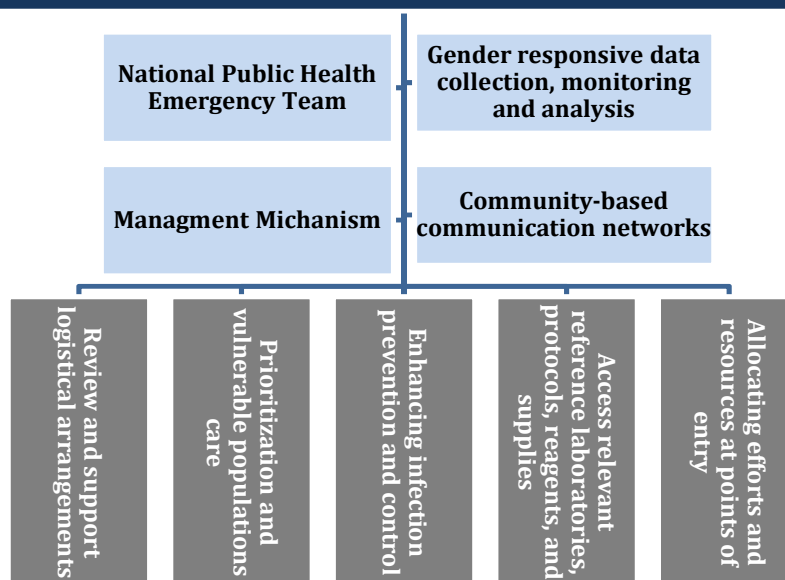
- ➔ Map vulnerable populations, such as health workers, elderly people and pregnant women). Ensure continuous assessments on health system load and capacity (burden and stress on workers and facilities).
- ➔ Provide updates on COVID-19-specific protocols based on international standards and WHO clinical guidance. In parallel, ensure Omani global collaboration by participating in clinical expert networks to aid in the clinical characterization of the COVID-19 infection and address challenges in clinical care.
- ➔ Support the adoption of international R&D guidance, and WHO protocols for special studies (companionate use, Monitored Emergency Use of Unregistered and Investigational Interventions). Support the assessment of case management efficiency, particularly for the elderly, pregnant women, children, and immunocompromised patients), then address gaps and modify as required for more efficiency.

Pillar 8: Operational support and logistics

Periodically work with the government of Oman to review and support logistical arrangements, such as procurement of essential supplies

- ➔ Provide support in reviewing and mapping resources, supply chains, and supplies inventories (based on WHO's (a) Disease Commodity Package (DCP) and the (b) COVID-19 patient kit) and develop a central stock reserve for COVID-19 case management.
- ➔ Review and assess medical supply chain control and management systems, procurement processes, and local markets. Support the coordinating of international supply requests through regional and global procurement mechanisms.
- ➔ Help in identifying important operations; support in planning for the sustainable functioning of resources, like water, sanitation and human capital, during critical times.

The Health Impact Mitigation Response



The response to pandemics and such crises should be **flexible and continuously re-examined** based on relevant and up-to-date data and practices. The above-mentioned ‘eight pillars’ provide a basis for planning and implementing interventions with government. Implementation of responses will depend on government needs and should align with governmental strategic priorities during the crisis. Close coordination and plan reviews, depending on results, will need to allow for regular adjustments based on on-the-ground progress.

7.3.2. The Socio-economic Impact Mitigation Response

“National solidarity is crucial to leave no one behind”

- ⇒ **Undertake fiscal stimulus and support for the most vulnerable.** In addition, women and girls must have a face in the response.
- ⇒ **Protect Human Rights and focus on inclusion.** Such as, access to additional financial aid for persons with disabilities and their families and ensure that persons with disabilities and under care, living in public and private facilities, are protected from neglect and abuse.
- ⇒ **Support to SMEs.** For example, governments can provide assistance to firms to maintain the flow of essential inputs, final products and services.
- ⇒ **Support decent work.** Such as, subsidized short-time working, in the short-run, and hiring subsidies in the longer term must consider populations likely to be most adversely affected.
- ⇒ **Support education.** Furthermore, preserve Quality Education for Children and Youth.
- ⇒ **Prioritize social cohesion measures.** Through, preserving and boosting social cohesion through free access to educational and cultural resources can be used to overcome social isolation.

Source: Shared Responsibility, Global Solidarity: Responding to the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19, United Nations Sustainable Development Group (UNSDG), March 2020.

The government of Oman has already provided financial incentives for various economic sectors in order to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on Oman economy. Since this is the first time the world is witnessing a pandemic of this scale, it is vital that the Omani government seriously consider the medium and long-term structural changes the economy will undergo. This transformation will have a direct impact on job opportunities, especially for young female graduates, not only in terms of supply but also in terms of the types of jobs available.

Preserving Omani Socio-economic Development Gains

Oman has demonstrated a practical commitment to Sustainable Development Goals, especially those concerning women empowerment and equality. The Omani legal system and framework, programs and their implementation have produced solid results, placing Oman beyond the regional and international average in terms of women's health, education and overall rights. In this light, policies and programs need to ensure the preservation of these gains and further reinforce these achievements.

Ensure Community Engagement in the Fight Against COVID-19

Response to this pandemic requires the active and serious involvement of all actors; including UN agencies, government and civil society (especially women-led civil society organizations). Women-led CSOs need to join forces in a complementary manner, in order to support communities socially and economically, through an efficient mobilization of key actors to ensure that people have access to the right information and resources, in order to endure the crisis and help vulnerable populations.

Women's community organizations can open opportunities and spaces for women's voices and participation while helping the government to collect data on socio-economic changes occurring within and among different communities.

Collection of Gender Responsive Information

During this pandemic and afterwards, the need for detailed data will be greater than ever. Collection of gender disaggregated data and information related to COVID-19 and the pandemic's socio-economic impacts is essential to analysing health, social and economic changes in order to respond quickly and appropriately to mitigate negative effects.

Ensure Availability of Women Support and Special Needs

During such pandemics, experience demonstrates that women's basic needs go unmet. It is thus critical for women to be able to access care to respond to such gender specific needs as those related to reproductive health, for example. What is more, the burden on women is expected to increase during this pandemic with increased time spent engaging in different kinds of care work, adding to other pandemic-related pressures. Women will require more support and attention from their families, government and UN agencies, and especially from women's civil society organizations. Preparedness in responding to women's needs will have a significant impact on women's mental and physical state and will help minimize socio-economic and psychological negative impacts. If government policy does not counter the pressures women will face, women's participation and contribution to the formal economy may be negatively affected in the long run.

- ⇒ Further studies will be needed on **“women leaving the economy as a result of an increased social burden during the pandemic”**.

Financial Packages and Market Linkages to Women-led Businesses

During and after this crisis, micro, small and medium businesses will suffer the most. While the government of Oman can provide financial support through financial packages or loan incentives through interest-rate free credit, it is also important that policies and actions facilitate opportunities for women entrepreneurs within private and government companies. Incentives that aim to integrate women entrepreneurs within large companies will have multidimensional impacts on the economy and produce benefits for both entrepreneurs and corporations.

- ⇒ Further analytical study is required with respect to the **“possibilities of market linkages between women entrepreneurs and corporations in Oman”**.

New Market Entrepreneurial Opportunities for Women

During this crisis period and in the post-COVID-19 world, demand for specific goods and services will increase. Presently, there is a high demand for hygiene-related products, online services, and organic and natural foods, for instance. The outbreak will impact demand patterns and consumer behaviour. These phenomena will affect local, regional and international markets. While there may be a general negative effect on economic activity in the short run, there will certainly be positive impacts on specific goods and services in the medium and long run.

- ⇒ Additional research is need to analyze **“new market opportunities in Oman during and after the outbreak”**.

Women Employees in the Private Sector

The government of Oman has successfully implemented plans to integrate women into the private sector while growing the economy and creating new jobs that meet the demand of a new generation in a fast-paced globalized economy. The integration of women into the market should continue at the same pace and, if possible, continue with financial incentives for companies that will need to endure the pandemic period.

- ⇒ Assessment research should be conducted on the **“economic impact on women employability in the market”**.

Social Protection for Women

Omanis enjoy the benefits of a strong social protection system. However, the current crisis has increased financial burdens and dramatically changed spending priorities for families. Therefore, during this crisis it is crucial that the state mitigate related negative impacts on women. The social protection system should take these burdens into account, especially when considering women receiving minimum wage, divorced women, widows, and women headed households. It is vital that state and non-state actors implement monitoring and communications systems for women in insecure and precarious situations.

Social Security and Pension for Women

The Omani government’s launch of a Self-Employed category within the social security system has greatly benefited handicrafts workers, professionals, self-employed, farmers, and informal sector workers, among others. This system provides important benefits and protections for individuals that would otherwise not have them. The need for incentives and programs to encourage women to enrol in the social security system has become even more urgent in the present crisis.

Ensure the Representation of Women in Impact Planning

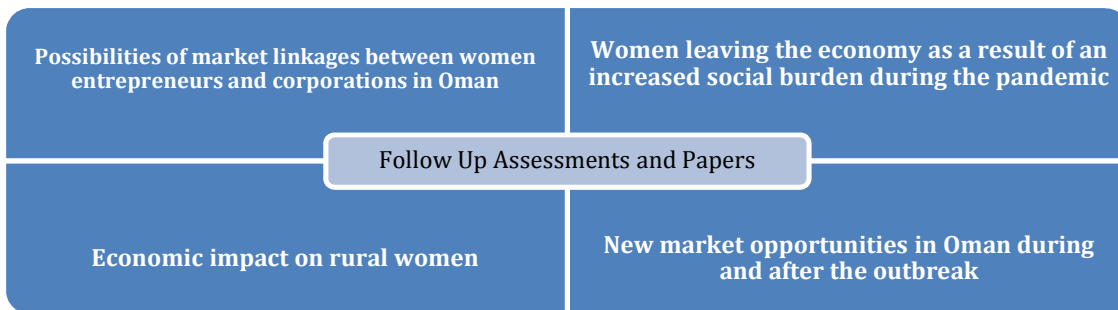
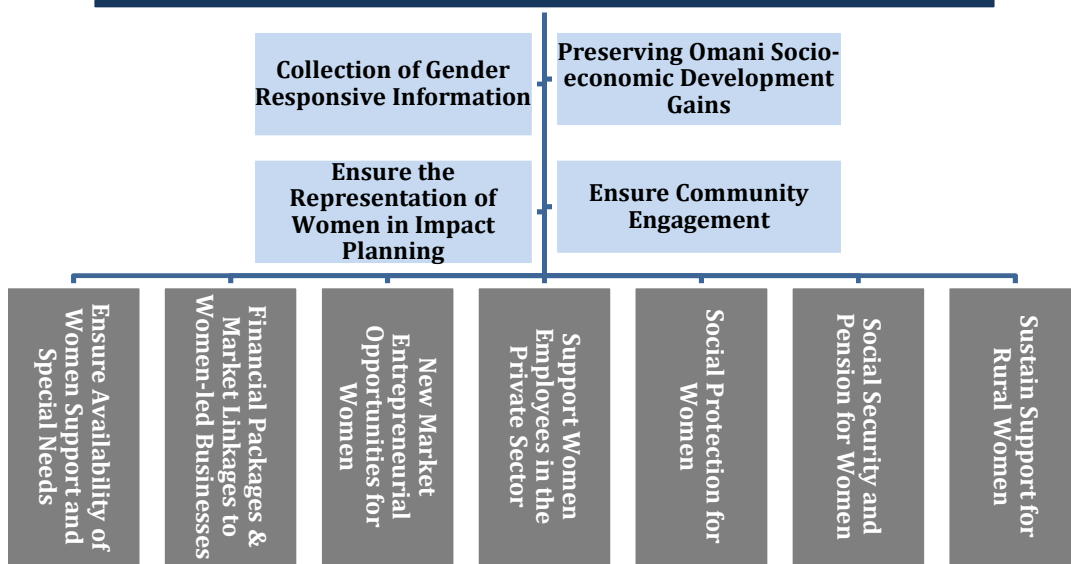
Women are on the front-line of care work within their families given that they are often the main caregivers for children and the elderly. Collecting data and feedback through women’s associations can allow women to regularly participate in decision making and propose real-life solutions which will, in turn, be implemented by women themselves.

Sustain Support for Rural Women

The Omani government has supported rural women with financial aid and a variety of programs in order to promote their activities and help women earn sustainable incomes. The current outbreak will have an impact on the activities of rural women given that consumers, markets and supply chains will not be functioning normally. Support for rural women is urgently important in order to ensure continuity in their activities and income.

⇒ More in depth analysis is required in regards to the “**economic impact on rural women**” in order to identify adequate mitigation measures.

The Socio-economic Impact Mitigation Response



7.3.3. Regional Response

Regional and national responses must be coordinated to fight the pandemic and alleviate socio-economic pressures.

Promote and sustain regional cooperation in GCC countries

Given the regional cooperation is vital during such times, GCC countries have prioritized maintaining open communication and trade channels. In these circumstances, regional cooperation could also include:

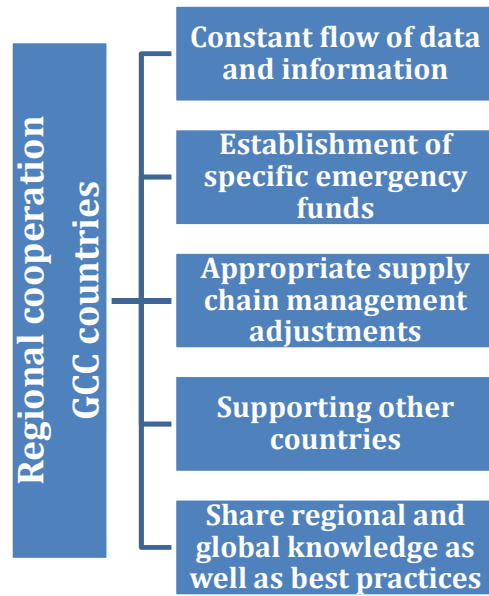
- **A constant flow** of data and information is needed to learn from experiences and good practices related to dealing with the COVID-19 outbreak both in terms of health and economics effects.
- **Appropriate supply chain management adjustments.** In such pandemics, supply chain management faces many challenges and interruptions. As a result, it is imperative to **facilitation of movement of goods**, particularly health supplies, food, and essential domestic necessities.
- **the establishment of specific emergency funds** to confront the effects of the pandemic, to promote research and to support the private sector.
- **Supporting other countries** in the Arab region.

Share regional and global knowledge as well as best practices

UN agencies should help facilitate the sharing and transfer of regional and international knowledge and best practices related to health and economy between governments in order to minimize negative impacts on women and other vulnerable communities.

- ⇒ Conduct a Live Study on the **“GCC Countries Regional Collaboration during COVID-19 Outbreak; Gains, Best Practices, and Lessons Learned”** so can be updated regularly.

Regional Response to Mitigate Health and Socio-economic Impact on Omani Women



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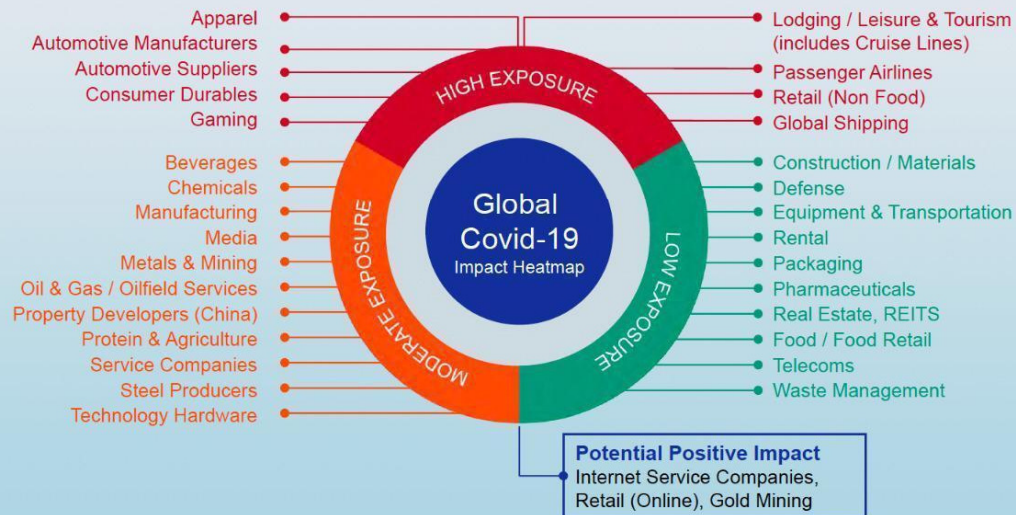
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Annexes

Annex 1 MOODY'S - COVID-19 Impact HeatMap, March 2020

The COVID-19 Heat Map

COVID-19 induced economic disruption will disproportionately impact some industry sectors more than others



Source: Moody's, Covid-19 Impact Heatmap, Coronavirus hurts travel-driven sectors, disrupts supply chains

MOODY'S

**United Nations Population Fund
Sub-Regional Office for the Gulf Cooperation Council Countries
Muscat, Sultanate of Oman
Tel: +968 24496893, Fax: +968 24496381
Email: gcc-info@unfpa.org
Website: gcc.unfpa.org, Twitter: @UNFPAGCC**