



# Socialist International Women

## SOCIALIST INTERNATIONAL WOMEN

### A Gender Sensitive Approach to the COVID-19 Crisis

#### STATEMENT

In this time of acute crisis our global solidarity, humanity and cooperation are more important now than they have ever been. The worldwide pandemic of the coronavirus COVID-19 is deeply affecting all of our lives personally, economically and in most cases both. This is already having an impact on the social and welfare dynamics of families and individuals, on how we live our daily lives and cope with either isolation or increased carer responsibilities for children and in providing support for isolated family members. The sudden, devastating impact of the loss of income from necessary economic shutdowns is also having severe repercussions for millions.

It is vital during this crisis that a gender sensitive approach to saving lives and reducing suffering is prioritised as quickly as possible. Previous disease outbreaks have proven that gender inequalities affecting women and girls worsen, with women's unique needs and vulnerabilities ignored, resulting in increased levels of extreme distress, poverty and ultimately mortality. Globally, women perform 70 per cent of health and social care roles, which immediately puts them disproportionately at risk of infection. All healthcare workers must absolutely be protected as a priority in addition to vulnerable groups of carers who are also at increased risk due to essential close contact with those they care for. There will also be an increased need for mental health support for all, but particularly for women who most often perform the role of providing social nourishment and emotional support within their families and communities while being under immense stress themselves. Economically, many of the industries that are immediately affected by this pandemic are in roles where women predominate including paid carer roles, retail, local market trading and small local collectives. As schools are closed, this means that many women cannot work even where the opportunity is still available. Single parent families where a woman is the only provider are also at increased risk of extreme deprivation if their income has ceased. Extreme stress within family groups is known to increase levels of domestic violence. This raises a critical concern in the provision of support for women and children who are currently suffering or at increased risk of domestic violence and abuse. A complete lockdown can mean being forced to remain with an abuser at great danger to personal safety and wellbeing. It is essential to implement safely managed exceptions to lockdowns to enable vulnerable women and children to escape their abusers and seek refuge and support.

Within governments, women remain largely unrepresented and particularly within healthcare leadership. It is vital that the perspectives of women are heard to ensure essential women's issues, including health issues, such as access to personal hygiene, sexual and maternal healthcare do not get overlooked. For millions of women, the ability to move freely is already limited, or has only recently been permitted. We must all remain in solidarity to ensure that lockdowns and restrictions on movement are regularly reviewed by governments to ensure that personal freedoms are not permanently erased. For women in particular, it is vital that freedom of movement remains when this catastrophe has passed.

Socialist International Women stands in firm solidarity with all members of the social democratic community and all citizens worldwide. As a global family we can all support our governments and communities in demonstrating the social democratic principles of justice, humanity and the support of all of our citizens as quickly as possible through this extraordinary period in our global history.