



# International Women's Day 8 March 2021. Women In Leadership: Achieving An Equal Future In A COVID 19 World

*COVID 19 has disproportionately affected women and girls, particularly those who face multiple inequalities due to income, race, geographic location, age, disability, migration, and health status.*

*Women leadership and the wide-reaching participation of women's rights organisations are essential to ensure that the needs of women and other marginalized groups are prioritized in the immediate response, as well as in recovery and resilience measures.* (UN Women. COVID 19 and Women's Leadership; From an Effective Response to Building Better)

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8 March 2021 is International Women's Day. This is a day for the world to celebrate the courage and determination of the women who changed history, as well as acknowledge those who will advance gender equality into the future.

However, International Women's Day is not simply an occasion to review how far women have come in their struggle for equality, peace, and development. It is also an opportunity to continue to find ways to unite, network and mobilise for meaningful change.

## **COVID 19 Is Not Gendered Neutral**

Women have suffered disproportionate economic and social consequences from the COVID-19 pandemic and resulting recession. Women face greater risks of economic insecurity in both the short and long term due to greater job losses, greater threats to incomes and career status, and increased risks of gendered violence.

Long-standing gender inequalities that existed prior to COVID-19 have been exposed and exacerbated. Prior to COVID-19, women were over-represented in insecure, lower-paid jobs. This resulted in disproportionate job losses during the initial shutdowns. But the pandemic also brought an explosion in demands for unpaid household and caring labour, which also fell disproportionately on women's shoulders. This has resulted in women cutting back paid work, and a severe intensification of the 'double burden' for women who kept their paid jobs.

Without targeted, immediate and long-term policy remedies, now during the pandemic, and in the future recovery and rebuilding phase, gender inequalities will widen further – and structurally

embed lifetime disadvantage for generations of women. Failure to address women's economic hardship in the COVID-19 crisis will compromise our collective long-term economic growth and prosperity, reducing productivity, growth, and progress toward a more inclusive, equal society.

Investing in getting Australians back to work and reconstructing the economy will need all hands on deck. But that economic reconstruction agenda must reflect the unique severity of this crisis for women.

Australian women need a sustained public investment and policy effort to undo the damage of the crisis and ensure women can play an equal role in an inclusive economic recovery: with access to good jobs, skills and training, and repairing their incomes.

### **More now than ever, the voice of women leadership is needed.**

While women are being hit the hardest by this pandemic, they will also be the backbone of recovery. Every policy response that places women and girls centre in its focus will be more impactful for it.<sup>1</sup>

Across the globe, women are leading organisations and institutions carrying out effective and inclusive COVID 19 responses, from the highest levels of decision making through to front line delivery.

Women bring different experiences, perspectives and skills to the table and make invaluable contributions to decisions, policies and laws that work better for all.

Yet, women remain significantly underrepresented in many aspects of decision making.

- Women are significantly under-represented in parliament, holding only one quarter of parliamentary seats worldwide<sup>2</sup>. In Australia, only 30.46% of MPs are women<sup>3</sup>.
- In Australian companies, women represent just 17.1% of CEOs and 14.1% of board chairs<sup>4</sup>.
- Just one of the 25 CEOs appointed to lead ASX 200 organisations in the past year has been female<sup>5</sup>.
- While women comprise around 47% of all employees in Australia<sup>6</sup>, they take home on average \$253.60 less than men every week (Full-time ordinary earnings), making the national gender pay gap 14% - a figure that has remained the relatively stationary for the past twenty years.<sup>7</sup>

### **Gender equality in leadership leads to collaboration and a blending of visions, and paves the way for the adoption of more comprehensive and inclusive solutions than if conceived from only one perspective**

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<sup>1</sup> Policy Briefing The Impact of COVID 19 on women United Nations

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2020/policy-brief-covid-19-and-womens-leadership-en.pdf?la=en&vs=409>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.ipu.org/parliament/au>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.wgea.gov.au/topics/women-in-leadership>

<sup>5</sup> [https://cew.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/14\\_CEW\\_ASX200-SEC-2020\\_V3.3-Single-Page-RGB.pdf](https://cew.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/14_CEW_ASX200-SEC-2020_V3.3-Single-Page-RGB.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/DetailsPage/6202.0Dec%202017?OpenDocument>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.wgea.gov.au/data/fact-sheets/australias-gender-pay-gap-statistics-2020>

Thus, advancing women in leadership is central to creating more profitable and productive economies, flourishing businesses, and a healthier and more peaceful planet.

When women are at the negotiating table, peace agreements are more likely to last 15 years or longer<sup>8</sup>.

Research shows that female led countries are handling COVID 19 more effectively than their male lead counterparts.

A recent Workplace Gender Equality Agency (WGEA) study shows that more women on Boards and in senior leadership roles result in improved company performance, profitability, and productivity<sup>9</sup>. Moreover, the appointment of a female CEO led to a 12.9% increase in the likelihood of outperforming the sector on three or more metrics.<sup>10</sup>

More diverse and inclusive groups have higher performance both on safety and operational performance<sup>11</sup>.

*“Women leaders react more quickly and decisively in the face of potential fatalities ..analysis clearly confirms that when women led countries are compared to countries similar to them along a range of characteristics, they have performed better, experiencing fewer cases as well as fewer deaths”.*<sup>12</sup>  
(Supriya Garikipati Developmental Economist from Liverpool University.)

## **What Can Be Done Right Now? Campaign for Gender Equality in Leadership**

There is a growing understanding and expectation that leadership in all facets of economic, political and social life must reflect communities; organisations miss out if 50% of the talent pool – women in all their diversity – is not at the decision-making tables.

### **On International Women’s Day, IEU Members are called to:**

- **Challenge** sexist language and behaviour in all contexts as such attitudes only serve to reinforce gender inequality.
- **Challenge** stereotypes and the perception of the “ideal worker” which is held by many employers and governments. Women, who bear the bulk of responsibilities for caring, simply do not fit into these false perceptions of the ideal worker.
- **Campaign** for comprehensive legal and industrial change which protects and enhances the position of women. We need greater access to secure part time flexible work, to paid family

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/in-focus/women-peace-security>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.wgea.gov.au/newsroom/media-releases/more-women-at-the-top-proves-better-for-business>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.wgea.gov.au/newsroom/media-releases/more-women-at-the-top-proves-better-for-business>

<sup>11</sup>

<https://www.mckinsey.com/~media/McKinsey/Featured%20Insights/Gender%20Equality/Women%20in%20leadership%20Lesson%20from%20Australian%20companies%20leading%20the%20way/Women-in-Leadership-Lessons-from-Australian-companies-leading-the-way.ashx>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/aug/18/female-led-countries-handled-coronavirus-better-study-jacinda-ardern-angela-merkel>

and domestic violence leave and to stronger superannuation provisions which recognise the caregivers.

- **Campaign** for effective education of both men and women to raises awareness of the issues affecting women, particularly in regard to gendered violence.

Thus, by campaigning for gender equality in leadership, we can fundamentally lead a more rapid recovery, drive better and more sustainable development outcomes for all and set communities on the path to achieve gender equality.

