

Knowledge-Sharing Webinar

Measuring SDG 5.4.1 (Unpaid Domestic and Care Work) in the Labour Force Survey

Opening Ceremony

Thursday 27 May 2021- 9:00 am – 9:40 am AST

Remarks by UN Women MCO Caribbean Representative - Tonni Brodber

- Mr. Dider Trebucq, UN Resident Coordinator for Barbados and the OECS
- Ambassador Manorma Soeknandan, Deputy Secretary General, CARICOM Secretariat
- Dr. Carlene Radix, Head, Human and Social Cluster, OECS Commission
- Permanent Secretaries and representatives of Government Ministries, Departments and Agencies
- Directors of National Gender Machineries
- Directors of National Statistical Offices
- Representatives from Regional Institutions and Organisations, Women’s Civil Society Organisations and other CSOs and NGOs, academia and other stakeholders.

“There can be no evidence-based policy without good statistics, including gender statistics which enable our policymakers to create the right interventions to target the right sections of our populations - the persons most vulnerable in our community”- This is a 2016 quote from CARICOM Deputy Secretary-General Dr. Manorma Soeknandan at the CSW60 *“Monitoring the Implementation of the SDGs from a Gender Perspective: Tools and Accountability”* event discussing the CARICOM Gender Equality Indicators.

What does unpaid domestic and care work have to do with it? COVID-19 has laid bare all of our deepest and some not so deep inequalities. The critical importance of the work that happens, often unpaid, but drives our emotional, social, physical and economic well-being, has now been driven to the fore. This work that generally has been done in homes can no longer be invisible, as many work from their homes, and the external support systems in formal physical schools, day care and elder

care facilities have been curtailed. So now we see the work, now we see the level of responsibility that is required to do the work and now we see who is doing the work. While business activities were impacted with those in the active working force moving to virtual working or in the worst-case, their sector or industry slowing or grinding to a halt and them becoming underemployed or unemployed; paid and unpaid care have increased both in intensity and in significance.

So it is no surprise as UN Women notes in its [*Feminist Plan for Sustainability and Social Justice*](#): “Suddenly, the very work that is routinely devalued by markets and inadequately supported by governments is considered essential. The extent to which the care economy relies on women’s unpaid and underpaid labour has also been exposed as never before. While COVID-19 may have pushed care arrangements to a breaking point, they were already patchy, fragile and plagued by inequalities before the pandemic.”

The silver lining is that the pandemic offers us an opportunity to address the structural issues of the care crisis, for this is indeed what it is – it is a structural issue. We need to shift economic and social policies towards supporting more equal and sustainable care arrangements, with benefits for all.

As you heard from the UN Resident Coordinator, under the **Joint SDG Fund** project technical support is being provided to the development of a common regional approach to measuring SDG 5.4.1 through the Housing and Population Census and the Labour Force Surveys. We had at our meeting in February told you about the specific work that was going to be done on developing a common model. We are very happy to be able report that further work has been done on measuring unpaid care work through both the Labour Force Survey and Census. UN Women, will be developing regional technical guidance to CARICOM National Statistical Offices on measuring SDG 5.4.1 through the Labour Force Survey and therefore the feedback and exchange during this meeting will be instructive in developing and finalizing the technical guidance.

Next steps include further work on testing the questions in the upcoming round of housing and population censuses with Grenada agreeing to serve as pilot for the OECS with support from the SDG Fund. Guyana, Suriname, St. Vincent and the Grenadines and Trinidad and Tobago have also agreed to pilot the questions in their censuses.

However what remains at heart, is how do we get women back into the active labour force undergirded by more equal and sustainable care arrangements and more equitable distribution of domestic work.

The 2021 UN Women MCO Caribbean “[*Status of Women and Men in the Caribbean Summary Report: Amidst COVID-19*](#)” noted men and women face distinctive vulnerabilities as a result of deep-rooted social, cultural and economic dynamics. Women are more concentrated in tourism-affected industries¹ and the service sectors, particularly in the more informal activities earning lower wages, and shouldering the majority of unpaid care work. They are also unfortunately enduring more incidences of domestic violence². Lone parent households (the majority of which are headed by women) are often over-represented in economically vulnerable populations³. These intersecting vulnerabilities mean that women are more exposed to negative shocks than men. As a result, while everyone has suffered, COVID-19 has forced women into greater social, economic, and physical insecurity.

Job loss and reduced income has been felt across the board. An IDB Online Socioeconomic Survey in 2020 across six Caribbean countries found that more than 70% of households reported reduced income in the weeks preceding their interview⁴. A February 2021 World Food Programme and CARICOM household survey similarly found that 63% of respondents experienced job loss and/or reduced income since the beginning of the pandemic, a significant 15 percentage point increase since April 2020⁵. However, because of women’s concentration in tourism and tourism-affected industries (e.g. Wholesale and retail trade, service sectors etc.) this means that they have faced disproportionate

¹ Labour Force Surveys and National Statistics Offices

² Azcona, G., et al., 2020. *From Insights to Action: Gender Equality in the Wake of COVID-19*. Available at: <<https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2020/09/gender-equality-in-the-wake-of-covid-19>>

Budlender, D. and Iyehen, I., 2019. *Status of Women and Men Report: Productive Employment and Decent Work for All*. Available at: <<https://caribbean.unwomen.org/en/materials/publications/2019/10/status-of-women-and-men-report-productive-employment-and-decent-work-for-all>>

³ UNDP, UNICEF and UN Women, 2020. *Saint Lucia and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines COVID-19 HEAT Reports: Human and Economic Assessment of Impact (HEAT) Series*. Available at: <https://www.bb.undp.org/content/barbados/en/home/library/undp_publications/human-and-economic-assessment-of-impact---saint-lucia.html>

Barbados Survey of Living Conditions, 2016/2017

⁴ IDB Country Department Caribbean, 2020. *COVID-19 The Caribbean Crisis: Results from an Online Socioeconomic Survey*. Available at: <<https://publications.iadb.org/publications/english/document/COVID-19-The-Caribbean-Crisis-Results-from-an-Online-Socioeconomic-Survey.pdf>>

⁵ UN WFP & CARICOM, 2021. *Caribbean COVID-19 Food Security and Livelihoods Impact Survey - Round 3 – February 2021*. Available at: <<https://www.wfp.org/publications/caribbean-covid-19-food-security-and-livelihoods-impact-survey-round-2-july-2020>>

job losses as a result of the global pandemic and the subsequent international tourism paralysis, pushing thousands into economic insecurity, vulnerability and poverty. Unsurprisingly, low-income groups were most affected. On the other hand, men's employment is more diversified meaning they have greater resilience even though they have been impacted by the economic shocks.

Drastic increases in unpaid domestic work and childcare duties throughout the pandemic have also disproportionately burdened women. Lockdowns, stay-at-home orders and school closures have exaggerated the unpaid care burden that women already faced. With children at home, parents were spending considerably more time entertaining, feeding and assisting children with online learning. We speak about these things in very general terms but many of us have met each other's children as a result of them becoming our new colleagues while we work from our home as well.

What we need to understand is that this places considerable strain on women's availability and productivity for paid employment and it contributes to that time poverty that women experience and sees many women being forced to balance, and in some cases choose between, caring for their children and pursuing the livelihoods to be able to feed them. This has also significantly affected women and men's wellbeing and mental health. While flexible working arrangements significantly aided the burden, the issues around decent work standards, difficulties for single-parent households (the majority of whom are women) whose family/friends support networks are inaccessible due to movement restrictions, or the inflexibility of working arrangements in many low-income jobs, has created persistent barriers to economic empowerment and security. So now we need to **build back equal** and what does that really mean.

In 2019, UN Women MCO Caribbean produced and launched through a sensitisation session with the joint Houses of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, [*A Gender Responsive Budgeting Tool for Enhancing Parliamentary Oversight and Accountability*](#). We are doing this work today, we are also looking at the ways in which through the UN Women and UNDP COVID-19 Global Gender Response Tracker, how in a COVID-19 context, we can support fiscal policy, using gender responsive budgeting to support recovery measures as well. So at this stage, we know we have this expertise and the expertise that exists within our particular agencies - that is the beauty of the SDG Fund that with UN Women, you also have the comparative advantages of UNICEF, WFP, ILO and UNDP. This expertise

and this work that began in 2016 and I really want to thank UN Women's Isiuwa Iyehen for all of the work she has done to drive this and our colleague at CARICOM, Dr. Philomen Harrison for continued collaboration. We stand ready to support Governments more broadly as we build back equal.

We have to build back equal by seeing the work and seeing the people who do the work that we assume just gets done without pay and without acknowledgement. With the high uncertainty surrounding the evolution of the COVID-19 pandemic, Governments really need to start thinking about how to apply these tools such as gender responsive budgeting to design and deliver better recovery programmes and packages that move towards equitable and inclusive economies. This requires public investment in jobs, care services and social protection for women and men, investments that are currently not the focus yet of COVID-19 support and recovery packages but are absolutely critical for economic recovery.