



**COVID-19 AND**  
**WORKING PARENTS**  
**- AN ACTION BRIEF**

Many countries in the Caribbean and across the world are beginning to reopen their economies in order to mitigate some of the socio-economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic induced lockdowns. UN Women's ***Covid-19 And Implications for Inclusive Economic Empowerment in CARICOM: Policy and Programme Considerations*** highlighted the challenges that many women will face. Many families will be affected by unemployment because of dependence on the tourism and service sectors. Already across CARICOM many workers have been furloughed<sup>1</sup>. A recent UN Women MCO Caribbean analysis of 2017 labour force data in six countries (Barbados, Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, St. Lucia and Trinidad & Tobago), shows that the majority of women workers are in the services and sales sectors (ranging from 62% to 69%). This means that many mothers this year will be without a means to feed their children and sustain their care responsibilities.

Work outside of the home in the formal and informal economy is visible for all to see because workers are usually remunerated for their efforts. The work that happens inside the home, cooking, cleaning, care of children, and care of the elderly is called care-work. Although some families benefit from the support of domestic workers, most of the work done is unpaid or underpaid. Unpaid care work constitutes almost half of total global work time. It sustains families and communities on a day-to-day basis.<sup>2</sup> No country in the Caribbean has ever completed a survey to fully assess the hours spent on unpaid care work or how this time is divided between women and men. However, in most countries, women work longer hours than men when both unpaid care and paid market work are combined.<sup>3</sup>

The UN Women MCO Caribbean study also confirmed that women are more likely than men to be employed by government and that



women comprise the majority of those in the essential services including nurses. While schools are physically closed, parents are expected to support their children's online learning. The other profession where women predominate is that of teaching. For these women they are teaching their students from home, as well as supporting their own children and family members through their coursework. Women who are parents and Small Business Entrepreneurs and those who work for other industries that are opening while schools remain closed will also have to manage delivering on their professional duties as well as their care responsibilities. For too many women, there is no one to watch their child while they are at work. Therefore, re-opening economies should be done in coordination with the re-opening of schools and day care/childcare services. Otherwise, as outlined, workers with significant care responsibilities, the majority of whom are women, will be severely disadvantaged. Will they have to choose between their child's care and earning an income? Business cannot be done as usual.

The following are actions governments and companies should consider and implement to support parents. Some of the actions will be temporary and others are long term. All the actions will strengthen countries' and companies' resilience

<sup>1</sup> [https://www.ilo.org/caribbean/newsroom/WCMS\\_741225/lang-en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/caribbean/newsroom/WCMS_741225/lang-en/index.htm)

<sup>2</sup> UN Women. 2015. *Progress of the World's Women 2015-2016. Transforming Economies, Realizing Rights*, New York; UN Women. 2019. *Progress of the World's Women 2019-2020. Families in a Changing World*, New York.

<sup>3</sup> UN Women. 2019. *Progress of the World's Women 2019-2020. Families in a Changing World*, New York.

by implementing sustainable and inclusive ways of working that empower mothers, all parents and families. UN Women stands ready to support countries and companies in the operationalization of these proposed actions, through its Women's Empowerment Principles (WEPs).

## Data

### Governments and Regional Institutions

*Medium-Long Term:*

- Complete Time-Use Surveys to better understand how much time people spend on care-work disaggregated by sex.

### Employers

*Short Term:*

- Do short surveys with staff to determine what support parents' need most i.e. equipment (laptops, tablets, phones), time flexibility, support with care.

*Medium-Long Term:*

- Complete Time-Use Surveys to better understand how much time employees spend on care-work disaggregated by sex.

## Time

### Governments and Regional Institutions

*Medium-Long Term:*

- Develop policy and legislation to allow for flexible work schedules.
- Strengthen legislation to protect workers from unfair dismissal because of time spent on care duties.

### Employers

*Short Term:*

- Where possible allow for flexible work schedules that are deliverable based.
- Supervisors and staff agree on schedules and deliverables periodically.

- Ask colleagues with children and other family care responsibilities, to indicate times that work best for them when scheduling meetings.
- Avoid last minute and back to back meetings.
- Practice effective and efficient meeting policies i.e. all meetings have agendas, clearly stated objectives, stay as much on topic and time as possible.
- Invite managers to have immediate assessments after meetings so that employees can give anonymous feedback indicating whether the meeting met the objectives identified and what could be improved.

## Resources

### Governments and Regional Institutions

*Short Term:*

- Develop guidance and oversee implementation for the phased opening of school and day care facilities, especially for essential workers. The guidance should outline the necessary health and occupational safety provisions for staff and parents.
- Where possible transportation should be arranged for staff and students.
- Develop gender transformative social protection measures e.g. monthly wage subsidies,





unconditional child-care benefits etc., for parents who have been furloughed.

- Collaborate with the international development community and private sector to provide equipment to families who require equipment to work from home.

#### *Medium-Long Term:*

- Amend Labour acts to ensure that companies that expect employees to work from home are required to provide the necessary equipment for staff to be able to safely work remotely.
- Advise professional unions to update standards and protocols to ensure confidentiality measures are in place for persons who are working from home.
- Amend Labour acts to ensure during or in immediate aftermath of hazards, companies which remain open, provide support in the forms of stipend or direct quality childcare for parents.

## **Employers**

### *Short Term:*

- Provide equipment (unused computers and tablets) for staff who are working from home.
- Develop and disseminate company policies on confidentiality while working from home.
- Where possible provide equipment to parents who need additional equipment for their children to participate in virtual schooling.
- Use WEPs guidance to develop and implement comprehensive care packages to parents who have been furloughed.
- If your company offers an essential service or requires staff to be in office, identify adequate physical space in the office for staff children schooling. These spaces should be managed following strict COVID-19 prevention procedures i.e. physical distancing, no one can enter with any symptoms associated with COVID-19 etc<sup>4</sup>.
- Where possible, hire staff to watch younger children and support older children with online schooling. Companies can investigate contracting qualified nursery staff who are out of work or collaborate with teachers' colleges<sup>5</sup> to place students to support and provide a stipend payment.
- Provide transport for staff and children where necessary. Collaboration can be made with tour operators who no longer have immediate tourism business.
- Psychosocial support is critical. Stress counsellor/s should be contracted and made available to all staff during this time.

<sup>4</sup> Review relevant Ministry of Health and WHO/PAHO guidance [https://www.who.int/health-topics/coronavirus#tab=tab\\_1](https://www.who.int/health-topics/coronavirus#tab=tab_1)

<sup>5</sup> This would be for the countries that have Teachers' Colleges, which train students to join the workforce, and not others where Teachers' Colleges only train teachers who are already in the workforce.

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