

ICW-CIF

# Activity Report in response to COVID-19



INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL OF WOMEN

# Contents

<b>FOREWORD .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>1. ICW-CIF PARALLEL EVENT .....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>2. STANDING COMMITTEES .....</b>	<b>11</b>
2.1 Arts & Letters .....	11
2.2 Environment .....	23
2.3 Education .....	29
<b>3. MEMBER COUNCILS (NCWs) .....</b>	<b>31</b>
3.1 Austria .....	31
3.2 Bangladesh .....	39
3.3 Belgium .....	42
3.4 Canada .....	50
3.5 Guatemala .....	69
3.6 India .....	70
3.7 Indonesia .....	73
3.8 Israel .....	76
3.9 Lesotho .....	82
3.10 Malta .....	84
3.11 Nigeria .....	90
3.12 Pakistan .....	93
3.13 Philippines .....	96
3.14 Russia .....	98
3.15 Spain .....	113
3.16 Taiwan .....	115
3.17 Tunisia .....	119
3.18 Turkey .....	125

Dear ICW-CIF members and friends,

We all know what an enormous tragedy COVID-19 has become--so many deaths, so much misery on a scale few of us have ever witnessed, indeed to an extent which is difficult to even imagine. While there are many obvious manifestations of the pandemic, among them we can see that the coronavirus is exacerbating existing inequalities. This is especially true among the most vulnerable groups. Women and girls are suffering inordinately.

Women's rights are all too often threatened. Abuse is taking the form of rising levels of physical and psychological violence, repression, and growing economic hardship. The general lack of a social security net makes the situation much worse, and all of these maladies are amplified by the confined living conditions of lockdowns.

For those of us who believe in equality and fair treatment, it is essential that we redouble our efforts to inform others of just what is happening and to find effective ways to combat the inhumane regressions brought on by the disease.

ICW-CIF member councils have endeavored to overcome this COVID-19 crisis through implementation of their own programs and activities. This report includes efforts undertaken until the end of 2020/early 2021. If needed, we shall produce the 2nd edition of the activity report once the pandemic seems well under control.

I greatly appreciate all member councils and sisters who have sent their reports. We can all learn by sharing our experiences, and working together we are much more likely to accomplish our objectives in these difficult times. Thank you -- together we will overcome.

**Jungsook Kim (Ed.D)**  
**President of ICW-CIF**

## ICW-CIF PARALLEL EVENT

During the United Nations' 65th Commission on Status of Women, ICW-CIF organized a virtual parallel event, ***Violence Against Women and Girls and COVID-19: Policies/Practices to Build Back Better***, on March 18, 2021 at 3:30 a.m. (EST).

In her opening speech, ICW-CIF President Dr. Jungsook Kim remarked that in addition to a health pandemic, COVID-19 increased the inequalities faced by women and girls and aggravated all forms of violence against women, in particular, intimate partner violence. According to numbers from the World Health Organization, the highest rate of violence against women by intimate partners during the past year was on women between 15 to 24 years of age.

Emphasizing the entitlement of all women to enjoy protection of their human rights and freedoms, Dr. Kim noted that post recovery programs present a good opportunity for countries to implement policies and practices to eliminate gender-based violence and achieve gender equality and women's empowerment. In closing, she expressed her hope that the event will inspire concrete strategies and ideas on how to combat and eliminate violence against women and girls. She then turned the floor to the moderator, ICW-CIF Vice President Ms. Linda Liu.



Dr. Jungsook Kim

### Speakers:

ICW-CIF invited an excellent panel of 4 experts from the United Nations (UN), World Bank and OECD and two survivor activists to speak at the webinar. The presentations started with Dr. Dubravka Simonovic, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women, its causes and consequences, followed by Ms. Hilary Gbedemah, a current member and immediate past Chair of the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) Committee, Ms. Diana J. Arango, the Senior Gender-Based Violence and Development Specialist in the Gender Group of the World Bank, Ms. Grizelda Grootboom, a survivor turned activist committed to help survivors of the sex-trade who seek to exit and rehabilitate their lives, Ms. Hyeshin Park, the Gender Programme Co-ordinator of the Networks, Partnerships and Gender Division at the OECD Development Centre, and concluded with Dr. Mohinder Watson, a survivor activist, who is also the main representative of the International Council of Women to UN

Geneva and an expert on child marriage.

During the event, the participants not only learned about the issues from two renowned world experts on the topics of gender-based violence and gender equality, but also from two survivor activists whose moving stories speak to the impact of such violence on the lives of its victims and the necessity to eliminate violence against women and girls in all its forms. The two speakers from the intergovernmental organizations (IGOs) conveyed the actions and programs of the World Bank and the OECD to work with governments, private sector and civil society for the elimination of VAWG.

### Discussions:

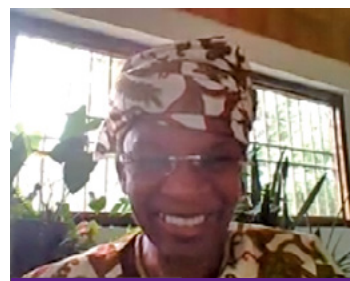
#### 1. Impact of COVID-19 on Violence Against Women and Girls



Dr. Dubravka Simonovic

Observing that services for victims of VAWG were already insufficient in some countries before the pandemic, the UN Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women, **Dr. Simonovic**, spoke about how the COVID pandemic and the policies adopted to control the pandemic resulted in the reduction of funding in most countries for services provided to victims of violence against women (VAW) including shelters, data collection and medical services for victims of violence against women, thereby exacerbating problems related to gender-based violence. She stated that the various socio-economic stresses created by the pandemic and government lockdown measures to control the spread of the virus resulted in trapping many women at home with their abusers and made it more difficult for them to seek help or escape the abuse. Dr. Simonovic specifically noted that during the initial stages of the pandemic, reproductive health and medical services, such as abortions, became unavailable for victims of rape and that in the majority of Member States, women were excluded from the response and recovery teams.

In her presentation, **Ms. Gbedemah**, the immediate past chair of CEDAW committee, further added that lockdown measures led to dire impacts on the livelihood of women, especially those who worked in the informal sector, in outdoor work, and in work that requires physical contact with people. They both pointed out that the effects of the pandemic were aggravated for disadvantaged women, including migrant women living in crowded conditions and informal settlements.



Ms. Hilary Gbedemah

## 2. Commitment and Important Role of Intergovernmental Organizations to end violence against women and girls

The presentations of the 4 experts elaborated on their respective IGO's commitment, programs and instruments to eliminate violence against women and girls (VAWG).

Dr. Simonovic expounded on the effectiveness of the UN's role, through the Secretary General and herself, to raise world awareness that violence against women was also a casualty of the COVID pandemic and to urge Member States to resume and continue providing protection and medical services to victims of VAWG during the pandemic.

Ms. Hilary Gbedemah comprehensively explained how VAWG and the obligations of the state is covered in every article of CEDAW. Among them, Article 12 requires States to take measures to ensure equal access of women to health care and reproductive health; Article 2 requires States to pursue all appropriate means to eliminate discrimination against women; and General Recommendation 35 establishes the general obligations of the States relating to gender-based violence. She further noted the obligation of state parties to CEDAW to ensure that measures taken to address COVID pandemic do not discriminate against women, protect women from gender-based violence, guarantee their socio-economic empowerment and include women's participation in policy and decision making in gender response and recovery efforts.



Ms. Diana Arango

**Ms. Diana Arango** communicated the World Bank's commitment to end VAWG at the start of the pandemic by incorporating this goal in their programs with UN agencies, governments, and private sectors. Some of the examples she provided include: funding media campaigns on the radio and television to heighten awareness on the prevention of VAWG and to inform women that protections services for victims of VAWG would not stop during the pandemic; conducting studies to identify and close gaps in services for VAWG, such as establishing 24-hour hotlines and expanding safe service and referral centers to gas stations; and funding the construction of hospitals and medical services to build back better through strengthening physical, reproductive and mental health services for victims of VAWG. She specifically disclosed the World Bank's requirement that their programs and operations include monitoring and mitigation methods to prevent and ensure that they are not impacted by sexual exploitation, abuse or harassment.



Ms. Hyeshin Park

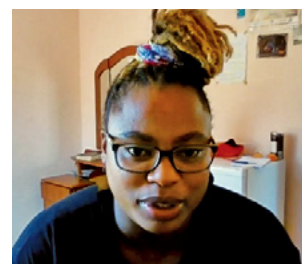
**Ms. Hyeshin Park** spoke about one of the OECD's actions to work for gender equality, women's empowerment and the elimination of VAWG through collecting data to measure the Social Institution and Gender Index. This index evaluates discriminations against women in countries around the world to enhance understanding of the root causes of gender inequality and VAWG. She identified certain socio-cultural masculinity norms as being restrictive because they create power imbalance between males and females, undermine gender equality and women's empowerment, and lead to violence against women and girls. These restrictive norms include men being the breadwinner in the family and being financially dominant, men having the final say in household decisions and financial matters, and real men suppressing their emotions.

She explained that these norms result in men feeling the need to have work and to be in control of family finances, in anger and violence being accepted reactions from men and boys, in the possibility of men resorting to violence against women as an outlet for their frustrations from not working or from their masculinity being threatened, in women's inability to leave the home after suffering physical abuse, and in the increase in domestic violence during the pandemic.

She suggested the identification of education programs that target changing harmful stereotypes, the creation of campaigns that succeed in changing the restrictive masculinity norms to gender equitable norms, the engagement of men and boys in the campaign, and the adoption of a whole of government and whole of society approach as ways to work toward ending violence against women.

### 3. Moving Stories of Two Survivor Activists

Through the personal stories of the two survivor activists, the audience heard true accounts of how two young girls inadvertently became victims of different forms of violence against women and girls and also how they managed to escape the violence.



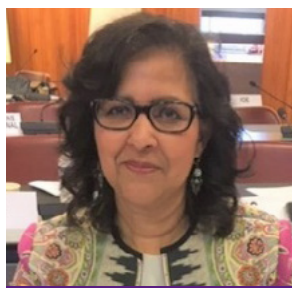
Ms. Grizelda Grootboom

**Ms. Grizelda Grootboom**, whose eyes filled with tears as she recounted her harrowing life journey, spoke about being raped at a young age to being forced into sex trafficking and drug abuse at 18 years old by someone whom she thought was her best friend and finally to exiting successfully from



the violence after 12 long years. She took the opportunity to escape from prostitution, ending up in the hospital and rehabilitation, after she was thrown out of the house because she had refused her pimps' request to work right after a forced abortion several months after she accidentally became pregnant.

Explaining that it was very hard to get help through the social system when one had a criminal record, she had to find ways to pay for her own medical care. Her abusers found her again and used her for drug trafficking, which brought her back to Cape Town and the second phase of her escape. While in Cape Town, medical diseases and health problems from years of drug abuse and sexual exploitation landed her back in the hospital. She became acquainted with organizations like Embrace Dignity, which helped her and gave her the opportunity to write her book "Exit". This book has allowed her to work as a survivor activist and try to help girls escape from sex slavery, trafficking and violence.



Dr. Mohinder Watson

Beginning with her own story as a survivor of child marriage to the stories of other girls who tried to escape the child marriage and consequently became victims of honor-based violence, **Dr. Mohinder Watson** discussed how these two hidden forms of violence against girls, committed in the name of giving daughters a secure future and protecting the family honor, effectively disregards a girls' human right to enjoy good health, to choose who she wants to marry, and to be educated, to name a few. She explained how a girl can trigger honor-based violence from wearing too much makeup, dressing in an unacceptable manner, refusing an arranged marriage, engaging in pre-marital or extra-marital relationships, wanting to marry someone outside the community, or wanting to leave an abusive husband and the devastating consequences of honor-based violence, including mutilations, killings and suicides.

She also introduced some best practices to combat honor-based violence including heightening awareness, implementing and enforcing laws, providing survivor centered care, changing socio-cultural norms, and education of children and teachers.

#### 4. Policies and Best Practices to Build Back Better

Regarding policies and best practices that will result in governments building back better, Dr. Simonovic reiterated that violence against women is a violation of women's human right to live free from violence, therefore she recommended that policies to build back better must adopt a holistic and human rights-based approach which would ensure that



States are obligated to eliminate VAWG and provide services to victims of VAWG. She also stressed that in order to eliminate VAWG, States should accelerate implementation of various international human rights instruments, in particular the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).

Elaborating on this latter point, Ms. Gbedemah emphasized that CEDAW clearly obligates the States to eliminate gender-based violence, to provide medical and health services to women, to ensure that measures to address COVID pandemic do not discriminate against women and girls, and to include the participation of women in designing and implementation of response and recovery programs. She also stressed that state policies should include punishment of perpetrators, provision of specialized security to victims especially those in rural communities, provision of mental health services, safe quarantining and equal access to testing and vaccinations. Explaining that the socio-economic sector is critical to preventing violence against women, she added that the CEDAW guidelines provide that social economic support should be given to women out of work, marginalized women, and women in low paying jobs and in temporary jobs, and that programs should be implemented to transition women from informal to formal sector, provide access to markets, and include women in economic resuscitation programs.

In addition, policies that address gender inequalities in the workplace, as well as institutional responses from national human rights institutions and national women's machineries are essential to preventing VAWG. She concluded that the COVID pandemic provides an opportunity for countries to build back better and for civil society to mobilize by using the pandemic as entry point to resuscitate the human rights approach to VAWG and to advocate for change.

All four experts cited examples of best practices for easing access of victims to protection services, including the creation of 24-hour hotlines and messaging hotlines, provision of online services such as e-reporting, e-protection and e-emergency orders, inclusion of medical services for victims of GBV in establishment of medical facilities and centers, establishment of alert systems in pharmacies and food stores, provision of referrals for safe services in gas stations, and creation of temporary shelters in vacant hotels.

Dr. Watson concluded her talk by also sharing some best practices for states and civil societies to end honor-based violence, including implementing and enforcing laws, education of children on mutual respect and healthy relationships, provide training on cultural sensitivity, engaging all sectors of society to end violence against women and girls, providing survivor centered care, establishing online apps for reporting cases, and

recruiting more female police officers from ethnic minorities. Dr. Simonovic also cited her recent thematic report on “COVID-19 and Domestic Violence” as a good source to find more of her recommendations on good policies and measures.

### **Conclusion:**

Before turning over to the Q&A, the moderator summed up some important points drawn from the presentation. She noted that though tragic that VAWG has increased during the pandemic, the spotlight on the issue will hopefully lead to the incorporation of policies, measures and practices to prevent and end VAWG in national and local recovery plans that will rebuild the world back better.



Ms. Linda Liu

Dr. Dubravka Simonovic suggested that policies to prevent VAWG should be holistic, have a human rights approach, be deemed essential services based on the recognition that it is the human right of women to live free from violence, and that the United Nations should come up with a global implementation plan to prevent VAWG that can be adopted by member states into their national plans.

Ms. Hilary Gbedemah clearly explained why CEDAW is an essential instrument that obligates the governments to work to eliminate gender-based violence and all forms of discrimination against women and thus, should be ratified and implemented by all countries.

The presentations of Ms. Diana Arango and Ms. Hyeshin Park, showed the importance and effectiveness of intergovernmental organizations as partners in the struggle to eliminate violence against women. One further conclusion that can be drawn from the experts' remarks is -- as long as there is the political will to provide protection measures, States, IGOs and NGOs have shown their flexibility on devising myriad of ways for victims of VAW to have access to services during the COVID pandemic, including the establishment of online and messaging hotlines, e-protection orders, e-emergency orders, turning vacant hotels into temporary shelters, and moving services into the communities, and so on.

Lastly, Linda Liu thanked Ms. Grizelda Grootboom and Dr. Mohinder Watson for personally telling their life stories so that the participants will have a better understanding of sex trafficking, child marriage and honor-based violence and the urgency to end VAWG in all its forms.

ICW President Dr. Jungsook Kim closed the event and expressed her appreciation to the all the speakers for their presentations and to participants for their participation.

### **Summation of Policies and Best Practices to build Back Better:**

#### **A. Establishment and implementation of Policies and Laws**

1. Adopting a human rights-based approach to elimination of VAWG,
2. Implementing and enforcing strict laws on elimination of VAWG, including criminalization of domestic violence and sexual harassment,
3. Adopting a holistic approach that involves all stakeholders, including governments, intergovernmental institutions, civil society and the private sector,
4. Accelerating implementation of various international human rights instruments including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW),
5. Participation of women in designing and implementation of response and recovery programs,
6. Mobilizing political will and funding of governments to end violence against women,
7. Providing access to justice for victims,
8. Strengthening physical, reproductive and mental health services for victims of VAWG in planning or building hospitals and medical centers,
9. Providing survivor-centered protection services,
10. Including elimination of VAWG as one of the objectives in international development and aid programs,

#### **B. Easing Access to Services for Victims of Violence**

1. Establishing 24-hour hotlines, messaging hotlines and online alert systems,
2. Provision of online services such as e-reporting, e-filing, e-protection and e-emergency orders,
3. Creating temporary shelters in vacant hotels during the pandemic,
4. Expanding safe service and referral centers to easily accessible places such as pharmacies, food stores and gas stations,
5. Creating media campaigns on the radio and television to heighten awareness on the prevention of VAWG and to inform women of protections services for victims of VAWG,

C. Mechanisms to create gender sensitive programs

1. Establishing monitoring mechanisms and mitigation methods to prevent and ensure that international intergovernmental aid programs or operations are not impacted by sexual exploitation, abuse or harassment,
2. Conducting studies to identify gaps in services for VAWG and to close such gaps,

D. Changing Socio-cultural norms and stereotypes

1. Adopting policies that level socio-cultural power imbalances,
2. Educating children on mutual respect and healthy relationships,
3. Identifying education programs that successfully target changing harmful stereotypes to gender sensitive stereotypes,
4. Providing cultural sensitivity training for judges, police officers and social workers,
5. Recruiting more female police officers from ethnic minorities,
6. Identifying, raising awareness on and establishing policies to address and transform the underlying root causes for VAWG,
7. Creating campaigns and programs that transform socio-cultural masculinity norms, and
8. Engagement of men and boys in the campaign to end VAWG.

**Reported by Linda Liu, First Vice-president of ICW-CIF**

## STANDING COMMITTEES

### Arts and Letters

#### < Coping with COVID-19 >

Values: Just as all our Councils of Women around the world are united by strong VALUES which infuse the humanitarian and educational goals which drive our work, the messages from the world of Arts & Letters throughout the pandemic are infused with strong VALUES. These values energise the understanding, compassion, action, educating, advocacy, friendship and communicating via which we have all survived the pandemic, which is still wreaking havoc! Hope for a changed future, however, grows, as VACCINES are now being used.



Jennifer Ann Davies,  
Arts & Letters Advisor

Population & Geographic Overview: Australia is a large continent, divided into states and territories. I live and work in the far north of the eastern state of Queensland, in a relatively small city, Cairns. Coping strategies, policies and lockdown measures have varied from state to state in Australia, because the state governments have political and strategic freedoms that may differ from those of the Australian government. Below are population figures for each state and territory in our country. Populations and problems are dense in the cities and on the coastal seaboard areas; and some problems differ in more remote and regional areas. SDGs 3/4/11/17

New South Wales	8,172,505
Victoria	6,661,736
Queensland	5,194,879
Western Australia	2,670,241
South Australia	1,770,790
Tasmania	541,506
Australian Capital Territory	431,484
Northern Territory	246,561



Border Closures: Queensland closed its borders for a greater part of the pandemic.

Because Australia is geographically distanced, in the Southern hemisphere, many residents were unable to return from journeys overseas. Their belated return has generated a number of infections, which have created havoc for Christmas travellers, who have obeyed all lockdown orders and sensibilities, and many will be in debt because of the extra cost of quarantine, which has to be enforced to preclude yet another wave of infections. Most Australians have obeyed health protocols, but on the downside, some have defied the regulations and this selfishness and lack of concern for others have had negative effects on health and behaviour.

On December 21, 2020, concerns amplified about the Northern Beaches ‘hot spot’ of Sydney New South Wales (NSW), where numbers are increasingly testing positive for the virus. Western Australia will not allow people from NSW to enter the state, and there exists the possibility of further border closures if the numbers in NSW continue to rise. Numerous Australian citizens believe that Border Closures have been the most outstanding preventative tool implemented by state governments, to provide protection from infection and death. Although widely criticised and unpopular with some members of the national population, these closures have saved lives – and after all – “...*life is infinitely precious...*”.

An update on January 2, 2020 displays further border closures as the virus begins the second wave in NSW, Victoria and South Australia. Masks have again been made mandatory in Southern states – and tracking and testing have accelerated in this New Year! Currently, Victoria has shut borders to NSW to contain the virus. Northern Territory of Australia closed borders to Sydney NSW. Western Australia (WA) closed borders to Victoria. Southern Australia shuts out NSW. Queensland closed to greater Sydney but open to Victoria. Protocols strengthened as both the UK and South African variants presented in Australia. Queensland has a snap lockdown in the Southern suburbs and greater Brisbane as the COVID-19 variants are highly infectious and the severity an estimated 70% worse than the original strain of COVID-19, the strengthened protocols, which include mandatory masks, mandatory quarantine for returning travellers and those who may have had exposure to any strain of the virus. The decisive action taken by state governments has been immediate, firm, and clear.

## 「 International Long Term Care Policy Networks in Australia 」

Lee-Fay LOW

**Key Findings:** The Australian government made the Aged Care sector during COVID, a priority. March 11, 2020, \$440M was committed to surge staffing improving infection control. New restrictions for nursing homes were declared on March 18. In Home Care additional funding supported Meals on Wheels and Televisitor schemes, remaining open to new proposals.

**New York City, United States of America:** Ideas continue to flow from the Network for Incubator and Commissary Kitchens to prep and deliver meals and to use temporary space or kerbside pickup to feed people. 89% of programs report increased demand for meals. Strict social distancing rules apply in the States and people are awaiting both vaccine and herd immunity.

Masks have been advocated in most countries, with extraordinary artistry and creativity making very interesting patterns and styles for this protective item! Many media outlets display the artistry employed in making protective masks – and people from children to grandmothers had some fun making their unique patterns, or using different fabrics and colours. Gloves are also exceptionally important, though not promoted as steadily and as often as are masks. Widespread lockdowns from March 23, 2020, changed people's lives.

Broadcasting as much information and wisdom as possible has enhanced communications and created large workloads for those of us with this portfolio – however, it has been an honour to be of service and also to remind readers/viewers of the following:

These are the words of Professor Jolanda JETTEN, School of Psychology, Faculty of Health and Behavioural Sciences at the University of Queensland, reviewing closures and restrictions throughout the COVID crisis... *“We have to be mindful not to introduce a false dichotomy: do we want freedom or health? There is no freedom without health, and it is only by staying healthy that people can have freedoms.”* UQ Contact Alumni & Community News Aug/Sep 2020. SDGs 3/4/17

Queensland and other Australian states are blessed with space, fresh air and sunshine; thusly offering little as Host to the virus! Our populations are not dense as those in many parts of the world and our rules are perfectly clear. We are immeasurably lucky, although we must remain alert.



Much has been said, in these unusual times, about the ‘place’ and value of all the arts, letters and community events; performers, poets, writers, musicians, singers, specialist and technical practitioners habitually involved. Ironically, as more and more funding for some elements of this enriching and uplifting domain has been removed, public praise and promotion of all those involved in arts/letters/music has reached a crescendo!

**Queensland Art Gallery and Gallery of Modern Art (QAGOMA)** is offering virtual art visits on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. QAGOMA KIDS is an online portal to keep kids entertained as they explore art and artists from Australia and around the world. DANCE in the lounge room provides a ‘lift’, with curated playlists on Spotify – musical magic in the “Up Late” series. COMPOSITIONS inspired by art are uploaded on YouTube channel: music by Brisbane’s contemporary classical group “Nonsemble”, inspired by the art of Margaret Olley, Ben Quilty and James Turrell’s ‘Night Life’ – just one of many past performances to enjoy! SDGs 3/4/12

**The University of Queensland Australia** offered Podcasts and Webinars. One of the Podcasts is covered with investigative journalism in an era of ‘fake news’. The new rhetoric with a proliferation of unreliable sources, the disregard for evidence and the denial of accountability raises serious questions. Why is this happening now? Do facts still matter? Is truth dead? In this podcast, award-winning investigative journalists, Professor Peter Grete and Marian Wilkinson examine the very real threats to justice, democracy, and progress, in this era of post-truth! SDGs 3/4/11/16

**Non-essential Workers?** While all the online innovations are wonderful, entertaining, and time-filling, many of our artists, performers, technical operators, and contracted workers have suffered. One of Australia’s Audio-Visual Technicians, Anna DAVIES, gave us a rare insight into the reality of the effects of COVID-19 through the eyes of a “non-essential” worker.

What they didn’t understand is that casual and temporary contract employees are what make the Audio-Visual industry go round. It’s the norm. It is incredibly unusual to have full-time sound and lighting engineers. Why? Well, it has never even really occurred to me to question this, as it was simply the way things were done. Perhaps it’s the inconsistent hours, or the late nights, or perhaps it’s to do with the fluctuation in business throughout the seasons.

Each lighting and sound company would have a pool of casual staff, some of whom they relied on more regularly than others. Some lucky staff would get “guaranteed hours”

or higher responsibilities – agreements often made verbally; not useful in these times. Companies that provide technical services for large-scale festivals and events with upwards of 5,000 guests operate on a daily basis with less than 5 full-time staff members (generally heads of departments, management and administration); they rely solely on their highly skilled casual staff to set up (bump in), operate (sound, lighting, vision etc.) and pack down (bump out). There was never any fear of work running out, or drying out, and thus the structure remained. Until...the day all events “over 500 people” were no longer to proceed. This was the day that we realised how precarious our employment was. No more big crowds. Overnight, all of my closest friends became unemployed. Instead of “How are you?” the question was “Have you found other work?”

Some have diversified, stepping into live streaming, facilitating e-learning and more; but by and large, the hard-working, highly skilled technicians whom I have spent my life admiring and working with are sitting at home, waiting to hear back from the government on how they can be supported. While there have been a number of grants specifically for the arts industry, very little can be done for the thousands of temporary and casual staff who have been working in this industry for years, with skills that have now been deemed virtually useless; certainly “non-essential.”

Historically, throughout all periods of conflict, the arts have thrived. Through music, poetry, literature, performance and visual art, people have expressed their joy, sorrow and pain and hope. The fundamental desire to have the arts is core to human society – quintessential to the human spirit. There has been an incredible outpouring of art, especially music, through social media. Artists as renowned as Andrew Lloyd Webber have skipped the barrier usually put in place by stages, purchasing tickets, record labels and production companies, and are feeding content directly into the hands of viewers. One of his famous musicals is now available each week under the initiative “The Shows Must Go On.”

**Paris, France:** Bookstores in France have been packing orders and customers have been able to collect their books outside the doors of these bookstores. Hundreds of wonderful books had been packed into paper carry bags, and handed over the barricade in the doorways! – Myriad smiling faces and “Merci beaucoup!” A brief and delightful interlude in the horrific news that continues to pour out of Europe because of the dreaded virus!

A book, ‘*The Little Breton Bistro*’ written by Nina GEORGE, says that “...people here were allowed to see the marks, because the gaze of friends was a balm for all the tears a woman shed over her lifetime – tears of passion, longing, happiness, emotion, rage, love

or pain.” (p. 69) “Marianne passed an old, thatched granite cottage with stooping eaves, a house as old as hope...Trees like cathedral buttresses and walls overgrown and ivy arched over the slender path. The fragrance of the woods blended with the peculiar aroma of seaweed, salt and spray.” (p. 90) “On the night of *Samhain*...the veil between worlds is gossamer- thin like cobwebs. Yet some of us are able to push that veil aside on any day of the year.” (p. 127) ‘*The Little Breton Bistro*’ is a captivating love letter to second chances! SDGs 1/2/3/4/5/10/17

**The joyful songs, dance, diverse cultural traditions, celebrations and classical music** that welcomed 2020, have had to ‘shape-shift’, as the virus continues to devour lives and our former way of life. Arts & Letters continue to inform the development of Social Protection Systems. Africa’s Alice ACHAN is currently locked down in Australia, where the launch of her important book, *The School of Restoration*, is prohibited by the virus. Students from The Pader Girls Academy are currently studying at home. An important publication of terrorism, sexual violence, captivity and kidnap; the author has helped hundreds of girls left with babies and HIV as a result of enslavement. SDGs 1/2/3/4/5/10/16

Christy LEFTERI is the child of Cypriot refugees. *The Beekeeper of Aleppo* is a book of international significance; born of the time the author worked as a volunteer at a UNICEF supported refugee centre in Athens. SDGs 1/2/3/4/10/11/16

**Open Cultural Centre:** an NGO and informal education & integration project in North Greece. ([www.openculturalcenter.org](http://www.openculturalcenter.org)) **Faros (The Lighthouse):** Humanitarian support for refugee children and young adults. **Salisbury World:** Refugee support for 20 years; based in north-west London, providing clubs, mentoring, careers advice, guidance and practical support for new arrivals of all ages.

**The Buzz Project:** West Yorkshire, founded by Professor Ryad Alsous, a refugee who was a beekeeper in his native Syria for over 40 years; lecturing in modern beekeeping and food quality control, teaching young people to keep bees, tend gardens and make honey.

The National Geographic Image Collection, of more than 64 physical and digital assets, is a global chronicle of the lives of women, up to the present day, taken over the past century. Snapshots show how women were perceived, treated, and how much power they had – or didn’t have. An extraordinary issue with all female contributing writers, artists and photographers assessed the greatest strengths of each. Melinda Gates alerts us that DATA is power. Susan Goldberg National Geographic Veteran war reporter, Christiane

Amanpour reminds us that we need to get men on our side when looking for equality. National Geographic: WOMEN: A Century of Change. SDGs 4/5/8/10/12/17

Great strain confronts National Councils, support staff and law providers in most countries, because of the rise of domestic abuse and violence throughout lockdown! Working groups, media and UN liaison cite Brussels, France, Morocco, Britain, Israel, Thailand and Netherlands, in particular; while Belgium and France relay cases of ‘femicide’ which were being discussed pre-virus. SDGs 1/2/3/4/10/11/16. Closed borders offer new opportunities for sourcing, trafficking and changed destinations – penal laws are demanded. Despite all, there is a whisper that *‘the Darkness never lasts...’* Jennifer Ann Davies

**Keeping Women Safe:** Congratulations also go to Jess HILL, who has won the Stella prize for “*See What You Made Me Do*”! “Domestic abuse and coercive control steals people’s language away from them,” says Jess. She has spent the past six years of her life trying to give it back! The following overview has been published and dates exist in the document, which has been acknowledged at a State level, by the Office of the Honourable Di Farmer MP, Minister for Child Safety, Youth and Women and Minister for the Prevention of Domestic and Family Violence; and by Senator, the Honourable Marise Payne, and Minister for Women at a Federal level.

Overview of Revised Law and Constitutional Changes relating to Domestic Abuse/ Domestic Violence in Argentina and Brazil. Overview relates to suggestions of alternative ways to genuinely protect women and children, following widely published review of Jess HILL’s text: *‘SEE WHAT YOU MADE ME DO: Power, Control and Domestic Abuse’*. Some of the following has already been published by NCWQ and NCWA. The information herein is important to understand the problems, context and potential solutions with an emphasis on the solutions provided by changing the Law and establishing police stations for women as was done in Argentina and Brazil.

Statistics like these may shock! In the book, *SEE WHAT YOU MADE ME DO: Power, Control and Domestic Abuse*, Jess HILL says that “Of the 87,000 women killed globally in 2017, 30,000 were killed by an intimate partner, and another 20,000 by a family member. In Australia...one woman a week is killed by a man she’s been intimate with.” This is about love, abuse and power. It’s about a phenomenon that flourishes in private and in public, perpetrated mostly by men who evade scrutiny. It’s about all the questions we don’t ask, like ‘Why does *he* do it?’ It’s about turning our stubborn beliefs and assumptions inside out and confronting one of the most complex – and urgent – issues of

our time. (Jess HILL, p. 2)

The text is abundant with sound statistics. Hill makes it very clear that abuse occurs everywhere and constantly. It is not confined to particular women and men...it does not occur only to the poor, the vulnerable, the mentally ill or those with a 'victim mentality'! Hill argues that we must 'trace the breadcrumbs back to where the destruction begins'! She states that, to address the myriad issues generated by abuse, we **MUST** understand that it is **ENTRENCHED** throughout society. (Jess HILL, p. 5) To address the problems and to change anything, we must **ALL** acknowledge this entrenchment.

THIS POINT MUST BE CLEAR to appreciate the truths, research, stories, reality and urgency of the book: 'Domestic abuse is not just violence. It's worse. It is a unique phenomenon, in which the perpetrator takes advantage of a partner's love and trust and uses that person's most intimate details – their deepest desires, shames and secrets – as a blueprint for their abuse.' (p. 6) Simply – "Men abuse women because society tells them they are **ENTITLED** to be in control."

For those who need to do a fast read, Chapter 5: **PATRIARCHY** is vital. Even if one may disagree, at first, please read on... "Patriarchy is an invisible mainframe that regulates how we live. It sets parameters around 'acceptable' behaviour for both genders: men should be 'strong, independent, unemotional, logical and confident', and women should be 'expressive, nurturant, weak and dependent.'" (p. 135) and explored further in Chapter 11. Being able to trust police to help is questionable. More than 80% of women living 'underground' (so they're not abused anymore or murdered) have not reported to the police. (Jess Hill, p. 253)

"For women with children...no system is as punishing – or as dangerous – as the family law system." It is exceptionally, completely vital that **ALL** readers understand this explicit statement, and absorb **ALL** the reasons **WHY** this is so. The ways in which we operate our 'systems' and 'supports' very often inflames an abuser and the same, most certainly, continue to place immense stress, fear-laden practices, demands and huge debts, on abused women and children. (Jess Hill, p. 285)

In Brazil, young women were kept in captivity, made to have babies for the officers, and then had their babies stolen – this is claimed to be the basis for *The Handmaid's Tale*. (p. 254) Women, brutalised by the state, looked for an answer. Brazil had introduced a new model of policing: *delagacia da mulher* – **POLICE STATIONS FOR WOMEN** – These new stations looked different and were brightly painted houses in the heart of

neighbourhoods...led and mostly staffed by female police officers. (p.284).

Argentina introduced its first police station for women in 1985, and today in Buenos Aires alone there are 128 police stations for women and children staffed by around 2,300 police. They have all the powers of regular police – they conduct investigations, make arrests... Their structure (however) is completely different – they report to the police minister via their own Commissioner for Women's Police, not the head of the common police – and their mission is different too. Their primary purpose is not to enforce the law; it's to PROTECT THE VICTIMS. "They never turn a woman away, and they never take their power away from her, which is what abusers do" says Professor Kerry CARRINGTON, head of Queensland University of Technology's school of justice. "Sometimes they will help a woman apply for a prosecution order. Other times, she may want them to kick her abuser out of the house...she may just want them to talk to him...No matter is too trivial – (the police are there to listen and protect, not to decide whether a law has been broken." (p. 254)

For a woman with kids, "Crucially, all the services she needs – lawyers, social workers, psychologists – are under the same roof, and police will also help her to get medical and financial aid. Instead of having to contact several different agencies, as most women do in Australia, they can get everything they need in one place." It is important to know that the women's police don't just wait for the women to come to them. They visit hospitals, community centres, churches and gatherings – they are not afraid and they know where the pockets of resistance are. (p. 255)

Following changes because of Argentina's system and a particularly violent incident, Brazil introduced ground-breaking legislation on domestic violence, called Maria da PENHA Law, on 22 September 2006. The Law was so-called to honour a woman who was almost killed by her husband, but there was not a single police station she could go to for help or which was specializing in violence against women. Maria da Penha is now a paraplegic as a direct result of that night of violence and she is in a wheelchair!! She is now 72– and still a vibrant and tireless worker for future protection for women and children. @BBCNewsMagazine

Maria also makes an interesting point that many, including our own organisations and institutions avoid or circumnavigate when trying to understand WHY? Maria states, repeatedly that there was No Single Trigger for changes in the behaviour of the abuser... which means that the abuse or violence is NOT, necessarily, caused by alcohol, drugs, or other triggers. It is truly entrenched and I can guarantee all readers that this is 100% correct!

The abuse, then, can be directed at the wife, children, babies – the time could be 5:00 AM, 12:00 noon or 7:38 PM.

**Changes to the Law** – heralded as landmark legislation on domestic abuse by The United Nations: BBC World Service Witness Programme: Increased punishment for offenders/Establishment of special Domestic Violence Courts/Requirement of Authorities to open 24-hour shelters for abused women.

The purpose and function of the special domestic violence courts differs from the long-winded, highly expensive and crude system we have in place in our country. ‘Specialists’, counsellors, advisors, psychologists are expensive – they have little cohesion OR some work for particular lawyers, with particular agendas and they do not view, compile or transmit immediate and relevant facts to keep women and children safe!

*This is a segment of the original document but timely because the issues have been bared naked throughout the pandemic. MEDIA has taken a braver and more acute look of the issues and people know that these cannot be alleviated simply by more funding or counselling. The publication of the full document was for NCWQ April Arts/Letters 2020.*

**Education:** Numerous teachers, parents and support people have assisted what the communities flippantly term ‘online learning’ which many post-modernists promote as ‘the way to the future’ of education – Those with a genuine and realistic ethos and direction know better. Some teacher/student contact throughout the pandemic has been of some value – largely, students are deeply concerned about the study and content they know has been missed and the concerns have been deepest for senior students, particularly our Year 12 students, who need pathways into tertiary education or into the workplace; and for tertiary students who are mandated to have ‘x’ hours of practical experience. Of particular concern, in Australian institutions, has been the practicums still needed in all medical arenas and in dentistry. Undergraduate students in teaching, nursing, dental, vet sciences and a range of other faculties have not been able to undertake their mandated practicums. The issue is being viewed by governments, councils and organisations to provide the most effective remedies.



## **BRIGHT SPOTS!**

For many students working online and receiving worksheets, some fun and learning generated from carefully derived worksheets which had both text and illustrations. The worksheets most attended, marked and correct, were those which gave illustrated ‘clues’ encouraging the kids to research future! This works particularly well in the sciences and social sciences; and can work well in all subject areas for primary and secondary students. Congratulations to the teachers, parents and trainers who prepared these worksheets! Freshwater S School 2020

**Language Rich Environments:** During all times, but particularly during the pandemic, friendship, laughter, hope, memory and listening, all help us create a language rich environment in which children of all ages are less vulnerable....in which they can still be immunised against poor language, literacy and numeracy! SDGs 3/4/10

*“Love recognises no barrier. It jumps hurdles, leaps fences, penetrates walls to arrive at its destination – full of hope.” - Maya ANGELOU*

**Fiji 2020:** Masks were not usually used in many parts of Fiji throughout the pandemic, but with much faith and little fear, Fijians planted crops, shared food, meals, laughter, prayer, song, companionship, homes and are again hunkered down for the monsoon season, which brings storms, cyclones, heavy rains and floods and demands that humane sharing which helps everyone arrive at the ‘destination’ cited by Maya Angelou.

**Bali and Java, Indonesia:** Few villagers use masks, but some social distancing has been practised, we are advised. COVID seems out of control in many areas of Indonesia and Java but families are careful to stay at home and to go out only when really essential. A big challenge is that the government keeps changing policies and people are not following health protocols, generating thousands of new cases daily. Globally, National Women’s Councils, sister organisations, and voluntary workers continue to communicate the importance of following health protocols.

**Austria:** ICW Music Advisor, Eleonore Hauer-Rona, advises that even though Austrians are in a third lockdown, vaccinations had begun and music was soothing and hope was flourishing! On 24 December, 2020 Eleonore had found, blossoming in her garden, the first five Snowdrops and one Primula! – symbols of the promise of Spring and a new era in which the COVID darkness will not overshadow our lives! Eleonore’s report on council and activities and coping strategies can be viewed in the ICW newsletter No. 71. SDGs 3/4/11/17

**Japan, Taiwan and North Korea:** Because of further serious outbreaks, celebrations for New Year were muted. Health protocols are being followed in the main and hope springs because of the possibilities of both immunisation and herd immunisation. Yukiko Ada of Japan's Women's Watch was another guest speaker at the webinar for Asia-Pacific Women's Watch.

**Communicating via social media** has been vital to the survival, well-being and resilience of people worldwide. Our Councils and sister organisations continue the work to cope with the COVID virus. Providing books has given as great boost to the isolated, lonely, anxious and has generated a new exchange for many. As the great Plato once wrote: *“Books give a soul to the universe, wings to the mind, flight to the imagination and Life to everything...”*

**Germany, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America** are currently suffering the greatest volume of deaths from both original strain of the virus and the variant in the UK. Work and advocacy continue. **The US, India and Brazil** are working to cope with the highest infection rates as at 11 January 2021. A global approach with vaccines, masks and lockdowns continues, as does our work!

Stay Safe, Strong and Well – we are with you in this!

**Jennifer Ann Davies, ICW-CIF Arts & Letters Advisor**

### < The Impact of COVID-19 on Food System >

In early September 2020, I represented ICW at the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) for the Asia Pacific Region. The Asia Pacific Region includes 46 countries across a vast area from Samoa in the Pacific, to the countries like, Russia, China, Korea, Japan, Philippines, Vietnam, Indonesia, Laos, Cambodia, Thailand, Malaysia, Myanmar, Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Bhutan, Iran and Afghanistan, Papua New Guinea, Australia, New Zealand, Vanuatu, Tuvalu, Fiji and Cook Islands. The FAO APR conference was held virtually for the first time, and was hosted by Bhutan. The Chairperson was Dasha Rinzin Dorji of Bhutan.



All countries have been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, through disruptions to food supply chains; higher prices for some fresh produce, disruptions in some countries to harvesting, planting and transport of food, with income losses for family farmers, that affect women greatly. An estimated 690 million people are hungry and 6.7 million children are undernourished.



There is a need to rebuild resilient food supply chains by supporting digital agriculture with more internet infrastructure in rural areas and support digital literacy. Also, to promote short food supply chains, to deepen intra-regional trade and keep trade open, and to prevent the next

zoonotic diseases. This would include knowing where food came from (traceability); de-linking wildlife from agriculture and livestock; tracking illegal trade; and monitoring encroachment of wildlife.

FAO is working with other programs like the World Food Program and raising financial resources through the World Bank and UNIDO. FAO has an “Umbrella Program” to improve data for better decision-making; more social protection and poverty reduction;

better food safety; helping smallholder resilience; prevent next zoonotic pandemic; improve global food systems transportation; and a global humanitarian response plan.

Responses from different countries varied: In **Korea** with a lockdown at first, people could buy food online, while in **India** the pandemic coincided with harvesting so restrictions were lowered so harvesting could happen. **Thailand** gave USD 5 billion to farmers.

**Bangladesh** has 1 in 10 people in extreme poverty, and that has been made worse due to COVID-19. In Bangladesh, many women lost their sources of income, but the government provided low interest loans and there was public food assistance for the poor. In **China**, they said FAO has responded quickly, and there has been strengthened co-operation, while China was able to avoid the impacts of COVID-19. In **Vietnam**, 65% of people are rural, and most had their income affected by the disease, and poverty increased.

Some countries limited the spread of disease by closing borders, but that affects tourism. Local fisheries are important food sources for many Asia and Pacific countries, some of which are affected by illegal, and large-scale fishing boats.

In **Malaysia**, although adversely affected by COVID-19, the Malaysian government established a cabinet Food Security Committee to support farmers and to provide temporary income support, with a stay on loan repayments, shortening the food supply chain, and enhancing digital platforms.

In **Papua New Guinea** where up to this time they had 459 people with COVID-19, they extended the State of Emergency, so that there were restrictions on the movement of people, but that did affect food supply. The PNG government provided money for a range of agricultural products.

The **Australian** official spoke about the need for comprehensive zoonotic biosecurity; for containing transboundary pests, like swine fever; to have both long-term and immediate responses; and to respond to human-caused environmental changes.

**Fiji** reported that at that time there had been 20 cases of COVID-19, and they contained the spread, but this affected tourism. As 59% of Fijians rely on agriculture, they are promoting sustainable food practices, as they are also impacted by climate change. FAO supplied seeds for home gardens.

Many countries' officials spoke about the combined impacts of the pandemic and climate change, that includes extreme weather events from droughts in Afghanistan, water scarcity in islands like Vanuatu; flooding and salinity incursion in small islands

like Tuvalu, and in Bangladesh. The Indian official spoke about climate change affecting natural systems and adding to extreme weather events.

The FAO spoke about development of Action Plans in relation to the effects of climate change, to shocks and disasters, and the need for food and dietary diversification, plus plant and animal pest controls. FAO has done rapid assessments, developed policy briefs with countries, and held roundtables and dialogues, plus some re-orienting of existing projects and programs with extra resources.

FAO has Regional Initiatives: To end poverty and hunger (SDG1); To address climate change, (SDG13); One Health program: healthy people, plants, animals and shared environment and to control pests and zoonotic diseases, (SDG15); Promote Blue growth: fisheries, aquaculture and healthy oceans. (SDG14)

National Councils of Women anywhere in the World can understand how widespread these issues are, and the increased need to end poverty and hunger under the extra strains of a global pandemic, as well as to be aware that the pandemic effects on food systems are made worse by the impacts of climate changes.

There is also the need to advocate for better biosecurity, to contain the spread of diseases, like swine fever, avian flu and now COVID-19, and to ask governments to be better prepared for outbreaks of diseases.

### **< The fight against COVID-19 in Australia >**

The fight against the COVID-19 pandemic in Australia was helped by the restrictions on Australia's borders. People entering Australia from overseas are required to quarantine in specified hotels for 14 days.

Early on in the pandemic mistakes were made, for example thousands of people from the cruise liner, the Ruby Princess were allowed to leave despite people reporting ill. Those thousands travelled back to their home towns throughout Australia. People realized that such an occurrence was a super-spreader of the virus. Very soon afterwards, each State and Territory enacted strict lockdowns, then quarantines for anyone testing positive for COVID-19.

Frequent public announcements about the symptoms, and the necessity to get tested and to isolate if you had any such symptoms, were a factor in reducing the amount of this terrible virus.

The lockdowns meant many casual employees were suddenly out of work, and long lines of people queued for income relief. The Federal government brought in programs like Jobseeker, that had a temporary higher payment than usual, and asked that landlords give rent relief. The Federal government also brought in a payment to businesses called JobKeeper, so as to keep employees “on their books”. The intention was to keep more businesses going over a few months. Later a program to get more people into jobs was Jobmaker. These programs appeared to help keep a majority of businesses going. Low paid casual employment means that such employees often do more than one job, and they have been in jobs like aged care. The results have been dreadful.

### **The effects varied in the different States and Territories:**

The Northern Territory government was very concerned especially wanting to protect Aboriginal communities, who already had taken swift action to keep their communities safe. The Northern Territory government kept their borders closed for months.

In the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) people adhered to lockdowns, with schools closed for a few weeks in April to May 2020. Students were generally used to using Chrome books for online learning, and the ACT government was quick to provide Chrome books and WiFi access to those few who did not have any. Very quickly family and local groups looked out for older people who are most at risk of severe illness and death from COVID. Some of us stayed at home with family doing shopping. We were allowed to exercise, and many of us would drive to places of beauty to walk. Sometimes walking with a friend while keeping distant. With no local transmission for COVID for many days, activities started to resume, school students returned to face-to-face learning. The community use the protocols of hand sanitising, mask wearing, keeping distant, getting tested if any symptoms. Better ventilation in building helps, and some places like cafes, restaurants and hotels could serve take-away food, and later serve food and drinks outside.

People learnt to use Zoom or other such platforms, and were able to keep in touch with family, friends and their usual groups. Organisations started to run Webinars, with excellent presenters. Doctors started to have consultations using telehealth or use digital health platforms much more. For example, a doctor in a region or remote area could speak with a specialist in a major city. Sometimes patients could do the same.

**Tasmania, Western Australia and South Australia** closed their borders to interstate travel, used strict lockdowns for any outbreaks, doing many COVID tests, ensuring that if anyone tested positive for COVID they stayed in isolation for 14 days. Then with no local

transmission, they were able to open up economic and social activities with the health protocols. Their economies thrived under such care.

**Queensland** was similar but had more cases as they opened up their borders.

Sudden border closures were difficult for people. Permit systems have been put in place, but they can change too, depending on any outbreaks.

New South Wales and Victoria had more outbreaks. Victoria had high cases at one stage in April 2020, but with a strict lockdown, isolation for 14 days when someone tested positive for COVID, they were eventually able to bring cases down to zero.

In a recent Newsletter from the National Council of Women in Victoria, they reported: “At the initial meeting of the new Committee on 17 December, we reflected on Australia again being the “Lucky Country” when we consider ourselves compared to humanity around the world dealing with the pandemic. We are benefitting from the respect of our leadership for those involved in medicine, nursing, and medical science for recommended methods to control the spread of COVID-19, approval process for COVID-19 vaccination; and having the wherewithal to produce and distribute the necessary equipment and vaccines around Australia and engaging with Pacific neighbours.” (NCWV Newsletter, Jan. 2021)

We know that viruses mutate and the new strains are proving to have higher transmission rates. There is hope that vaccines will help reduce the deaths and severe ill effects of this terrible virus. The vaccines being used so far seem to be effective in reducing those effects. Many people will need to be vaccinated and even then experts are saying that the virus is likely to be around for 2021 and into 2022. Covid-safe protocols of hand sanitising, keeping distance, wearing masks, getting tested if any symptoms and isolating will continue to be necessary.

### < Domestic Violence and Mental Health >

Domestic Violence and mental health issues of anxiety, stress, sadness and grief have been spoken about in the media in Australia, with a number of helplines. Some have mentioned that with lockdown, some women could not escape the abuse, nor could they phone for help.

Families have often found it stressful in coping with their children learning from home. In some cases, people have learnt how hard teachers tried to help the students, how difficult it can be to pace the studies and concentration of students, and have learnt to appreciate teachers a lot more!



A leading Professor of Psychiatry, Ian Hickie, has written about mental health during the COVID. He said, “From a public messaging perspective, people experiencing mental distress are being encouraged to use mental health hotlines or seek help from their family doctor or other mental health practitioners. While these may seem to be straightforward and sensible messages, we have shown that simply increasing awareness without expanding the actual capacity of an already thinly stretched (if not broken) care system can have more negative outcomes. What is really required are two clear actions. One is public messaging about supporting each other, and those who are distressed, within our families, workplaces, communities and churches throughout this period. The other is rapid action to fix key elements of the mental health system.”

According to the report on Rethinking Mental Health in Australia from the University of Sydney, it says that “Sadly, the summer of 2019-20 has had a huge impact on the mental health of Australia, with fires, storms and now a pandemic. Although Australia’s health system is frequently lauded as one of the best in the world, such assessments do not include mental health, where Australia’s performance is far from world class. Mental health was typically characterized as in crisis before COVID-19. The pandemic has now increased the community’s risk of suicidality and mental illness associated with anxiety, depression, social isolation, financial distress, unemployment and educational dislocation.” (Dr. Rosenberg, Hickie, and Rock)



Wendy Rainbird,  
Environment Advisor

National Councils can advocate for better funding for mental health because the issues will continue. Women can also advocate for better pay for the caring professions, particularly in aged care, and their work is made more permanent, so that if unwell, employees take the time out to get tested, wait for the COVID result and stay home if positive. The National Councils who used online technology to keep the meetings going and to keep in contact, for helping people to feel less isolated.

**Wendy Rainbird, ICW-CIF Environment Advisor**

## Education

### < Civic Education and Coronavirus Reduction in Korea >



Young-ae Ha,  
Education Advisor

In recent times South Korea has been greatly praised by many countries around the world as one of the best in confronting the coronavirus. Civic education has played a key role in curbing the spread of COVID-19 and helping to keep citizens relatively safe. The government has collaborated with civil societies and companies to produce and supply masks that are readily available. Citizens are given instructions which allow them to receive their masks on designated days. One can purchase masks at any pharmacy, provided that the person brings her ID card with her. This method has now become the norm and part of civic education for all citizens. Because the system is well organized, it is not necessary for people to wait in line to receive the masks.

The media plays a critical role in the daily education of Korean citizens. The focus is emphasizing the importance of habitualized sanitization and social distancing.

In addition, the government has implemented a COVID-19 contact tracing system to identify the infected population. The system can effectively trace, quarantine and alert other citizens on their phones. Civic safety and hygiene education are the driving force behind Korea's success in reducing the number of COVID-19 patients and containing the spread of the virus.



### < 18-year-old teenagers will exercise their right to vote >

April 15, 2020 was South Korea's parliamentary election day. Elections are, obviously, of great national interest and provide a platform for civic education. Currently, there are 300 lawmakers in South Korea. Starting this year, the voting age has been lowered from 19 to 18. Therefore, high school students are now given the right to vote for the first time. It is estimated that there are some 520,000 18-year-olds and among them, 140,000 students are in their third year of high school.

This is the dawn of an era where discussions in the classroom begin to influence politics outside the classroom. It is now incumbent upon candidates to consider addressing policies which appeal to the younger generation in order to broaden their support.

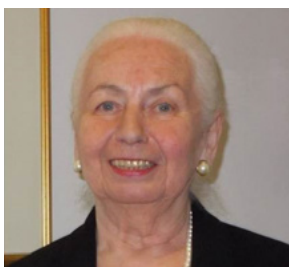
**< Middle-aged and Elderly Women's Smartphone Education Program >**

The Korean National Council of Women, along with the leaders of the Women's Association in 17 cities and provinces, will implement digital literacy education for middle-aged and elderly women. According to the results of the "2019 Survey on the Use of Broadcast Media" released by the Korea Communications Commission, less than half of the middle-aged and elderly population are proficient with smartphone use which results in severely limited utilization. Therefore, a digital literacy program was created to empower middle-aged and elder women with the capacity to become active in today's digital world. This program will also enhance people's livelihood during this crisis by allowing for online shopping and entertainment. This will benefit elderly citizens as well as businesses with an online presence.

**Young-ae Ha, ICW-CIF Education Advisor**

## MEMBER COUNCILS (NCWs) ————○—○—○

### 🌐 National Council of Women of Austria



Eleonore Hauer-Rona,  
President of NCW Austria

The last months were characterized by the measures and restrictions related to COVID-19. The activities of the NCW were reduced to the most necessary, a new light system was installed in our premises, but work within most of the member organizations was intensified because of the unexpected new challenges posed by the pandemic. On the other hand, COVID-19 gave most of us time for reflecting our work, where we stand in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and last but not least to look after all things we never had the time to do in the months before.

Home office, home-schooling, distance learning, looking after children at home because of closed kindergarten or schools posed on many of our members an additional burden and life work balance was often not more than an idea. The real extent of these measures will be realized only in the months to come.

Originally planned for a shorter period, the system seems to become a permanent load on women's shoulders. Strange enough that a majority of women welcomes the work at home. Perhaps they will wake up when the financial and psychological consequences will be realized later on and a return to the situation before the pandemic will be no more possible as the offices are no longer existing because the costs for them have been too high for the employers and so on. The disproportional impact of COVID-19 on women should be monitored in all political and economic discussions and consequences should be met by governments and the economy.



The increase of domestic violence during the lockdown is a well-known consequence of living together under the problems caused by the pandemic. Unemployment and short time work following the economic breakdown is another reason for growing problems in social cohesion.

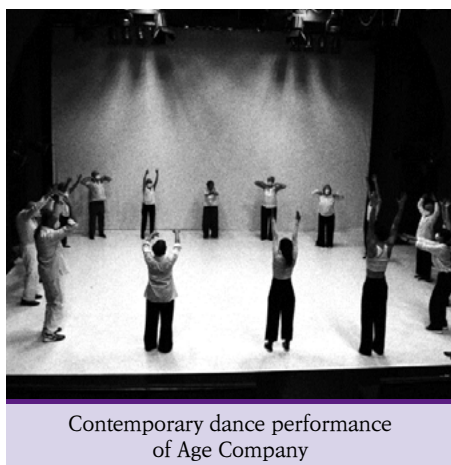
However, we should not be pessimistic, we have tools like the arts and music, which should be better used and given greater importance as they are helping to overcome the

psychological problems and for musicians and artists to earn their living. We women are the leaders in overcoming all these difficulties, in finding ways for ourselves, our families and society in general, and we will be successful in the end as we were in times of and after wars.

Some examples from our member organisations of dealing with the COVID-19 situation (alphabetical order):

### < Age Company >

Members of a dance/performance group, Age Company, are going through tough times especially when they are older. Since March when COVID did affect also Europe there was no possibility to hold a rehearsal or it was too risky to meet in the rehearsal room even. How can one develop a choreography, when you don't come together, get in contact with the other bodies, experience ideas for body movements. At the beginning of COVID, most of us were afraid and we did not dare to go out for shopping and walking. When we went out, we recognized very often nasty looks. The old folks should stay home, it is their fault that we, the younger generation, are forced to this terrible lockdown. We thought the generation conflict is coming back and we, the older generation, is again used as a scapegoat. In the meantime, one can see in public that there is no generation conflict but a conflict between stupid and ignorant peoples and responsible and solidary peoples.



Contemporary dance performance  
of Age Company

The symbol of this conflict is the mask and not the age. The conflict runs through all age groups. One part is wearing the mask for instance in public traffic the other part does not follow the rules and more than that is proud of the own courage. The mask is a symbol of solidarity because when we are wearing it, we are protecting more others than ourselves. There is a saying that the world after COVID will be a better world because humanity has recognized that it cannot go on like this. When I see all these peoples of all ages without their masks I doubt it.

Nothing is like it used to be but wasn't it always like that. Also, in former times had unpredictable events erased dreams, canceled wishes, crashed plans. Pause key. Should we really continue like before? In this case, we see red! Fear and anxiety let our bodies shrink. We withdraw from public life, we experience real situations of isolation and exclusion. Can it be, that the so-called normality is our salvation? In this case we see red!

On the one hand, we are faced with pictures, "how elderly peoples have to be", and on the other hand with the illusion of a desirable, eternal youth. Do we really need to entangle in a conflict between generations? In this case, we see red! The performers of the Age Company and the students of MUK (Musik und Kunst Privatuniversität der Stadt Wien) create together the vision of a common world.

**< CWM - Club der Wiener Musikerinnen  
(Association of Women Musicians of Vienna) >**



The lack of possibilities to perform gave time to think about planning a new CD with works by contemporary women composers, videos on music archaeology were produced for students, "Dachbodenkonzerte" (Attic or Loft concerts) were started, teachers and students from abroad had to stay in Vienna over the summer months instead of traveling to their home countries and felt lonely until they finally were more than happy to play under difficult circumstances after 6 "lost months", while concerts of our members in the Suntory Hall, Japan, and in Riga, Latvia, had to be canceled because of travel restrictions.

"Distance Learning: My best pupils lost motivation and interest first. The younger pupils reacted negatively to distance learning: it was very difficult to convey my suggestions and ideas to them with just words, without the physical presence. The sound quality with WhatsApp was abominable-- deeper bass notes weren't audible, I couldn't hear if the pupils were using pedal or not. With some pupils, the connection kept breaking.

The sound was more constant with pupils that had an electric piano. There was almost no possibility to work musically with the pupils, just simply correct wrong notes-- it wasn't always possible to check the fingering, let alone control the dynamics (because of the faulty connection). All this was terribly frustrating for both sides-- I was exhausted after teaching!



Surprisingly enough, my weaker pupils seemed to react positively to the distance learning and practice more than usual. In some cases, I realized why some pupils had bad hand/finger position-- they were sitting much too low at their piano at home; why some always had problems with the piano at the music school-- they had only an electric piano or keyboard at home. Instrumental teaching needs physical presence.” (R.S.)

“Since March we stopped playing with our Ensemble Diagonal. We planned two concerts, but we couldn't play. We were very sorry about that, because it would have been beneficial for a new organ. I myself could not visit music courses in Germany. I was very sad about that and lost some money. No good time! I hope a vaccination will be developed soon. The only thing we can do is to be careful, think of distance and wear masks.” (I.G.)

For music – perhaps different from many other fields – the in-person contact is a precondition for satisfactory and successful results in teaching and performing.

### < COVID-19 in the kindergarten >



The COVID-19 crisis hit us all quite hard especially in the kindergarten. The children, parents and the team have been very worried, scared and felt

unsafe. It was very important to show all that we can manage the situation well and know what we do. We had and still have strict rules for the parents e.g., to wear all the time a mask as soon as they enter the kindergarten. For the team additional work came up such as disinfecting regularly the doorknobs, light switches, opening the windows on an hourly basis, protocols over protocols, filling in lots of forms, writing a hygiene script and so on.

We talked and explained a lot to the parents about the changes in the daily routine. With the children we had to start by scratch to teach them the importance of coughing into their elbows and not into their hands. We made up Coronavirus stories, a little book and Coronavirus pictures. Not all parents have been acknowledging our rules and it took as a big effort to get them to obey our rules. The children have been easier but forgot often while sneezing how to do it.

The time was and is still very stressful because new rules keeping coming up and so many changes and decisions are to handle daily. We all hope, that that threat is soon over.



We try to make all to understand that it is only possible when we all work together and take care of each another. Best wishes from the Discovery Zone team. (M.K.)

### < Intakt therapy centre for people suffering from eating disorders >

During the first lockdown, we closed our therapy centre, but our therapists worked with their clients via telephone, skype or zoom. For most of the clients it was very helpful not to be left alone in these demanding weeks. The health insurance companies also refunded this way of therapy.

After summer, the intakt team moved its office to Gussenbauergasse 1/21 and since then we have been experiencing that increasingly more clients are contacting us, as they realize that their eating habits have turned to a stressful extent and finally look for help in our centre. ([www.intakt.at](http://www.intakt.at))

In the second lockdown, therapy sessions are allowed to be face to face - of course under the corona safety conditions - and it is up to therapists and clients in which way they decide to continue their work. It is a pity that we have not yet been able to start again our evening sessions to support parents or relatives to cope with the challenges concerning eating disorders. But still we can offer help via telephone or our forum pages on our homepage. (B.L-B.)



The leading team of intakt

### < MAS (Morbus Alzheimer Help) Alzheimerhilfe >



“We can now again offer all its services under the corona safety conditions. Due to the coronavirus, some of the clients are still hesitating to contact the dementia service centres. MAS also took the opportunity to use intensively the online facilities in order to extend services especially in the field of training and meeting with relatives are offered free of charge. They refer to and recommend their books, tips and other info material or the online helpline.” (M.B.) ([www.alzheimerhilfe.at](http://www.alzheimerhilfe.at))

### < MOKI - Mobile Kinderkrankenpflege (Mobile nurses for children) >

“The last 6 months were very challenging. Worrying about a possible infection some of the families cancelled the visits of the nurses, on the other hand part of the free capacities could be used to compensate the care for grown up clients. Public relation work was and remains reduced. Less public relation results in reduced income from sponsoring and donations. In addition, members had to find other ways to get the necessary masks and protective clothing as in the beginning of the pandemic these precautionary materials were not available in sufficient numbers. Volunteers among members of MOKI were sewing these articles. With the support by a great number of companies and private persons these problems could be solved.” (G.H.)



### < OEFU - Oesterreichische Familien-Union (Austrian Society for Families) >

Although we had no immediate or direct problems with COVID-19, our work has been heavily impaired by the measures prescribed by the Austrian government. We work for and with families. As can be seen on our website ([www.oefu.at](http://www.oefu.at)), our projects are mostly family-bound and therefore include direct contact between our team and our clients.

**Mamisi Baby Lounge:** We offer a newly installed apartment in close distance to the Universitätsklinikum Graz where women who plan to give birth in hospital can prepare for labor in cozy surroundings. They can relax in our place with their families before the time at the delivery suite, husbands or older children and grandparents may stay there and be closer to the mothers and newborns. This place was used, yes, but less than normal, since we were not allowed to invite prospective parents to informative talks. Furthermore, prenatal classes which advertise our offer were cancelled.

**Mama-Baby-Perle:** Our second project helps young families in need of support by means of doula-visits. Our doulas are well-trained, experienced mothers who go into families and provide a big help with new-born babies and also with older siblings. Unfortunately, this going into families was forbidden. We could only help via e-mail or telephone – which was better than nothing but could not replace personal contact satisfactorily.

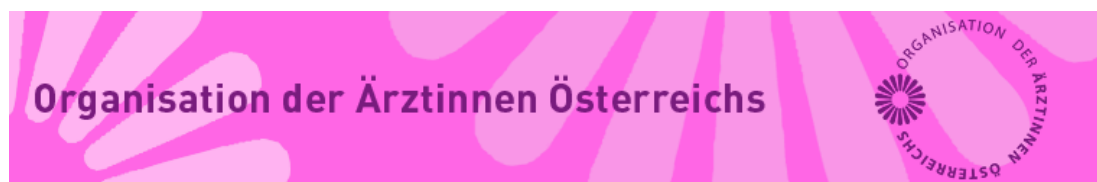
**Aus.Zeit.Haus (Time-out places):** This project offers a pretty and fully furnished garden-apartment at a lake near Graz to mothers/women who need some time off after hospital treatment, illness, or affliction. Two more places, one in Southern Styria and one

in Western Hungary, which we had just started preparing could not get finished due to corona-measures. With home-schooling and the ban on grandparents doing family work, mothers could not get much time for themselves, however desperately needed...

Fortunately, a few older women could enjoy our place in early summer and we invited several families for holidays who received less money in the course of short-time working and would have had difficulty affording a holiday.

Altogether I must say that I understand the first panic and chaos around a “new” disease. But very strict measures became even stricter when the curve had already flattened and every covid-positive death was and still is counted as caused by COVID-19, even a traffic accident. I would call that a completely unscientific approach which only intends to frighten people.

### < Organisation der Aerztinnen Oesterreichs (Medical Women Austria) >



COVID-19 and pregnancy – a short summary of the statement by Dr. Edith Schratzberger-Vécsei, president of the member organization of NCW Austria, at the Medical Women's International Association (MWIA) side event at the 65th session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW65) in March 2021.

Pregnant women are at risk of severe COVID-19. This risk is not yet common knowledge. Out of 90 pregnant women with COVID-19 admitted to one hospital in Vienna, 15 had to be transferred to the intensive care unit; one woman aged 31 succumbed to COVID soon after giving birth.

Unfortunately, we cannot yet recommend the vaccination against COVID-19 for pregnant women due to a lack of data. Studies providing safety and efficacy data are on their way and to be published in the near future. Until then, it is crucial that we protect pregnant women as much as we can. That includes the possibility of early maternity leave if workplaces are not safe. Women who plan to get pregnant should have priority access to vaccinations against COVID-19. And obviously, measures such as wearing masks, keeping distance and frequent hand disinfection serve to protect pregnant women too. Politicians have to be aware of the particular vulnerability of pregnant women when it comes to developing and establishing anti-COVID-19 measures.

**< VAO - Verband der Akademikerinnen Oesterreichs  
(Austrian Federation of University Women) >**

“One of our VAO members, Dr. Maria-Luise Oehl, Chair of the Austrian Doctors' Art Association, has produced the attached video which shows Coronavirus-inspired artwork.” (E.F.) (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fL7iMf4RXFk&t=30s>)

**< Zonta Wien City >**



Like in some other organizations “activities are simply not taking place, even elections for the board are held virtually only in order to avoid putting someone’s health at risk.” (M.S.)

**To conclude:**

In addition to the activities of member organizations, we are discussing the various webinars and conferences dealing with the impact of the pandemic on different groups of the society, actual books like the green book “COVID-19 and Beyond” by the Forum of the researching pharmaceutical industry, various scientific papers and statements. The effect of the pandemic on the SDGs is another theme of interest for our meetings.

Finally, we are collecting ideas and proposals on how to overcome the raising lethargy, depressive symptoms and psychological phenomena among all age groups, but especially among the young generation, our future. The great concern is the growing number of young people suffering from eating disorders and other psychological diseases as a result of the lockdowns and other restrictions resulting in alarming figures of stays in hospitals.

Simple daily activities are recommended to uplift the quality of well-being during these demanding months: participating in virtual language courses, learning a music instrument, growing plants on the window ledge, bringing colors into the living room by putting flowers or funny table clothes on the table, to dress in the home office like you would go to the office, etc.

Overall, we should not listen only to all kinds of Corona news, but concentrate on positive aspects of life and plan for the time after the pandemic, taking profit of what we have learned for our life during the period of COVID-19.

We women have learned to overcome difficult periods of life during and after a number of crisis and wars and so we will overcome the COVID-19 pandemic too.

**Reported by Eleonore Hauer-Rona, President NCW Austria**

## Bangladesh Mahila Parishad (BMP)

The first case of the COVID-19 made its headline on March 8, 2020 in Bangladesh. But no one could comprehend the severity of this impending disaster, even though it has been taking millions of lives across the continents since January 2020. The first phase of the official lockdown has been imposed on March 25. Social distancing turned out to be the most effective strategy, while other sanitization protocols were introduced to curb the pandemic. Apart from public health crisis, this pandemic unraveled the social inequalities based on age, class, and gender. Millions of people bore the brunt of economic crisis due to the lock down, resulting into pay cuts, losing jobs; while gender-based violence has been on rise.

Bangladesh Mahila Parishad (BMP) has been extremely proactive since the beginning of the pandemic. It has taken up multiple initiatives to tackle the challenge. The physical office has been shut down since March 2020 and the BMP central body has been operating in the virtual platform ever since. They have made a concentrated effort to raise funds for providing the sustenance to the individuals in need; introduced hotlines for the survivors of the gender-based violence to avail the legal aid and a separate line for the health support. They have initiated several advocacy programs with multiple stake holders including state agencies at the wake of the pandemic. Highlights of these initiatives are following:

### < Donation and Relief >

The BMP's first reaction to the pandemic was to extend the help to the worst affected – individuals at the margin. There has been a centralized drive to raise funds to procure the essentials for the marginal communities. These essentials contained weekly groceries, dry food, hand sanitizer, soap, gloves, and masks for the affected families. Apart from distributing the relief, some of the district committees generated their funds for relief operations. A total of 1,265 families has received supports through these initiatives. BMP launched an awareness campaign distributing leaflets with instructions to maintain personal safety.



### < Health Awareness Campaign >

Several Awareness campaigns aim at familiarizing women with the COVID-19 symptoms by explaining the need to maintain social distance and use precautions such as using frequent hand wash and the mask in public, ensuring special protection for pregnant women, women with coronary heart disease and respiratory problem. All these awareness programs followed COVID-19 safety protocols.

### < Monitor and Curb Violence Against Women and Girls >

The lockdown has resulted in stressful conditions at home. Women and children have been forced to co-reside with the abusive individuals at home. Domestic violence against women and children has been on rise ever since the lockdown. BMP has taken steps to address these issues.



The central committee has issued a memorandum to the Prime Minister, Home Minister, and Inspector General of Police (IGP) of Bangladesh expressing concerns about 71 incidents of Violence Against Woman and Girls (VAWG). They have appealed for transparency in the judiciary and demanded a speedy trial ensuring appropriate punishment for the perpetrators. The statements were also published in

the national dailies. As pressure groups, the leaders of the district committees of BMP were mobilized to work, communicating with the local government and police authorities to prevent such violence against women and children. The legal Aid sub-committee has been working with all the Divisional Victim Support Centers to ensure the shelter (with isolation facilities) for the survivors throughout the lockdown.

BMP launched the hotline for reporting any incident of VAWG. Adv. Masuda Rehana Begum, assistant General Secretary, and Adv. Makshuda Akter Laily, legal advocacy and lobby director, have been managing the hotline. The central legal aid unit has received 67 complaints of VAWG during the pandemic. Apart from the central committee, 57 branches of BMP have been rendering legal aid services to the survivors of the VAWG at the district level. These cases have been documented and the legal advice provided to the survivors over the phone. However, some of these survivors had to be sent to the one-stop crisis center (OCC) or to the victim support centers (VSC) and finally to the shelters as per the severity of the cases. There have been two legal officers assigned to coordinate



with the members of the district committees, police station and local administration to monitor the incidents of VAWG situation. A lawyer has been assigned to be in constant touch with the OCC and the VSC in this regard. BMP also took the initiative to resist any attempt of early marriage under the lockdown.

Meanwhile, BMP has been documenting the cases of VAWG. The data between March-June 2020 shows that a total of 788 women and children (457 women, 331 girls) have been the victim of VAWG; among them, 307 women and girls were raped (127 women, 180 girls). These research results have been published in the national dailies as well as broadcasted in the several TV channels on June 5 and 6 & July 2, 2020.

### < Other activities >

Despite the pandemic, BMP continued its regular activities and observed its 50th founding anniversary on April 4, 2020. An online webinar titled ‘Full ratification and implementation of CEDAW is essential to prevent Violence Against Women and Girls’ has been organized on September 3, 2020. BMP continued to liaise with various networks including the Social Resistance Committee and the Citizen’s Platform for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Bangladesh. It was reassuring to witness all the senior leaders of BMP being proactive and moving to the virtual platform to adapt to the ‘new normal’. Online platform has facilitated the intergenerational conversations among the activists, keeping the hope alive to resist any incident VAWG.



**Reported by Fauzia Moslem, President of BMP**



## 🌐 National Council of Women of Belgium (Dutch-speaking)



Magda De Meyer, Former President of NCW Belgium

In 2020, the coronavirus entered our lives, we mainly tried to make sure all governmental recovery programs included gender awareness. It was/is of capital importance not to lose progress in the field of women's rights. We especially paid attention to violence against women and to the precarious situation of women and children locked up at home with their aggressors during the pandemic.

At the beginning of 2020, we organized two conferences: one on digitalization and artificial intelligence discussing the consequences for women on the labor market and for gender equality and the one on femicide. In three years' time, at least 102 women were killed in Belgium just for being a woman. We ask for femicide to be treated as a separate crime in law, as it kills more people than terrorism does.

March 8th was International Women's Day, business as usual. Not yet fully aware of the invisible enemy that had already entered our territory, the feminist movement had one big demand, a strong social security! The National Council of Women of Belgium (Dutch-speaking) itself wants the maternity allowance at the rate of 100%, fully individual rights for each person (meaning for instance: the abolition of the status of cohabitants in the unemployment benefits and in health insurance/incapacity benefits) and full child benefits. Fighting against the dismantling of social security also means fighting against sexism.

That day, we joined the World March of Women in Brussels, dressed as the women in *The Handmaid's Tale*. The signs say: "We will march until all women are free". Free from sexism and free to enjoy their sexual and reproductive rights.



### < Violence against women >

As we went in lockdown, it became clear very soon that the issue of violence against women was getting worse every day. Locked up with their aggressor, women and children are not safe in their own homes. It has become even more difficult to seek protection.

Therefore, an interdepartmental conference was established, bringing together twelve ministerial cabinets in charge of women's rights and violence.

The feminist movement decided to join forces and wrote two open letters (signed by 28 organizations) paying attention to the dangerous situation female victims of domestic violence find themselves in right now. In the letters we proposed a number of urgent measures, among which a campaign to promote the urgency number 1712. The Vrouwenraad itself had a campaign spot made to convince victims and witnesses to get in touch with 1712.

We also asked that specific attention should be paid to the situation of women working in primary health care, single parent families, migrant women, etc. Many people, amongst them a lot of women, lost their job temporarily and have to manage with an unemployment benefit. Those who work from home, struggle with the balance between their job and their family, as children cannot go to school and parents had to 'preteach' them. Very troubling, mostly for single mothers. Women's economic independence and social rights must be guaranteed, as well as their access to health care and sexual and reproductive rights.

We are still participating in the temporary Flemish Taskforce for vulnerable families. We make sure that specific items get a place on the agenda: f.i. single parent families, victims of domestic violence and the difficult balance between job and family.

At the request of our organization, a master student in Gender and Diversity did a small research project on cyber violence against women in Flanders. She talked to twelve well-known women and asked them about their experiences with this rather new phenomenon. She took into account the intersectional perspective (age, profession, ethnicity). The dossier was published on our site: [www.vrouwenraad.be](http://www.vrouwenraad.be).

We also criticized the questionable role of the media when reporting about violence on women. Image and coverage are very powerful means, which must be handled with care. It is extremely important not to encourage people to react with contempt, harassment or bullying, and hate speech. The media should use their power to condemn violence against girls and women and to help realize equality between women and men in all areas and at all levels.



In August, a well-known female politician was brutally murdered by her male friend. Six years ago, he was condemned for stalking, and assault and battery on an old girlfriend. This is a clear case of femicide. We asked (article in quality press) to include femicide as a separate offence in the criminal law. That way, society would be sending out a clear signal.

### < Female refugees >

At the occasion of World Refugee Day (June 20, 2020), we denounced the precarious situation of irregular (i.e. without papers) migrant women (article in quality press). Their situation should be regularized urgently so that they can fully enjoy their human rights.

### < Campaign #stopfemicide

**let us put an end to deadly violence against women and children >**



Within the frame of the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women (November 25, 2020), the two councils of women of Belgium (Dutch-speaking and French-speaking) decided to launch a campaign to raise awareness concerning femicide (violence on women and their children resulting in death). Violence often starts with verbal and psychological abuse, followed by assault and battery and even death. We see femicide all over the country, within all layers of the population and at all ages.

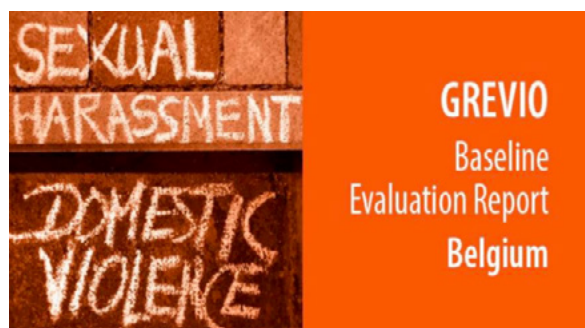
Last year, in Belgium, at least twenty girls/women have been murdered by their (ex-) partner. These women are more than bare statistic numbers. We want society to be aware of this shameful act of violence. We try to do so by giving the victims a voice, by telling their life story, by describing who they were and what they were like. Many well-known people paid tribute to each of the victims, all women killed in similar circumstances: within a violent relationship, in a context of separation or divorce, always by an aggressor who was not an outsider.

Once a week, we released a video on social media channels: one minute for a lifetime. The National Council of Women of Belgium (Dutch-speaking) prepared a number of policy recommendations in order to eradicate this dreadful act. We especially want to see femicide as such included in the Penal Code.

**< First GREVIO evaluation report on Belgium: still no real policy to put an end to violence against women and domestic violence >**

GREVIO (Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence) is the independent expert body responsible for monitoring the implementation of the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (aka the Istanbul

Convention) by the Parties. Belgium ratified the convention in 2016 and provided its first state report to GREVIO in 2019. A number of NGO's wrote a shadow report concerning the governmental measures and discussed it with GREVIO.



GREVIO states that the policy on violence against women is relatively invisible in Belgium. Funding is insufficient and unclear, there are but few or no gender disaggregated data at all, there is not enough recognition of the fact that violence hits women harder, not enough attention for very vulnerable women trying to cope with multiple forms of discrimination, women shelters are not for free, and children should not be staying with their parent-perpetrator in case of joint custody. GREVIO also stresses that the gender neutral Belgian policy could jeopardize the protection and support of female victims of violence. Interventions by professionals might not be gender sensitive. Women could again become victims.

Therefore, the coalition of women's organizations proposed in its shadow report to elaborate a framework law on gender-based violence, including all forms of violence against women, both public and private. This law should not only provide legal prosecution and treatment for perpetrators, but also mechanisms to protect, support and heal victims, as well as preventive measures. The National Council of Women of Belgium (Dutch-speaking) feels reassured by the GREVIO report.

### < The History of Her Story >

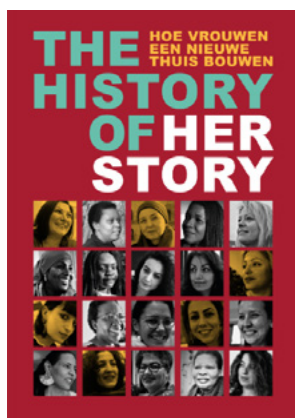
The National Council of Women of Belgium (Dutch-speaking) is proud to present ‘The History of Her Story’: a book and movie with the stories of twenty women who arrived as refugees in Belgium and had to build a new life for themselves and their family – including the director of the movie herself.

Women from Afghanistan, Burundi, Chechnya, Chili, Congo, Djibouti, Eritrea, Iraq, Iran, Russia, Rwanda, Sudan, Syria, Venezuela, Zimbabwe. Women who arrived in Belgium 25 years ago, or just 1 year ago. Women in their twenties or in their sixties. Mothers, single women, students, working women and volunteers.

Twenty different women with one thing in common: they all have a positive story to share about how they built a new home for themselves. That does not mean their stories are easy – they all had to overcome obstacles. To flee your home country is to leave behind friends, family, jobs and anything you took for granted in your life. The search for a new home is the search for a place where you feel safe.

The book and the movie both offer a unique opportunity to help transform the discriminations and stereotypes concerning refugees into a positive breeding ground for support for refugees in society, to help them feel welcome. Only when newcomers are treated with respect and equality they can fully integrate in their new home country. It will soon be available in English and French.

### < From recommendation to policy >



During the summer, two of our recommendations were converted into policy. Firstly, every member of the judiciary now has to take a mandatory course on sexual violence. Secondly, a number of periods of absence will be taken into account for the extension of the maternity leave. Every mother-to-be will be able to enjoy 15 weeks of this leave, even when they get ill before delivery, when they get (temporarily) unemployed or when they no longer can work due to precautionary measures. The law is being applied retroactively from March 1, 2020.



In autumn, we finally got a new federal government. Thanks to our prime minister, to whom we handed our petition with more than 10,000 signatures, the birth leave for young daddies and co-mothers gets extended gradually from 10 to 20 days.

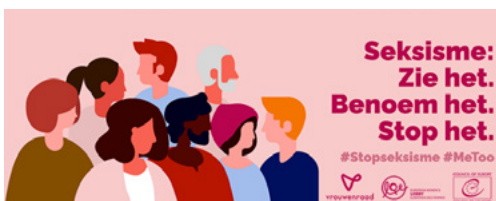
### < **Meron Knikman, new president of National Council of Women of Belgium (Dutch-speaking)** >

In November 2020, the General Assembly of the Dutch-speaking Council of Women of Belgium chooses a new chairwoman. Meron Knikman succeeds Magda De Meyer, who was president for the past eight years. She can look back on a very active presidency and a successful collaboration with the different governments, the feminist movement and civil society. Meron lives and works in Brussels. She has been vice-president of our organization for two years.



The new president started with a warning, “Nothing is achieved permanently. We must be alert. Some rights are being scaled back. We will be needing partnerships and collaboration when working on the realization of the so necessary intersectional feminism”.

### < **Campaign on sexism: See it. Name it. Stop it.** >



In 2019, the Council of Europe decided that governments have a duty of taking action against sexism. The Council of Europe, therefore, adopted a recommendation to prevent and combat this reprehensible phenomenon. Based

on this recommendation, we now have an international definition of sexism and sexist behavior, i.e. behavior starting from the idea that a person is less than another person based on her/his sex. The perpetrator inflicts physical, sexual, psychological or socio-economic pain or damage upon the victim, both in public or private, online or offline.

In order to prevent and combat sexism, the Member States of the Council of Europe must adapt their legislation, elaborate a policy to support victims and punish perpetrators, and inform and raise awareness with the general public. Women’s organizations and young people have an important role to play. Member States are to report on a regular basis. We can now enforce a policy against sexism. Together with the Council of Europe, the European Women’s Lobby and several of our affiliated organizations, we are campaigning for an efficient policy against sexism.

### < Young Feminists >



Since a few years, feminism has become hot, even among girls and young women. That is why we created a Wall of Young Feminists as a token of our appreciation and support. May these role models inspire a lot of boys and girls, men and women! (<https://thenextwave.be/wall-of-young-feminists>)

In September 2020, we organized our famous Feminist Lab for the third time. It was a successful event. Young feminist women discussed different topics, but mainly how to create safe spaces for women.

### < The Belgian Abortion Act >

A number of political parties have been working on the liberalization of the Belgian law on abortion. The demands of the women's organizations concern the shortening of the reflection period, the removal from criminal law and the possibility to have an abortion up to 18 weeks



after conception. The past years, there have been thorough discussions between members of the federal parliament. Many experts took the stand. The draft bill was adopted in the commission for Justice. The final hurdle was the vote in the Chamber. But, as our country had no new government at the time (after the elections of May 2019), some parties considered it necessary to use the abortion act as bargaining whilst negotiating a coalition agreement. That is why the Belgian women's organizations called upon the other political parties not to give in and to leave this ethical issue where it belongs: in the parliament. No trading with women's rights! All over the world, the right to abortion and the facilitated access tell us a lot about the democratic attitude of the country involved.

We say: 'Abortion is a right!'. We always participate in the demonstrations for this women's right. We also try to lobby by publishing open letters signed by a great deal of the civil society's organizations.



## < Women and Poverty >

In 2020, we continued our project to the benefit of single mothers living in poor conditions, a project known as MIRIAM. Each year, the Vrouwenraad is accompanying a number of public social welfare offices (in Flanders, Wallonia and Brussels): the case managers work with a group of poor and unemployed single moms and try to help them to escape from the precarious situation they find themselves in. They help them figure out how to look for a job and/or decent housing, how to reorganize their lives in order to build a future for themselves and their children.

## < The Purple Pact >



The European Women's Lobby wrote a new pact for the future: a feminist approach to the economy. Our past president, Magda De Meyer, helped developing it. The pandemic has shown what has been clear for a long time now: we need a new society that no longer puts profit first, that prefers wellbeing to growth and profit, that appreciates and values formal and informal care, for children, for sick people and

for the elderly. Women have always been caretakers. The consequences are clear: less income, less pension, high poverty risk. What the world needs, is more women working and more men caring. There has to be a balance between life, work and care, for men as well as for women. This will lead to more equality in all domains and at all levels, to less discrimination and sexism, to less violence against girls and women.

The Purple Pact will serve as our bible, so to speak. We translated the document into Dutch and will use it whenever appropriate and necessary.

**Reported by Magda De Meyer, Former President of NCW Belgium**

## 🌐 National Council of Women of Canada (NCWC)



Canada is the second largest country in the world and occupies approximately the northern two-fifths of the North American continent. This size comes with its own special challenges, especially during a pandemic such as this. As you will note from the map, Canada has ten provinces and three territories, each with their own governments. The federal government is in Ottawa, Ontario.

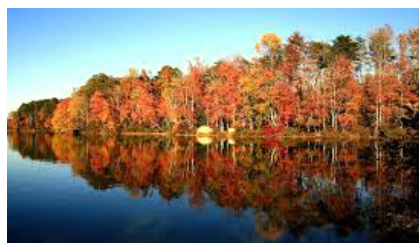
Despite Canada's great size, it is one of the world's most sparsely populated countries. As of July 1st, 2020, Canada's population was listed as 38,005,238 million; women accounted for 19.12 million of this number and there were 4.8 million seniors over the age of 65.

This fact, coupled with the grandeur of the landscape, has been central to the sense of Canadian national identity. Although we are comparatively few in number, we have crafted a model multicultural society, welcoming immigrant populations from every other continent. In addition, Canada harbours and exports a wealth of natural resources and intellectual capital equaled by few other countries.

Canada is officially bilingual in English and French, which reflects our history as ground once contested by two of Europe's great powers. The French and British influences are supplemented by the cultures of our Indigenous people. Indeed, the name 'Canada' is derived from the Huron-Iroquois word 'kanata', which means a village or settlement. To honour these original ancestors of our land, we, and most other organizations, begin our meetings with a 'land acknowledgement'. Here is the one the NCWC uses:

*Today as we join together, it is important to begin our meeting by acknowledging the Indigenous Peoples of all the lands on which we have a presence.*

*We acknowledge the importance of the land, which we each call home. We do this to reaffirm our commitment and responsibility in improving relationships between nations and to improving our own understanding of local Indigenous peoples and their cultures.*



*From coast to coast to coast, we acknowledge the ancestral and unceded territory of all the Inuit, Métis, and First Nations people who call this nation home.*

*We acknowledge our activism role in reconciling the ninety-four Calls to Action established by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada as well as the Final Report of the National Inquiry into the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls.*

*Let us take a moment of reflection to acknowledge the harms and mistakes of the past and to consider how we can each, in our own way, try to move forward in a spirit of reconciliation and collaboration.*



National Council of Women of Canada (NCWC) was founded in 1893, shortly after Canada became a federation in 1867. Much has occurred since this time; we now have local councils in cities from Halifax to Vancouver, and provincial councils across the nation. These local, provincial, and national organizations are intricately connected with issues at all levels while also having a firm grasp of international issues and Canada's commitment to them. For this reason, the NCWC is uniquely qualified to approach our governments with suggestions and recommendations which are based on carefully researched and democratically approved policies for improving the quality of life for Canadians. This has become especially important during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The operations of governments at all levels changed dramatically over the past months. COVID-19 has shifted the focus of the government to immediate day to day, week to week, month to month, response scenarios. We were cognizant of this, so we were even more diligent in ensuring our responses to the COVID-19 outbreak would not reproduce or perpetuate inequality. We strongly urged the government to take action on each of the issues that are impacting vulnerable people and communities; they must not be shoved aside.

Yes, we are all in this together, but we are not all being affected equally. As the COVID-19 pandemic continues to unfold, we are acutely aware that the current crisis amplifies existing gender, racial, economic, and political inequalities. Those most impacted are the marginalized – Indigenous women, racialized women, LGBTIQ+ individuals, people with disabilities, the elderly, the poor, lone parents, and the displaced. The current crisis has a

distinct and disproportionate impact on women, whether it is due to the increasing risk of gender-based violence, lack of access to necessary sexual and reproductive healthcare, greater caregiving responsibilities, losing employment or working without adequate protective equipment. Women who can least afford care are at the greatest risk. They will also have the greatest difficulty recovering after the crisis.

We are at a fundamental turning point; we must take gender into account. If it is not addressed now, we run the risk that sexism, racism, and other current societal inequities will be indelibly woven into the fabric of our society.

### 「 Environment Report 」

**Gracia Janes, 1st Vice President of NCWC**

In times like these, as climate change threatens our future and COVID-19 drastically impacts our health, the pandemic has provided some respite for the air, water, and land. The National Council of Women of Canada (NCWC) can be proud of its role over the last one hundred and twenty-eight years in advocating for nature. However, in the years ahead we must work even harder to secure an environmentally sound future for coming generations.

With this in mind, I bring to your attention some examples of our past environmental concerns and achievements, one with a link to the present COVID-19 crisis, and then, a very recent email glimpse of hopes, fears, and challenges to us all, from my son Peter, a skilled musician, photographer, and film person, who is isolating alone in a tiny apartment in Toronto.

It seems amazing that as far back as 1910, the Local Councils of Women of Montreal and Toronto lobbied successfully for municipal water purification systems and in the 1920s for the formation of National Parks such as Jasper. In the 1930s, the NCWC expressed grave concerns regarding leaking oil tankers and in 1955 were ahead of the times in warning about the dangers of nuclear power (atomic energy as it was called). In addition, in the 1970s, the NCWC was one of the first groups to speak out about the impacts of acid rain.

Since then, the NCWC has sent countless cautionary letters to the Government of Canada and presented briefs to a variety of federal Boards and Commissions regarding environmentally destructive projects and practices. Some examples are the shipment by highway of high level very dangerous liquid nuclear waste from Chalk River near Ottawa, to the Savannah River site in South Carolina, nuclear reactor life-extensions, the Northern

Gateway pipeline, off-shore drilling in the Gulf of St. Lawrence and the urgent need to turn off dirty, costly, extremely dangerous nuclear financial investments and dramatically increase investments in energy efficiencies and conservation and alternative forms of energy in order to combat global warming.

Coincidentally, in mid-to-late April as we were in one of the initial stages of the COVID-19 epidemic, world news began to report of clear skies, waters, and air due to the current restrictions on travel. I learned of whale protection advocate Elizabeth Hewitt, an NCWC member in the 1920s, whose husband, Charles Gordon Hewitt, was a scientist, public servant, and Canadian environmental hero. He was the architect of the 1917 Migratory Bird Convention treaty between Great Britain and the USA, which banned wildlife markets such as those found today in Wuhan, China, the epicentre of the COVID-19.

Speaking of our avian friends, here is what my son, Peter, wrote to me from Toronto:

*“Nice to watch birds fly from here. ‘Ralph’, the resident hawk from Hawk’s Hill in High Park floating on the air currents. Searching no doubt for mice. The pigeons are very wary as are seagulls. Two pigeon chicks have hatched in the nest on my balcony. Earlier in the spring I tried to shoo the adults off, but with the distractions of the pandemic they of course took full advantage of my absence, as we are seeing the world over. Turtles launching onto beaches unhindered by humanity. The condors I imagine soaring freely without airplanes blocking their travel routes. Mountain tops of the Himalayas visible for the first time in thirty years. No Mount Everest expeditions littering its slopes with spent oxygen and propane tanks. No cruise ships dumping their holding tanks or tossing garbage into the oceans. Perhaps for the first time since the forges of the industrial revolution began over two hundred years ago, has the ozone layer begun to close up. We are able to see a dramatic increase in air quality in major cities around the world.*

*Will we, as a species, be able to look at the positive net effect to realize that it is possible to curb climate crisis and change our global behaviours to make a dramatic turn in conditions which ensure survival of life on earth? I really hope so. It is worth the try. The future depends on it!”*

## 「 Economics Report 」

**Karen Dempsey, Convenor/Past President/Hon. Life Member**

Several major advocacy organizations in Canada, including the National Council of Women of Canada and many of its affiliates, fifty Senators, and other parliamentarians have been advocating vigorously for a Basic Income Guarantee in Canada. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the current inequities in our society and brought them into sharp focus. Women have been the hardest hit as they simultaneously work from home, help teach their children, do child-care, sometimes having to live in lock-down with their abusers. Women have also made up a huge percentage of front-line workers including those in healthcare. Instead of stop-gap measures, having a basic income guarantee in place permanently would assist in our economic recovery and cushion any further economic disasters.

The Government of Canada has an Economic Response Plan which is available to all on their internet site and is continually updated. Starting last year at the beginning of the pandemic, our Prime Minister did daily updates on television and Canada's Chief Public Health Officer, Dr. Tam, also did updates. The updates continue on an as-needed basis.

The federal government's Economic Response Plan addresses many areas, but those that affect women and families most directly are those dealing with individuals and organizations helping Canadians, as well as their support to provinces/territories.

### **Individuals, (programs available to):**

- **Employment Insurance (EI)** – temporary changes were made to the program to help support Canadians who needed financial assistance. As of September 27, 2020, the minimum benefit rate is \$500/week before taxes in most cases.
- **Canada Recovery Benefit (CRB or CERB)** – provides \$500/week for up to 26 weeks for workers who have stopped working or had their incomes reduced by at least 50% due to COVID-19 and who are not eligible for EI.
- **Canada Recovery Sickness Benefit (CRSB)** – provides \$500/week to a maximum of two weeks for workers who have contracted COVID or are required to self-isolate, or have conditions, etc., which would make them more susceptible to contracting the virus.
- **Canada Recovery Caregiving (CRCB)** – provides \$500/week for up to 26 weeks per household for workers:
  1. Unable to work for at least 50% of the week to care for a child or family member due to schools, day-cares, or care facilities being closed

2. Whose child or family member is sick, required to quarantine, or is at risk of serious health implications if they were to contract the virus.

Seniors: Government programs supporting the delivery of items and personal outreach.

### **Organizations providing support to Canadians:**

- Individuals and families who are homeless
- Women and children who are experiencing violence in the home (exacerbated by having to stay home with their abuser)
- Youth and individuals who need mental health support
- Support of public health efforts through the Red Cross

### **Support for Provinces and Territories**

- Providing temporary wage top-up for low-income essential workers (many of whom are women)
- Supporting critical health care needs
- Helping provinces and territories to restart the economies
- Ensuring safe return to school

The military sent medical staff to several long-term care facilities in situations where extra help for seniors was urgently required. The military also delivered food, supplies, and other assistance to northern communities.

### **「 NCWC Justice Report 」**

The Government of Canada states that “The Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) recognizes the operational challenges associated with COVID-19 for many law firms and advocacy groups across the country. CSC is also working hard to lessen the impact of this public health crisis on inmates in federal institutions. We have put in place a number of interim measures to offer financial relief and help inmates maintain access to their families, counsel, and support networks. In order to protect inmates, staff and our institutions, CSC has suspended visits at all federal institutions across the country, including for legal counsel. However, we understand the importance of inmates continuing to have access to legal counsel. Inmates can communicate with legal counsel via telephone, mail, and fax.”

As of January 28, 2021, at federal correctional institutions across Canada, a total of 23,072 inmates have been tested for COVID. Only 1,237 tested positive; 1,214 have recovered, 18 cases are still active, and 5 have died.



During the past year, many courts were essentially suspended with only emergency matters being dealt with. As of January 2021, the Supreme Court of Canada is holding hearings via videoconferencing.

### 「 Status of Women Report 」

With regard to the economic impact on women, please refer to our Economic Report.

*Western Centre for Research and Education on Violence Against Women and Children state:*

“Violence against women and children represents one of the most significant societal issues that endangers Canadians' health and well-being. COVID-19 has made these problems more severe. The increased risks of harm and vulnerability of abused women and children is obvious. International research has documented the increase in domestic violence and child abuse during crises such as the current pandemic.”

“Social distancing and isolation mean that victims have less access to the support of friends and family and reduced availability of police and health care. Many victims and children are now isolated with the very individuals who abuse them. That increases their daily exposure to potential abuse and produces new means of control for abusive partners and parents.”

“Organizations across Canada that work to end violence against women and children are responding to this crisis with the support of new federal and provincial/territorial government funding. There has been a rapid response to search for and to promote innovative strategies to cope with this pandemic. The Centre has been part of several initiatives to support services, enhance public and professional education, support workplaces and develop research on effective community responses.”

### 「 Social Development (Health/Seniors) Report 」

This past year has definitely dealt a severe blow to seniors with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly those in long-term care facilities. The Government of Canada had to send military assistance into those facilities which needed urgent help.

Ottawa Public Health states that the risk of serious illness from COVID-19 increases progressively with age, particularly beyond 50 years of age. In Ottawa, approximately 90% of persons who died from COVID-19 were 70 years of age or older. The number of

people who needed hospitalization and intensive care rose as age increased, particularly above the age of 50 years. In addition to increasing age, people who have serious underlying medical conditions (such as: cardiovascular disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, chronic lung disease, chronic liver disease, cancer, are immunocompromised) or who are severely obese are at higher risk for severe illness from COVID-19.

“More than 70 per cent of COVID-19 deaths in Canada have been among those aged 80 and older, according to an epidemiology update by the federal government. In Ontario, the province reported more than 2,700 pandemic-related deaths in long-term care homes as of Dec. 30.” (Amina Zafar, CBC News, Jan. 7/21)

Seniors who live on their own have had to deal with isolation in addition to other issues. Those who were able to – who had computers/phone/internet – kept in touch with friends and family. Grocery stores implemented a ‘senior shopping hour’, usually from 7:00 AM to 8:00 AM, in order to ensure a safer shopping experience. It also became possible to do online shopping and pick up your groceries or arrange to have them delivered. Most pharmacies already delivered prescriptions.

Efforts were made to ensure that all segments of our diverse population were informed of the federal response to the pandemic (efforts to mitigate, etc.). A Federal/Provincial/Territorial Public Health Response Plan ensured that Canadians had a coordinated response across Canada. A Special Advisory Committee was established to advise Federal/Provincial/Territorial Deputy Ministers of Health across Canada in the coordination, public health policy and technical content related to this pandemic.

The Public Health Agency of Canada is working closely with partners, domestically and around the world, including the World Health Organization (WHO), to respond to the pandemic.

**Canadian researchers are working to support international efforts:**

- Testing anti-virals and other treatments
- Developing vaccines
- Supporting clinical trials

**The Government of Canada has stated that the following priority for early COVID-19 vaccination will be given to the following populations:**

- residents and staff of shared living settings who provide care for seniors

- adults 70 years of age and older, with order of priority
- beginning with adults 80 years of age and older
- decreasing the age limit by 5-year increments to age 70 years as supply becomes available
- health care workers who have direct contact with patients, including: those who work in health care settings
- personal support workers
- adults in indigenous communities

「 Canadian Council of Muslim Women (CCMW), NCWC Federate 」

Nuzhat Jafri, President of CCMW

### **Life in the time of COVID-19: Let's keep on keeping on!**

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Canadian Council of Muslim Women (CCMW) decided to hold virtual board meetings. During normal times, we meet in person every two months or so and work extremely hard from Friday evening until Sunday afternoon.

One of the reasons we love to gather in person is to share our sisterhood, our lives and our challenges and accomplishments. The personal presence of each and every board member attending from different parts of Canada is worth every minute. Now, we shared all of it without gathering together around a single table. We gathered together through fibreoptics, cable transmission lines, Internet, and cyber connections that are invisible yet ever present. The remarkable thing was that we still did what we always do. Technology, you are a godsend!

As we worked through our ambitious agenda to discuss current projects and working at home during the time of COVID-19, we shared once again our sisterhood, our lives and our challenges and accomplishments. Some of us are cooking more and probably packing on some additional pounds around the waist, some are taking long walks in our backyards or decks, some are learning how to home school our children without tearing our hair out completely, and some are dancing at different intervals in their day to their favourite playlist or virtual dance party organized by famous DJs on the web. Some are reciting comforting verses from the Qur'an and prayers recommended by wise elders in our families. We also shared that we are connecting more often with friends and family on the phone or the Internet.

It sounds heartless to say but there is a silver lining to this pandemic. We are not distancing socially; we are distancing physically to save each other's lives. We continue to

share our work, safety tips and information about the pandemic – our social connections being stronger than ever. Humans are learning to be the social beings they were always meant to be and expressing gratitude with humility and awe to God and all those who are looking after other humans around the globe.

Let us also think about all those millions all over the world, including here in Canada, who have no access to technology, healthcare, food, shelter, and basic necessities of life. Let us use the resources we are blessed with to help and support them.

Life in the time of COVID-19 reminded me of a song from the '60s by Len Chandler, Keep on Keeping on. Let us keep on keeping on. You can listen to Len right here!

### **< A Tribute to our Elders >**

As the news of outbreaks of COVID-19 in large numbers in long-term care facilities reaches our news feeds and television screens, we are experiencing a myriad of emotions, not the least of which are sadness and grief at losing the most precious people in our lives.

Not long ago, when spring was making its presence known through a burst of crocuses and daffodils, I began to keep my father company at the side of his hospital bed in Scarbrough. Our father was admitted to the hospital and moved to palliative care because my siblings and I could no longer take care of him at home. He was in the 95th year of his life.

My father had Alzheimer's and engaging with him required patience and perseverance. Days and weeks passed. He began to withdraw from eating and drinking and slept most of the time. On my laptop I played verses from the Qur'an and some of his nostalgic music, Urdu poetry recited by his favourite narrators, and occasionally an old Bollywood historical movie. Most of the time he did not recognize any of the visitors, including his children and grandchildren. With each passing day, he ate less and less and slept more and more. That was the beginning of my father's end in this life.

Before his admittance to the hospital for the last time in his life, we had struggled to find care for him at home. Services provided through the local Community Care Access Centre were sporadic, with constantly changing caregivers, inconsistent care practices, and absences without notice.

Five years earlier, we had gone through this with our mother. At that time, it was my father who lovingly took care of my mother at home with the help of some reliable

personal support workers. In each of our parents' cases, care at home prevailed because care in long-term facilities looked precarious.

We were fortunate to be with our parents towards the end of their lives. There were, indeed, the most precious people in our lives, and the struggles for their care were no match for what had given us in love and sacrifice.

Today, in the wake of an invisible killer virus, thousands of seniors are dying alone in long-term care facilities. They are deprived of the company of their loved ones by their sides, and their caregivers, themselves, are in peril of COVID-19. Surely, our elders deserve than this. They have given so much to their children, grandchildren, and to this country. Can we please not let them die so mercilessly – alone, without dignity. Their lives are just as precious, if not more, as all the others who are suffering with this disease.

Let us urge our governments to accelerate the provision of personal protective equipment, better pay for caregivers, and healthcare commensurate with the best as that is what our elders deserve. We owe them our lives.

「 Canadian Hadassah WIZO (CHW), NCWC Federate 」

**Elyana Latsky, President of CHW**

Canadian Hadassah WIZO (CHW) is a non-political, non-partisan national network of dedicated volunteers and professionals who strongly believe the advancement of child-care, education, healthcare and women's issues transcends politics, religion, and national boundaries.



Chef Uri Buri

CHW has discovered some very innovative and successful fundraising ideas during the lockdown due to COVID-19. The wildly popular Gila Gourmet Celebrity Chef Zoom Series presented by CHW Toronto Gila Chapter kicked off on September 9, 2020, where guests were treated to demonstrations by chefs over the course of 10 sessions split into two series. The chefs came from a diverse background of specialities and cooked dishes from around the world. World renowned chef and fish expert Uri Buri even presented all the way from Israel!

Alla Reed, an amazing, multi-talented singer, kicked off the CHW Vancouver Light Up the Night Concert Series last Sunday. Alla was delighted to donate her time and voice, working with CHW Vancouver beforehand to get the music just right. The series

continues through the winter and spring, featuring musicians from around the world.

CHW Montreal Centre will soon be launching an incredible Jewish Tour of 4 major cities in South America through February and March! Each city has its own history and culture to explore with a personalized tour guide.



Ms. Alla Reed, a jazz singer



## 「 Canadian Association of Midwives (CAM) 」

**Annie Hibbert, Executive Director**

In mid-March 2020, Canadian Association of Midwives (CAM) set up a National COVID-19 Task Group made up of leadership from all midwifery member associations across Canada.

### **Meetings of this group continue to serve many purposes including:**

- Information sharing between jurisdictions Identifying common themes so that CAM can issue statements and advocate appropriately
- Identifying if a province or territory requires support for local advocacy
- providing staffing support

The internal group of midwives and staff representing all member associations met every week in the spring 2020, once per month during the summer and fall 2020 and will now continue meeting every two months in 2021.

CAM and The National Aboriginal Council of Midwives (NACM) published three recommendation documents and one joint statement in the spring of 2020 which are still relevant for the second wave of COVID-19:

- ***Reproductive Justice during the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Call to Action from Midwives:*** Recommendations for governments, policy makers and healthcare professionals (developed in consultation with the National Racialized Midwives (BPOC) Council/Group) Version 1 – May 12, 2020: [https://canadianmidwives.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/ReproductiveJusticeCallActionCOVID19\\_VF\\_ENG\\_20200512.pdf](https://canadianmidwives.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/ReproductiveJusticeCallActionCOVID19_VF_ENG_20200512.pdf)
- ***Flexible Frameworks for Safe and Quality Midwifery Care during COVID-19:*** Recommendations for governments and health authorities Version 1 – April 16, 2020: [https://canadianmidwives.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/MaintainingQualityMidwiferyCareCOVID19\\_VFfinalENG\\_20200417.pdf](https://canadianmidwives.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/MaintainingQualityMidwiferyCareCOVID19_VFfinalENG_20200417.pdf)
- ***Midwives as Essential Primary Care Providers in the Context of COVID-19*** Statement issued on April 3, 2020: [https://canadianmidwives.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/MidwivesEssentialProviders\\_EN\\_20190403\\_VF.pdf](https://canadianmidwives.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/MidwivesEssentialProviders_EN_20190403_VF.pdf)
- CAM, SOGC, CFPC, NACM, CAPWHN **Joint statement on Support Persons in Labour** issued on April 24, 2020: <https://www.sogc.org/en/content/featured-news/A-Joint-Statement-on-the-Issue-of-Support-Persons-in-Labour-in-Canada.aspx>
- ***Recognize and Respond: Building Midwives' Capacity to Address Intimate Partner Violence and Child Maltreatment began summer 2020.***

CAM was recently awarded a three-year project from the Public Health Agency of Canada, Preventing Gender-Based Violence division.

From now until 2023, CAM and NACM in partnership with McMaster University, will develop materials, resources and learning opportunities to equip midwives and indigenous midwives to recognize and respond safely to child maltreatment, children's exposure to intimate partner violence, and intimate partner violence.

In May, CAM also brought together an interprofessional group of perinatal health care providers (Society of Rural Physicians of Canada, National Aboriginal Council of Canada, Canadian Indigenous Nurses Association, College of Family Physicians of Canada, Canadian Association of Perinatal and Women's Health Nurses and The Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada). The main objective of this working group is to develop a National Pandemic Plan for the delivery of reproductive care. Work of this group is ongoing.



## 「 Canada Confronts the Coronavirus: Looking Forward to a New Tomorrow 」

**Sandra Cohen-Rose, Former President of NCWC and Honorary Member**

Canadians joined the rest of the global community in confronting the challenges presented by the coronavirus, as it exposed the inequalities and injustices in our society. Harvesting our love and compassion, we, "The True North strong and free!" will emerge from this tragedy a more caring society.

Quebec has been one of the provinces hardest hit by the pandemic, with most of the cases in my hometown, Montreal, the epicenter of COVID-19. Many attribute the early coronavirus wave in Quebec to the midterm school break when many families traveled to all corners of the globe. Quebecer's midterm school break was one week earlier than other provinces and before the coronavirus travel restrictions.

On Friday, March 13, 2020, Quebec became the first province to declare total lockdown – sports events and festivals such as the annual St. Patrick's Day parade and concerts were canceled, schools and places of worship and parks were closed, as were non-essential stores and businesses. Streets were deserted. Gasoline dropped to seventy-seven cents a litre. There were no contrails in the sky. Within a few weeks, atmospheric nitrogen oxides dropped dramatically.

During our darkest time, Montreal's sense of community shone. Our silent streets echoed the sound of music on Sunday, March 22 and March 31, and every Tuesday night in April. From balconies and rooftops, Montrealer's joined in singing Martha Wainwright's streamed presentation of Leonard Cohen's song, *So Long, Marianne* and other popular, uplifting songs. The days leading up to Easter weekend and Christmas, church bells chimed across the city for ten minutes, as a message of hope and of solidarity. While families and individuals celebrated holidays and grieved the loss of loved ones alone – often connected online to each other and religious services. For the first time in Quebec's history synagogues were closed. As men of the Hasidic community, living primarily on the east side of Mount Royal, in lower Outremont, are required to pray together, they could be heard davening from their balconies. Doors and windows of many homes displayed colourful rainbows with the slogan, *ça va bien aller* (it is going to be fine).

Nationally and locally, as lockdowns came into effect, the biggest change in our daily lives has been the isolation from friends, family, and co-workers. But we connected through an extensive social media network. It has been heartwarming to see new technologies gratefully embraced by many who had never used them before. Whether it be for meals

or words of encouragement, we have been here for each other.

Federal and Provincial Governments have informed us of and enforced health measures to keep us safe. In an effort to stem the spread of the coronavirus, March 18, 2020, the Federal Government closed the land border between Canada and the USA to all non-essential services. Since then, the closure has been renewed every month. Because the virus ignores borders, it is spread from low-income neighbourhoods, via low-paid essential service workers, to places where they work. The largest number of cases have been in long-term care facilities and meat packing plants, and other low-paying service jobs where people are crowded together.

The government is now taking a more active role in the care of the most vulnerable in our society. Quebec Premier Legault has floated the idea of nationalizing the province's privately-run long-term care centres. For years, these for-profit centres have been underfunded and understaffed, serviced by workers who are underpaid. The Canadian Armed Forces were dispatched to help feed and care for residents.

Through this pandemic we have gained a greater appreciation of the service our essential workers deliver, and the need for them to be paid fair salaries and provided acceptable working conditions and personal protection from contagion. To assure an adequate income for their families, essential service workers often toil long hours, frequently going from one workplace to another. As the NCWC advocates, we now more clearly than ever before, see the need for a basic guaranteed income.

The Federal Government has been doling out tens of billions in emergency aid funding – meant to stimulate the economy, while cash is being hoarded at a record level. In 2020 savings surged to 28.2 percent, up from 3.6 percent before the pandemic – the highest in our history.

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and Chief Public Health Officer, Dr. Theresa Tam, had repeatedly cautioned Canadians about an impending second wave, analogous to that of the second wave of the 1918 Spanish flu. It was fuelled by Canadians who saw COVID-19 as someone else's problem and did not adhere to federal health guidelines. Over the Christmas holiday break, thousands traveled to warmer destinations, including several Canadian elected officials and more than 4,000 Canadians who visited Hawaii!



From the start of the pandemic, international travel has been a major virus source. Of particular concern are the coronavirus mutations from Africa and the United Kingdom. On January 29, 2021, the Federal Government mandated more restrictive measures, which included a halt to Caribbean and Mexico flights and hotel quarantines at the expense of the traveler, although most believe these measures are too little too late.

How much travel is necessary? During the pandemic, Canadians have learned the value of videoconferencing, whether for working from home or attending a professional conference, resulting in more workplace flexibility and fewer geographical constraints, and reduced crowding in office buildings – and doctor's offices.

With more people working from home, and desiring more space, there is a move from Canada's largest cities to smaller towns and communities where people can afford larger houses with gardens. Office buildings and hotels sit mostly vacant, like monuments to another era. Reducing consumption of goods and services our environment is cleaner. In 2020, demand for oil decreased for the first time in history and the ozone hole over the Antarctica closed. We can clearly see the mountains in the distance and the stars at night.

Our governments have begun to take note and are creating plans to reduce the need for transportation, while investing in walking and cycling paths. Transportation can be further curtailed by demanding locally produced products, producing fresher, tastier and more nutritious vegetables. Local manufacturing, in addition to cutting transportation, can create not only higher-quality, more-sustainable products, but also, more jobs for Canadians.



On January 9, 2021, in response to the second wave, Quebecers received an alarm alert on their cell phones, warning them a curfew was going into effect from 8:00 PM to 5:00 AM in the morning and would extend to at least February 8th. To enforce the curfew, a \$1,000-\$6,000 fine could be given out by the police to those violating the curfew. The last curfew in Quebec was about 100 years ago, during the flu pandemic of 1918.

On January 26, 2021, a Quebec Superior Court judge made homeless people exempt from the province's curfew until February 5, 2021. The pandemic has only amplified the underlying problems of Montreal's homeless population and the need for them to receive more help.

The only region excluded from the curfew is the Northern Quebec communities of Terres-Cries-de-la-Baie-James and Nunavik. During the first wave, they made sacrifices, which kept the incidence of COVID low. Into the second wave, seeing some increase, they are putting into effect their own strict measures. Across Canada during the second wave, there has been an increase in coronavirus cases amongst most First Nation communities.

On January 25, 2021, on the anniversary of the first coronavirus case in Canada, 750,544 cases were registered. Half of all Canadians know someone infected by coronavirus and 19,180 people have died, making it the third-leading cause of death in Canada in 2020, behind cancer and heart disease. The COVID-19 vaccine, the fastest developed vaccine in history, has given us hope. But Dr. Theresa Tam, Canada's Chief Public Health Officer continues to inform us and remind us of our civic duty to continue to follow precautions. With these precautions, there has also been a noted decline in other infectious illnesses, such as influenza and sexually transmitted infections, and more awareness of the value of routine infection prevention, such as, hand washing and staying home while ill. As in most countries, a small number of citizens oppose restrictions, such as face masks and lockdowns, and the vaccine.

Due to the lockdown, perhaps for the first time in their adult lives, many have experienced a period of downtime, a time for rest and reflection, which is recognized as fundamental to success, health, and happiness. During this unusual time, everything seems more intense. We see things we have perhaps never noticed before.

The pandemic has drawn attention to an increase in mental illness, and violence against women and children, along with gender inequality. Women have been disproportionately affected by the coronavirus pandemic. Studies show Life Skills Education taught from an early age can help children cope with everyday challenges and help them deal with mental problems, prevent violent behavior, and promote gender equality.

We all look forward to our vaccination for coronavirus. Unfortunately, there is no vaccination for mental illness, violent behavior, and gender inequality. With the illumination in the media of these problems, could governments take the leap, and make Life Skills Education mandatory in schools?

As our everyday lives changed, so did our habits. For our daily meals many ordered food online, others found shopping one of their only outings. Home cooking increased, as did the demand for wheat and lentils. According to an AMC Global survey, 60% of people are cooking from scratch more often, making the most of pantry staples and minimizing food

waste. Pre-pandemic we spent 40% of our food budget at restaurants and on convenience foods. At the beginning of the pandemic, there was such a surge in baking, for a brief time Canadians found it difficult to find on their grocery shelves flour and yeast.

Lockdown has given us the opportunity to reflect on our future – time to appreciate that we must act in a more responsible manner individually and collectively if we are to have a healthier society and planet. Shelter in place has shown us old habits can change rapidly. Rather than going back to the ‘normal,’ let us embrace a different kind of society.

In this dark, disruptive, once-in-a-lifetime moment, we have had the time to reflect on how we can better shape our world. What we decide to do could have a great impact on our world for many years. Waking up to a new tomorrow, we see a greener more environmentally sound world and the prospect of a more just society – one with less have-nots, one with more equality.

Best wishes to everyone for a safe journey with their loved ones, to a kinder world full of exciting new possibilities.

### 「 Conclusion 」

**Patricia Leson, NCWC President**

My thanks go to those members who submitted information for this report. Your observations and work are much valued. This past year we, like everyone else, have had virtual board meetings and a two-day virtual Annual General Meeting which was quite an experience/learning curve. Our 2021 AGM will be virtual as well. We miss the camaraderie of gathering together in person but look forward to resuming in-person meetings in 2022!

These are indeed difficult times; but they will not destroy us; we will emerge stronger and more committed to caring for each other and working together to improve societal conditions in our communities, our provinces, and our country. While each of our lives have been altered and perhaps even forever changed by the COVID-19 pandemic, the NCWC remains vigilant in supporting those who have, and are, facing even more dire consequences than others.

We genuinely believe that, as one of our friends, Lorna Marsden, stated,

*“As WWI led to the right for Canadian women to vote at the federal level following the suffrage movement prior to the war; as the Depression led to some changes in economic*

*security with the institution of government pensions and economic plans; as so many crises in Canadian history have led to changes - often improvements - in the status of women in Canada, so COVID-19 has, and will, change the lives of women across the nation. The NCWC was there all the way...and will continue to be there, working to ensure the legacy of the pandemic is an improvement in the lives of Canadian women, children, and families.”*



Patricia Leson,  
President of NCWC

The NCWC continues its work to expand opportunities for all women, and we continue to be the voice for those who have neither the courage nor the strength to do so for themselves. Throughout these difficult times, we proudly continue to advocate for women from coast to coast to coast, pressing those in leadership positions to weave the strong tapestry of supports and programs necessary to improve the lives and living conditions for women, children, and families across Canada. Pandemic or not, the tradition of the NCWC continues – strong, proud, and bold.

**Reported by Patricia Leson, President of NCWC**



## National Council of Women of Guatemala (CONAMGUA)

As the COVID-19 cases increased, the CONAMGUA Board of Directors was well aware of the necessity and importance of our campaign to distribute foods and essential goods to people in need.

CONAMGUA board held its weekly work sessions throughout the year 2020. We had three Humanitarian Campaigns to help low-income communities. The first campaign was organized in May/June 2020, distributing sixty bags of food provisions to low-income families. Two months later, as we noticed that the pandemic was even stronger, we held a second effort distributing a similar quantity of staple goods. The members of CONAMGUA financially contributed to both campaigns.



At the second campaign, with the help of organization members, CONAMGUA distributed packages of basic food and needs containing sugar, oatmeal, black beans, rice, oil, masks, and so on. Fifty families living in three boroughs of Sacatepéquez (San José la Arrinconada, Asentamiento Vista Hermosa, and Los Llanos) received the emergency aid in due course.

For the third campaign, the board wished to bring some Christmas spirit to our communities, therefore, we arranged leftover staples from the two campaigns before, adding candy and toys and handed out them to 60 families. Also, we were able to distribute 19 water filters for schools and health centers and gave food and clothes to migrant children. We held two zoom meetings to celebrate the 56th Anniversary and Christmas.



**Reported by Ana María de Goyzueta, President of CONAMGUA**



## 🌐 National Council of Women in India (NCWI)



The year 2020 started with news of the outbreak of COVID-19 virus in China and soon it snowballed into pandemic of epic proportions. Since the pandemic hit India a month after the US and Italy, many precautions were put into place by the central

government and all of India went into a complete lockdown on March 21, 2020 to help curb the spread of the virus. While these measures gave India some time to prepare medically for the pandemic, it brought about a lot of other problems due to the sheer size of the population. There was shortage of food grains and supplies, availability of masks, displacement of migrant workers who set out on foot to reach their respective villages and etc. The NCWI and the affiliated State Councils rallied tirelessly to ensure their respective localities receive much-needed help.

Jammu Council of Women, Delhi State Council of Women, NCWI Nagpur Branch and NCWI Bangalore Branch conducted camps in various areas to distribute food packages and personal hygiene supplies to the needy. Jammu Council also provided meals to dispersed migrant workers who were travelling to Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh on foot. Delhi State Council



Workshop on health and sanitization  
in Delhi State Council of Women

of Women organized an online workshop on menstrual hygiene and cloth menstrual pad making for a diverse group of women and girls, including the teachers and students of Delhi State Council of Women. Attendance learned the process of menstruation including the cycle and the changes in the body. The workshop also raised awareness of the importance of hygiene during menstruation. There was a detailed explanation of the advantages of using a pad along with a demonstration of stitching a cloth pad. The cloth pads can be used for up to 5 years and be manufactured on a small scale to create a revenue stream for themselves, thereby ensuring sanitation and healthy living for themselves and others. Over a 100 women and girls attended this workshop and benefited immensely from it.

The NCWI, in collaboration with the local State Council – Poona Women’s Council and Parijat Foundation provided food packets to over 400 people. Since distribution was a problem due to the strict lockdown, we worked with the Corporators (City Council) in different areas to ensure that the food packets reached the needy. Food packets were also distributed to the transgender community in Pune area for 3 months during the lockdown. The Poona Women’s Council (PWC) ensured that the students of the PWC School did not suffer academically due to the lockdown. Classes were and are still being held via Whatsapp for all grades; from Nursery to 10th. Sanitary napkins are being distributed for all the female students quarterly and with the help of Mukul Madhav Foundation food packets have been distributed to all 600 students and their families.

India was also hit by a cyclone in West Bengal area which caused a lot of devastation. The Government had alerted the citizens living in the coastal areas and even evacuated the area but there was a lot of property damage. The Bashir Hat Project of NCWI was badly affected. The roof of the shelter was damaged and many of the villagers were left without electricity and food. NCWI, with the help of Parijat Foundation, provided funds for Bashir Hat Project and the West Bengal Council of Women.

It has been a very difficult year for all but the true strength of the NCWI and its affiliated State Councils have come to the forefront. Each of the members has worked very hard in mobilizing funds and efforts where ever required. The pandemic is not over and nor are the problems but together we pledge to get through this tough time with our motto being ‘Grace Under Pressure’. We pray for peace and health for all.



*It is only in our darkest hours that we may discover the true strength of the brilliant light within ourselves that can never, ever, be dimmed.” - Doe Zantamata, Author of Karma*

The COVID-19 pandemic has cast a dark shadow over people in India with incurring heavy losses monetarily and emotionally, families cooped up in their 8 feet by 8 feet tin houses, hospitals reaching peak capacity, but the spirit of the people of India has not broken. This pandemic has been a very humbling experience for most and has brought out the best in people. The National Council of Women in India and its affiliate State Councils have continued to work tirelessly to contribute to the needy population of India.



Recently, NCWI had a zoom meeting to discuss matters at hand and to share success stories. It has been to keep our spirits high and to help out in the best way we can. The year 2021 started with the celebration of Republic Day and various festivals like 'Lohri' and 'Basant Panchami' by the affiliate State Councils in their respective cities with

distributions of blankets, sweaters, masks, sanitizers, and food packets to the needy in slum areas.

In Bangalore, members also donated medication at psychiatric hospitals. Talks on hygiene and good health habits were organized in village welfare projects in West Bengal and Maharashtra. The NCWI continued its distribution of groceries and hygiene kits to the transgender community, children of sex workers, and the needy. Stationery supplies like compass boxes, pens, and pencils were given to students for their 10th and 12th Board Exams as many of the parents have lost their jobs and spent unexpected medical expenses.



Most of the projects have been working while keeping the COVID-19 regulations and rules and the members of NCWI have ensured that work has continued in full force. We hope that the situation settles down soon so that we can go back to our previous life before the pandemic. Until then, the NCWI team will continue to make its mark in the community.

**Reported by Rakhi Shetty, President of NCWI**

## National Council of Women of Indonesia (KOWANI)

### < KOWANI Social Distancing Program >

Novel Coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2) is a new strain of coronavirus causing COVID-19, first identified in Wuhan City, China at the end of 2019. It spreads rapidly throughout more than 190 countries and territories. This outbreak caused severe acute respiratory syndrome. The spread of this disease has had wide social and economic impacts.

Indonesia's Government is forced to publish some regulations to save the country and its population from the spreading of COVID-19. KOWANI has implemented social distancing by working from home and conducting online meeting.

To maintain coordination and on-going works, KOWANI's president, Giwo Rubianto encourages all organizations and members to stay at home and do all KOWANI work from home. Regularly, each division conducts online meetings, replacing the weekly/monthly meeting that used to be held in the office.

KOWANI, led by the Social, Health and Family Welfare Division, coordinated several social movements to help ease the burden by giving 1,000 litres of hand sanitizers to health facilities, health providers and communities. With the help of organization members, the distributions are well received.



KOWANI also distributed packages of basic food and needs which contains rice, cooking oil, sugar, noodles, flour, etc. Not forgetting, fabric masks are included within the package that was sent to people in Grogol Utara, Jakarta.

During the COVID-19 quarantine, KOWANI has formed Indonesia National Disaster of COVID-19 Solidarity Team to facilitate and disseminate aid. This team is also responsible to do coordination with Indonesia's Government COVID-19 Task Force.

KOWANI has been conducting online meetings and involved in online seminars, to commemorate Kartini Day on April 21, a national day of one of Indonesia Woman Hero on Gender Equality.



KOWANI has corresponded with the Embassy of The Republic Indonesia in Washington DC, United States, in conjunction with an online seminar. President of KOWANI, Giwo Rubianto, was one of the speakers for a seminar on Mental Health of Elderly during COVID-19 Pandemic. The online event was conducted April 14, 2020 and participated by 65 video conference attendees whom most of them were Indonesian elderly living in District of Columbia, Maryland and Virginia.

The phrase “vaccine saves lives” reflects society's enthusiasm especially the elderly who are susceptible to COVID-19 as Indonesia has reached the highest mortality rate (47% of elders). KOWANI conducted webinars to stop transmission of the COVID-19 by socializing and advocating for women.

In line with that, an interesting webinar was also held to get a clear picture of what COVID-19 was like in Slovakia and Australia. The virtual event was officially organized by the Minister of Women’s Empowerment and Child Protection of the Republic of Indonesia with the attendance of the Consulate General Indonesia for West Australia and Plenipotentiary Ambassador Indonesia for Slovakia on Tuesday, February 25, 2021.



A half-day virtual meeting was held on March 9, 2021, introducing the use of ecoenzymes as an environmentally friendly cleanser that converts organic waste into a benefit. The fermented liquid from fruits and vegetable skins mixed with sugar and water can be used as a versatile liquid detergent for washing dishes, fruits, clothes, and others.

It was one of KOWANI’s efforts to protect the environment with 400 participants from all over Indonesia.

Child marriage has become a serious social issue in Indonesia. This is revealed by an Wedding Organizer advertisement that advocates child marriage. KOWANI, as the oldest federation of women’s organizations, which houses 98 women’s organizations in Indonesia, strongly criticizes child marriage. It is against the law on marriage and child protection. Child marriage has implications for bleeding, premature babies,



maternal mortality, underweight babies, and others during childbirth. The underweight babies would continue to be malnourished or be stunted or have disproportionately short stature. Various negative impacts such as increases in domestic violence and divorce rate could also occur since children are not psychologically ready to be parents. Giwo Rubianto, President of KOWANI, said “Child marriage is against the law. The law should guarantee children’s rights to have education, health, and an adequate standard of living. We should protect children’s rights by stopping child marriage”.

**Reported by Giwo Rubianto, President of KOWANI**



## Council of Women's Organization in Israel (CWOI)

The Corona crisis in Israel, which started in March 2020, had not stopped by the end of the year, but during that period, only increased CWOI's involvement in burning issues. Before detailing below the highlights of our activities during this difficult past year, it is appropriate to mention that this report is based on the information received from our affiliate members who took action to give an adequate response to urgent needs.

The COVID-19 pandemic has laid bare the nation's social and economic inequalities and vulnerabilities, as happened unfortunately in all other affected countries around the world. It has demonstrated once again, that in periods of crisis, women's livelihoods and jobs are more at risk than men's, a situation which requires the exploration of community resilience, coalition building, and creativity, looking for new available possibilities. During such difficult time, women are notably faced with acute challenges affecting important aspects of their daily lives. More than ever, it is now time to improve women's organizations' practices, policies and programs, so as to create an enabling and rights-based environment in which women would be able to enjoy equal rights, regain hope and a sense of community, and engage as responsible social actors and innovators.

COVID-19 has made visible the need for more funding for immediate community response. Accordingly, at a time when policy-makers need to restore public confidence and preserve financial stability and growth, resilience and inclusive rebuilding are imperative. The pandemic has reminded governments and civil society organizations of the importance of healthcare services, social welfare, education, support systems for the needy, and elimination and prevention of domestic violence - to name only a few of the crucial elements which help in periods of crisis.

Despite the fact that women are at the frontlines of addressing COVID-19 impacts in their own communities, the funds dedicated to responding to the pandemic often remain unavailable to them. This is because most COVID-19 responses are not gender-responsive and because women are excluded from decision-making bodies. Transformative and normative change necessary to challenge gender inequalities requires meaningful participation of women and women-led organizations.

It should be pointed out that the month of November was particularly rich with events marking the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women throughout the country. As already mentioned, this issue has been exacerbated during the pandemic and hundreds of women found themselves struggling in order to free themselves from

violent and dangerous situations. Thanks to the initiative and the efforts of Oshrit Sitbon, CWOI President, an outstanding event took place at the Knesset in the presence of the Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, his spouse Sarah, the Speaker of the House, Ministers and several Members of the Knesset. In her keynote address, Minister Orly Levy Abecassis, declared that a special Authority for combatting Violence against Women (VAW) will be established with a substantive governmental budget which will allow a holistic and a comprehensive approach to tackle this crucial issue, including adequate training for police officers, judges and social workers, as well as the development and use of technological innovations (e.g. “Hear me” application), educational programs, support systems and tools which will enable women suffering from physical and mental violence to become economically independent, to stand up on their feet, and to free themselves from a violent environment.

In addition, specialists in the field of gender-based violence took the responsibility to advocate for greater awareness of the need for early intervention, and to help and lead the conversation about girls at risk, who remain a global challenge.

Taking into account the insights and lessons learnt from the experience of this year, women organizations decided to do their utmost to help the policy makers harness the economic power of women in driving the economic recovery from the pandemic, and in supporting gender-inclusive growth, advocating in the following areas:

- Accelerating women’s leadership and women’s involvement in decision-making
- Investing in social infrastructure and family-friendly policies
- Eliminating all forms of violence against women and sexual abuse
- Accelerating advances in women’s workforce competencies through professional and vocational training
- Investing in small-businesses owned by women entrepreneurs

During COVID-19, CWOI affiliate members have joined hands with other civil society partners and municipalities, in solidarity and in unity of purpose, with the deep belief that “We shall overcome together”.

**The following is a summary glance at our achievements:**

- Day care centers, family centers, shelters for battered women, parents’ hotline, at-risk youth villages and schools run by women’s organizations, functioned as usual, thanks to their dedicated staff and volunteers.

- Demonstrations led by women have influenced the Government to allocate adequate budgets for the creation, in some hospitals, of “Special Treatment Rooms” where victims of sexual harassment and abuse can receive holistic treatment, mentally and physically speaking.
- Provision of legal and financial aid to women who, due to the lockdown of numerous businesses, have been fired or forced to stay at home for a period of “leave without pay”. In the past year, major women organizations in Israel have opened special lines on labor law, and have dealt with about 2,000 inquiries from women who sought legal counseling. This activity necessitated the extension of working hours of volunteers in order to provide a comprehensive response to social security rights, writing letters to employers, conducting legal claims and making pressure on Parliament for legislative amendments.
- Contributing to civic education and responsible behavior of marginal groups – making sure to wear a mask, to keep distance, to wash hands, to use alco-gel...and to convince skeptic people that COVID-19 is a very serious illness, that it is not the flu, that it is not overblown, and that each citizen has a social responsibility in the matter vis-à-vis his own family, neighbors, and community at large.
- Acting as volunteer mentors in institutions for maltreated children who have been removed from their homes by order of the Court. These volunteers are helping to improve the children’s spirit, teaching them to become independent and to believe in themselves and in their future.
- Scholarships were granted to needy young women to begin higher education despite the pandemic restrictions.
- Weekly distribution of food parcels, clothes, blankets, toys, gift cards, to needy families, single mothers, women suffering from domestic violence, elderly people and to children with special needs.
- Provision of tablets and computers to children in families from low-economic status, to enable them to study on-line from home during lockdowns.
- Hot lines for psychological assistance were opened and are functioning with the help of hundreds of volunteers.
- Forwarding the special grant the Government has allocated to each Israeli citizen, to shelters for battered women, and for the fight of violence against women.
- Organization by CWOI President of virtual meetings looking for additional ways to continue coping with the challenges of caring for women during the pandemic.
- Meeting political figures and virtual regular attendance at the sessions of the Parliamentary Committee for the Status of Women for advocacy purpose. In such

context, we are pleased to point out that the Israeli Parliament (Knesset) passed an amendment to the “Men & Women Equal Wages Act” (from 1996) compelling the employer to publish a comparative salary report of employees of both genders.

- The Women's Lobby, together with the Ministry of Welfare, leads the round table in the Prime Minister's Office for Women's Needs. The round table monitors monthly for women, especially in the field of employment and violence.
- Appeals were made to courts for cases involving pay gaps, cases of gender discrimination, and also regarding the budgeting of women in sport.
- Appeals to the High Court- once against emergency regulations that limited women's rights, and a second time regarding adequate representation of women in the expert committee advising on the strategy of getting out of the corona.
- Publication of a number of policy reports on strategic issues regarding women with recommendations and directions for action.

Alongside this, there has been a great deal of relevant policy and lobbying work that included the preparation of materials, briefings, information transfer, and cooperation with the offices of MKs, ministers, and in front of many factors in government ministries and local authorities. Such work related to “women” issues regarding the right to old-age pension, the struggle to allow double benefits (old-age pension and unemployment benefits), women's sports, expanding legal aid for victims of domestic violence, the struggle to increase the budget for preventing domestic violence, establishing an inter-ministerial committee focusing on violence against women, etc.

Thousands of women and supporting men attended demonstrations to protest against VAW. Since the beginning of the COVID-19 crisis and the widespread lockdowns, there has been a recrudescence in domestic violence, with 21 women murdered and hundreds of women and children who were forced to free themselves from violence and to find refuge in special shelters run by women organizations and volunteer bodies. The virus in question, called, “violence against women”, has solutions that the government holds. Women demand what they deserve and demand safety. It should be mentioned that the government promised, already in 2017, \$17 million to devote to combatting VAW, but which sum still had not been transferred to the relevant authorities and spent. The main message of the connected protestations was clear: “future murders of women are not inevitable and can be prevented”.

CWOI affiliate members and other Israeli women's organizations also drive change by organizing and mobilizing into women's rights and feminist movements – which have been found to be key drivers of change, making our world more inclusive.

## **Other examples of projects and activities carried out by CWOI affiliate organizations during COVID- 19:**

### **1. "Adopt a neighbor" - Helping the community**

### **2. Donations to shelters for women and children suffering from domestic violence**

### **3. Distribution of orange masks**

To advocate for the fight of violence against women during the 16 days of activism, orange face masks were distributed to city representatives and citizens.



### **4. Help women to free themselves from prostitution**

Donations were made to the association – “Her Academy” – which organizes courses for prostitutes, so they can start a decent work and earn a living with dignity, becoming economically independent.

### **5. Demonstrating against Femicide**

Demonstrations were organized along the main streets of big cities, with the involvement of high school principals, women's councils, women's organizations, youth movements, with the permission from the municipality and the police to demonstrate during the hours of heavy traffic on the roads, while maintaining distance and wearing masks. Orange cloth strips were distributed to the participants in order to maintain a distance of 2 meters in accordance with the restrictions.

### **6. Lectures for the blind during CORONA time**

Providing zoom lectures to blind people and visually impaired people, and giving them the possibility to have a conversation on a subject of interest, encourage their spirit and soul.

### **7. Teaching at-risk teenagers about violence**

Together with Kivunim association which takes care of disabled youth, helping them to become independent, to take responsibility for their actions, to fight violence and teaching them working skills.

### **8. Healthy cooking with children**

In this period of limited activity and maintaining social distance, the need for creative activity with young children was felt. This brought to the realization of a special project that combines health and fun.

### **9. The annual motorcycle convoy VAW**

Members decided to join a protest convoy of 800 motorcyclists who demonstrate against VAW.



The new year 2021 started with the launch of the Israeli Observatory on Femicide, in cooperation with CWOI. This is the first time that a neutral body has provided data on femicide from a full year. March 2020, the month the coronavirus pandemic erupted in Israel in full force and the Government imposed the first nation-wide lockdown, was the deadliest month for women...

In conclusion, let us point out that we have mentioned only the salient examples of the achievements of our affiliate members during the COVID-19 pandemic. The effectiveness of our organization derives from the key role we play in generating awareness among our communities and policy-makers, and challenging the Parliamentary Committee for the Advancement of Women to listen to women's voices and to take actions to make the necessary amendments towards a more equitable society and fulfilment of women's rights, in regular times, and especially in time of crisis, such as the period of COVID-19.

**Reported by Mazal Renford and Aviva Kohlmann**



## 🌐 Lesotho National Council of Women (LNCW)



Lesotho, like all other countries, has been negatively impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, especially in the business sector. Our country is small with a population of 2.1 Million. Since the country went to a one-month lockdown in April 2020, the restrictions have been continuously lifted. Lockdown was a new experience for everybody in the country.

People who got their livelihoods from small income businesses such as street vendors suffered greatly because they survive on the daily proceeds of their businesses. These people could not make money to provide food for their daily consumption. The repercussions of the COVID-19 have been deeply felt by women and girls in Lesotho because a large number of uneducated young women, widows, and orphaned girls provide for their families with their small income. Thankfully, the local business people and all others took a responsibility to provide food parcels to those who had nothing to eat in the communities.

Lesotho National Council of Women (LNCW) members are suffering from this pandemic because they have lost their livelihoods. Some of them are teachers at community-based projects such as Early Childhood Care Centers but have not been paid since April because schools have not been allowed to operate. Some are making their lives by sewing items to sell, working in saloons, and selling vegetables that were left stranded during the lockdowns. However, when the government lifted strict restrictions, some are still unable to open their businesses because they already used their capital to buy groceries for their families.

LNCW is also immensely suffering from financial difficulties so it was not able to support its members who are worse off. The Council usually covers operating expenses from the rent of its property, but the rent has not been collected since all schools and churches are closed from April. Vocational centers are still not allowed to operate as it can be dangerous to have a large number of people inside. Therefore, we are not able to help young women and men to teach skills and to provide for their needs in the future. We hope that we will resume from where we stopped in January 2021.

Compared to other African Countries, Lesotho has a small number of deaths caused by COVID-19. But what we are concerned about is that the second wave of the coronavirus can bring about devastating effects on Lesotho as we do not have enough facilities to take care of a large number of patients.

Moreover, people in rural areas are not able to get the right information about COVID-19 at the right time. They are even not aware of the seriousness and danger of the current COVID-19 situation and they do not follow WHO guidelines to wear masks, to keep social distancing, and to stop large gatherings. Lesotho Government and Non-Governmental Organization such as LNCW are doing their best to provide information about COVID-19 in the rural communities. We have been making public gatherings to inform the dangers of the virus and the way to prevent infection of both COVID-19 and HIV.



When LNCW visits communities in Pitseng Leribe, Maseru, and Rothe, we provide face masks, food, and hygiene kits for girls. We encouraged people to grow vegetables on their lands and to raise indigenous poultry which can stand the harsh environmental condition and poor husbandry practices. The women community groups trained to develop entrepreneurial skills in the district of Butha-Buthe for the preparation of their future after the COVID-19 while following the three critical WHO safety guidelines wearing masks, regularly washing hands, and keeping social distance.

The Council, working with other partners, helps young girls who need to take PREP (pre-exposure prophylaxis) for the prevention of HIV infection. We are also concerned about the rapid increase in gender-based violence as we have been hearing the increased cases of women killed by their intimate partners since April. LNCW never stops making a loud voice to the government to establish systems to stop this scourge.

**Reported by Patricia Mabataung Mokhathali, President of LNCW**

## 🌐 National Council of Women of Malta



No one at the National Council of Women of Malta visualized that the year 2020 was going to be so different and rather challenging. In January 2020, rumors circulated that in Wuhan City a new infectious virus diagnosed as a novel coronavirus was affecting people with serious illness and eventually dying. We believed that Malta was very far from China and we thought it would never reach the island.

During the Annual General Meeting (AGM) held on January 25, 2020, we reflected on the achievements we made over the years and we were confident that we were going to continue working together with our affiliates for a fairer and more just society.

In February 2020, our education program was a feather in the cap of NCW Malta with many young participants attending various courses at the Centre. Our work to empower individuals to venture into digital entrepreneurship was showing signs of satisfaction. The program was overbooked and many attended the evening sessions even during the cold, rainy days.

We managed to organize and participate in all the activities for the International Women's Day celebrations, we were happy that we also had the support of H.E. Dr. George Vella, President of Malta and his spouse, Mrs. Miriam Vella, on March 8, 2020. At the AGM, we decided that Mrs. Miriam Vella will be given Honorary Life Membership during the Foundation Day Dinner.



A few days after the International Women's Day celebration, a lockdown was announced by the Authorities and schools were closed. We had to close the Centre and put our activities on hold until we decided what we would do next. The impact of COVID-19 on our activities was serious. Our main aim was to continue to give our service to the community and not to leave anyone behind. We knew that this epidemic has enormous social and economic implications on society.

We consulted the Education Ministry as some of our courses are with their collaboration. The Director for Lifelong Learning informed us that they are training the teachers to use online facilities. Meanwhile, NCW Malta lent out laptops and portable whiteboards to

teachers so that they could continuously give the sessions online. Laptops were available on loan to students.

We kept in touch with our elderly members by communicating via telephony, diverted our office telephone calls to the General Secretary house and gave out the mobile number of our Office Secretary.

We made sure that participants that were sitting for the Matriculation Certificate were not losing out on many sessions. Unfortunately, the Ministry for Education stopped the sessions for the summer months although the Matriculations Exams were postponed for September. Through the NCW initiative and with the cooperation and dedication of the mathematics teacher, who offered his services free of charge, we continued giving extra sessions during the summer, so that the students will be well prepared for their exam. The participants were mostly women who either wanted to re-enter the labor market or were seeking to obtain better qualifications for a better job. We were very happy that the students were successful and obtained the certificate.

The digital entrepreneurship course went online and the tutor gave the participants a tutorial on Microsoft Teams. At first, there were some problems with participants unable to log on to Microsoft Teams, but with the help of the tutor and that of the Office Secretary, we managed to put everyone on track. The participants worked on a wide range of professional development topics from business idea development, building their contact networks, digital marketing, online security, e-commerce, social media, web design and development, soft-skills and copyright laws. This course came at the right opportune time, when consumers were constrained to shop online and home delivery become popular due to COVID-19 restrictions. Some of the participants did take up this opportunity and opened an online business.

As all activities at the Centre were on hold, during the summer months NCW Malta decided to give a fresh welcoming look to the Centre. Although funding was very restricted, we went ahead with the project and engaged some workmen to paint the rooms and to do plumbing and electricity works and also a carpenter to arrange the damaged wooden doors. We also arranged the library, serviced all the air condition equipment, and sanitized the premises with the health authority regulations. We were determined to open the Centre for visitors in October according to health regulations.

We knew that the pandemic was causing a high risk of loneliness amongst vulnerable people especially those living alone and/or with low income. NCW Malta wanted to

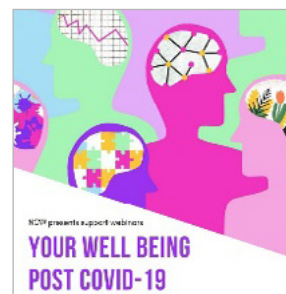
make the computer rooms available for teaching computer skills to those who wanted to do shopping online and access their bank accounts or paying bills online. Therefore, we wanted the Centre to welcome back a limited number of participants during the first week of October 2020.

Meanwhile, NCW Executive Members continued to meet monthly and discussed a number of topics and events to be organized online. Online sessions were very well attended. Some members and friends were roped in to engage in developing their confidence in technology. NCW Malta is proud that it helped many individuals to develop their skills and to understand that no barriers of gender or age bracket can stop them learning new skills or entering the digital world.

NCW Malta organized a number of Webinars which tackled various topic such as:

### < Well-being >

The “Post COVID Well-Being” were a series of webinars, which were inspired by the current event when the Maltese Islands were experiencing low number of COVID-19 active cases. It was a time when people started to regain confidence in themselves and trying to pick-up the pieces that they might have lost during the first COVID-19 wave. These sessions were conducted by Dr. Josette Barbara Cardona an Occupational Psychologist and NCW Executive Member.



### < The Element of the New Cohabitation Law in Malta >

Dr. Elizabeth Gaerty, a lawyer and NCW Executive Member, gave two presentations, one in English and another in Maltese, on the new cohabitation law in Malta. She explained well the different aspects of the law which stipulates that all cohabitations must be registered through a public deed abolishing the recognition of de facto cohabitations.

### < Nutrition Post COVID-19 >



On June 23, 2020, Nutritionist Fleur Bugeja gave a presentation about healthy eating which is crucial in particular during the times when the immune system might need to fight back. A healthy and varied diet is essential as the current situation led to the increased consumption of highly processed foods, which are high in fats, sugars and salt.



In December, Fleur Bugeja gave another presentation just before the festive season, entitled “Healthy eating during Christmas”.

### < Bin it or Recycle it >

Mary Gaerty, President of NCW Malta and an expert in the field of Waste Management, gave a presentation on when do we bin things and when do we recycle them. She explained the environmental impact and the importance of the circular economy. The European Commission has adopted a new Circular Economy Action Plan as one of the main blocks of the European Green Deal which is Europe’s new agenda for Sustainable growth.

### < Living a pregnancy post-pandemic: Embracing the New Normal >

On July 16, 2020, Ms. Sylvana Ferriġġi a qualified midwife gave a presentation on expecting mothers and some revised guidelines from the Health Ministry in Malta. The Health Promotion and Disease Prevention Directorate had issued the following statement.

“Following the release of a number of measures of community-wide social distancing, it is critical that persons within the vulnerable category keep in mind that the threat of becoming infected with the coronavirus has not been removed and that everybody but in particular the vulnerable must continue to take every precaution to avoid becoming infected.” For this reason, NCW Malta felt that we should inform and make expecting parents aware of how to keep safe, what to eat or not to eat, and what to expect from local maternity services.



### < Reframing stress during the festive season >

In Malta, it was reported that the impact of the pandemic on people’s mental health, translated into an increase in demand of mental health services.

Over the past months, Mental Health Foundation has experienced a significant increase in the number of calls for help and a marked increase in the number of brief interventions, where people met with professional to discuss a situation and identified suitable support services for their particular situation

For most of us, daily life does not look the same these days. Living in times of uncertainty



can be overwhelming. But there are steps we can take to help us cope with stress and sustain our personal well-being — mind, body, spirit, and beyond. For this reason, NCW invited Ms. Lara Tonna Grima to give a presentation about reframing from stress during the festive season.

### < Teaching Science to Toddlers >

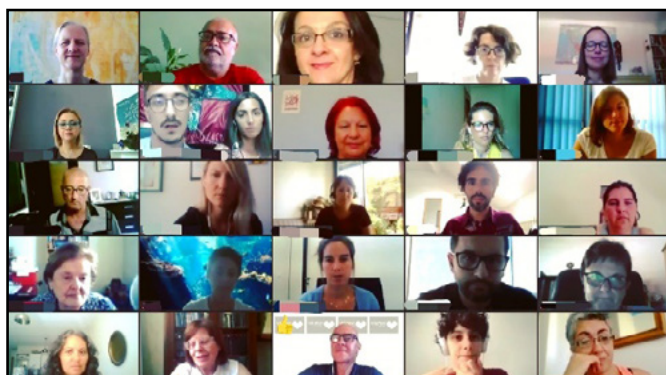
Dr. Daniel Cassola prepared a video for parents to help toddlers understand science from a young age. Dr. Cassola demonstrated some STEM related activities that parents could do with young children during the festive season. The video was placed on NCW Facebook page.

### < The art of dress in Malta: Mid-19th winter fashion in photography >

During the month of December 2020, NCW Malta invited Caroline Tonna, an art historian and curator and holds a Bachelor degree in Anthropology, in Art History and a master of Arts degree in the Art History from the University of Malta to give a virtual presentation during the Christmas about the art of dress in Malta: Mid-19th winter fashion in photography. Through observation on a selection of rare studio photographs, she shared information on the fashion and social history of the period. These photographs demonstrated a historically accurate record of self and group expression and as well as what were fashionable at the time and the detail in dress.

Although funds were lacking, NCW Malta managed to issue the newsletter, il-Mara, where high-profile personalities shared with our readers how they adjusted to the new norm during the pandemic. We also tried to keep members who could not join our webinars informed through our publication of the much-needed social element.

NCW Malta Executive Members took an active role during debates of national



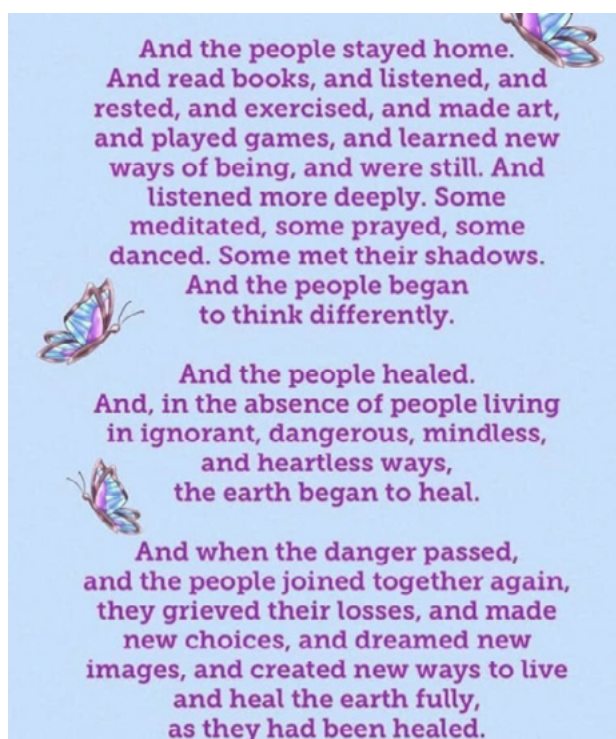
importance. Mary Gaerty attended the Malta Council for Economic and Social Development meetings, where most of the decisions about COVID-19 were discussed with the Prime Minister. Doris Bingley participated at a number of webinars organized by the

Commonwealth Secretariat, the Commonwealth Women's Network and the United Nations. Members of the Executive also attended other webinars organized at National and European level. NCW Malta is a member of many local platforms and many meetings were held virtual.

NCW Malta Centre had opened its doors in October for a few courses, especially the computer courses. Classes are kept to not more than 8 participants as the pandemic is still with us and quarantine is still in place for those who had close contact with someone with COVID-19. We need to remain vigilant at all times. NCW Malta will continue to work to help people find the right balance to ensure good mental health.

Although in Malta the Health Authorities have started vaccinating vulnerable people, cases of COVID-19 are on the increase. So, NCW Malta decided to hold the 2021 Annual General Meeting originally scheduled on January 30, 2021 to a later date as it is the wish of the committee that all members will have the opportunity to attend.

We would like to share with you this beautiful poem which was on one of slides during one of the presentations.



**Reported by Doris Bingley and Marie Demicoli**

## 🌐 NATIONAL COUNCIL OF WOMEN'S SOCIETIES - NIGEIRA (NCWS)

On March 30, 2020, the Federal Government of Nigeria, due to the global pandemic known as Coronavirus Disease or COVID-19, has placed the entire country on lockdown, as part of a strict policy to limit the spread of the disease. This saw a wholesale shutdown of the social and economic activities in key cities of Abuja, Lagos, Ogun, and Kano States in particular; and a ban on interstate travel; and curfews imposed in most States.

The restriction of the movement led to an unexpected and heavy impact on the lives of Nigerians. The formal sector was required to work from home, but the informal sector which accounts for 80 percent of the labor force saw millions of daily-paid workers be faced with poverty and hunger. Their livelihood and hand to mouth existence came under threat. These categories include market women, hawkers, fruit sellers, food vendors and etc. who abruptly lost their daily incomes due to the lockdown. Small and medium businesses are also affected. The National Council of Women's Societies (NCWS) swung into action to complement the government's interventions to alleviate the harshness of the lockdown.



### < Advocacy of the campaign to eradicate gender-based violence >



NCWS Osun State's Campaign to end violence against girls

Another fall-out of the lockdown was the impact on women and girls in terms of incidence of sexual and gender-based violence. We became aware of the possibility of girls and women being lockdown with their abusers. In June 2020, this led to Governors across the country declaring a state of emergency over rape and other gender-based violence against women and

children. The emerging situation led aid groups and NGOs to embark on a series of programs to cushion the effects of the lockdown. Due to the increase in cases of rape and domestic violence, the federal government inaugurated an inter-ministerial management Committee on Eradication of Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV) in July 2020.

This is an area which NCWS has continuously raised its voice over the years to advocate for perpetrators to be prosecuted according to the law.

### **< Public Enlightenment >**

NCWS produced a jingle with a stay-safe theme that reminded people to stay at home, do hand-washing for 20 seconds, use alcohol-based hand sanitizer in the absence of soap, practice social distancing and wear a face mask if going out for essential services.

This jingle was sent to all our chapters in the 36 states of the Federation, as well as the Federal Capital Territory of Abuja. Our media message of sensitization was to ensure that members and their households observe the WHO-recommended Safety protocols to curtail transmission of the disease in the communities including the rural areas.

### **< Palliative Programme >**



In collaboration with the Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development, the Council participated in practical support for families across the country when the curfew was declared. Through the philanthropic donations of Nigerians, NCWS purchased and distributed staple foodstuffs and ready-to-eat food to families across the nation. We also gave cash out to many poor families who were experiencing a lack of food and other essentials due to lack of income. The impact of COVID-19 has put unprecedented pressure on the citizens with the resultant questions on many lips; “Should I remain lockdown and face hunger or should I go out and face the dreadful virus.” This caused a lot of problems all over the country. We had to embark on massive sensitization through phone calls, WhatsApp and town crier systems in the villages.

We continued to request further aid to Nigerians and philanthropist. This led to the formation of the Society Committee against COVID-19, a coalition of NGOs by NCWS in Collaboration with Kenneth Kalu to try to cushion the effect of the pandemic on Nigerians through sensitization, distribution of palliatives such as food cash, tap buckets, hand sanitizers, and face masks.

To encourage the philanthropist and other good-willed donors, we created and launched the National COVID-19 Register for all who did anything to help in this trying period to write their name in the book. Minister for Women Affairs, Dame Pauline TALLEN, the Director General of the National Council for Arts and Culture, Otunba Olusegun Runsewe, the Coordinator of SOCOCOVID, Mr. Kenneth Kalu-Ibe, and Dr. Gloria Laraba Shoda, joined this event. Since many Nigerians and other kind people did positive things to help combat this dreaded pandemic and cushion its effects on the economy of citizens and the nation at large, their names have been on this register and will go down to posterity.



Gloria Laraba Shoda,  
President of NCWS

**Reported by Gloria Laraba Shoda, President of NCWS**



## All Pakistan Women's Association (APWA)

As the country remains under a lockdown to battle a daunting coronavirus outbreak, local charities are playing a role to stem the economic burden on the low-income groups providing them rations. A grinding economic slowdown, a direct result of the global COVID-19 outbreak, has particularly hit nearly 25% of the country's over 200 million population, which lives below poverty line.



All Pakistan Women's Association (APWA) being the premier NGO of Pakistan, is distributing ration, enough for 30 days, among the families of daily wagers in the low-income areas, to assist the community to fulfill their necessities.



APWA, which also runs a countrywide chain of charity education and health centers, affiliated with hospitals, are providing basic health facilities and creating awareness for health and hygiene among the mothers of the community.

### **< Helping the poor under lockdown >**

APWA, a women organization founded by the internationally-acclaimed social worker, Begum Ra'ana Liguata Ali Khan, is importing surgical masks from China, which will be provided to our health workers at the APWA health centers and affiliated hospitals in the Karachi's remote areas, in addition to distributing rations among needy families.

Another countrywide task is to collect the information about the families having their bread earners as unemployed due to COVID-19 pandemic, APWA is doing this job through its volunteers, project directors, teachers, principals, and other field workers working day and night to verify the information so that the ration could be distributed among the deserving families.

APWA is motivating their staff members with the provision of their monthly salary on time at their door step to protect them from being exposed to the virus. Moreover, during this pandemic APWA is also considering the need to update the knowledge of the staff of its Education Sector through assisting them free of cost online authentic resources for teachers training courses; additionally, supporting teachers to enhance their English Language skill with the provision of words family online to increase their vocabulary that



will play a significant role in learning English language.

### < Calls for the early distribution of zakat (tax) >

APWA has a tradition of receiving an aggregate amount of zakat every year from the regular donors and other reputable personals. Every Ramadhan this amount is being distributed among the needy families to support them in the wedding of orphan and needy girls, provision of sewing machines to the poor, widow, and needy women to earn their livelihood in respectable manner, assistance to the young women for their higher studies and scholarships for the students on merit-com-need basis.

In April 2020, APWA called for the early distribution of zakat to support those with low incomes, who are most vulnerable to an imminent economic slowdown due to the coronavirus pandemic. In a nutshell, it could be said that in this current situation of pandemic even a small pinch of charity would count as a huge contribution; therefore, APWA has reached out to serve around 3,000 families all over the country and specifically 1,000 families in Karachi through distributing rations. The same information is also being uploaded on the Sindh Relief Initiatives online data portal, set by the Government of Pakistan. Additionally, helping the women employees of APWA through the provision of their salary with ration bags to assist them in the times of need.



The success of APWA's mission to serve the needy families especially women in this pandemic rests on the shoulders of its individual donors and the donation from its overseas affiliates. Thus, APWA through these efforts and initiatives is assisting the government initiatives for supporting the citizens of Pakistan during this pandemic situation.



The Pandemic has created panic and chaos in the entire world. In Pakistan we have faced two long-term problems, poverty and disease. However, with the help of our kind sister, APWA has done its best to battle with this terrible pandemic.

In March 2020, despite COVID-19, APWA had organized a very successful function to celebrate Women's Day. This program was sponsored by Habib Metropolitan Bank. The Governor of Sindh was invited as the Chief Guest to distribute 100 machines to the deserving women so that they could earn some livelihood.

In May 2020, we received a donation of 20,000 KN95 masks from China and distributed them to five major Hospitals in Karachi. Since APWA has almost 50 branches, we also sent five thousand masks to our provincial branches.

During the pandemic, APWA has played a role in helping women in our Health Centers to organize numerous sessions to raise awareness of COVID-19. APWA has reached out to serve around 3,000 families all over the country and specifically 1,000 families in Karachi through distributing rations. APWA's Education and Health centers handed out rations in compliance with all the Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs). Additionally, to boost the spirit of patriotism, APWA celebrated the Independence Day of Pakistan and International Youth Day in its Education Projects.

Nevertheless, national, international and other multi-national companies are planning for down-sizing their staff. APWA is motivating their staff members with the provision of their monthly salary on time at their doorstep to protect them from being exposed to the virus. Moreover, APWA is also considering



the need to update the knowledge of the staff of its Education Sector through assisting them free of cost online authentic resources for teachers training courses. Teachers also recorded audio and video lessons to send to students' parents so that process of education would not be broken down due to pandemic. Additionally, to give the educational needs of students, PPSEAWA has also awarded COVID-19 Recovery Grant from APWA Education Projects so that mini laptops to be purchased and students to be kept updated with their educational needs.

Despite the COVID-19, it was a fulfilling year in terms of activities and tasks from APWA's platform.

**Reported by Charmaine Hidayatullah, President of APWA**

## 🌐 National Council of Women of the Philippines (NCWP)

The year 2020 seems to be a challenging year for our nation. At the start of the year, Taal Volcano erupted, displacing thousands of families from their homes. Realizing the need of those communities, National Council of Women of the Philippines (NCWP) responded by coordinating with its affiliates to provide basic necessities to the communities. It mobilized its Board of Trustees and donated cash to its affiliate, YWCA, who in turn purchased and distributed toiletries, laundry soap, and other items.



NCWP Director, Neriza Llana of YWCA was part of the gift giving mission. Through a collective effort were able to provide more 1,200 packs and distribute the items to different evacuation centers.



The NCWP Strategic Planning Workshop was likewise held from January 29 to 30, 2020 at the Greenyard Hotel, Cauayan City Isabela, home to our affiliate Cauayan Green Ladies. A new strategic plan focusing on Women's Health, more specifically, Mental Health, was prepared. The new plan will also include a strengthening of its collaborative efforts with both national and international agencies and organizations.

Prior to the Strategic Planning Workshop, the NCWP Board visited the one of its affiliate organization, the Cauayan Green Ladies headed by Mrs. Conchita Palencia and their eco-tourism projects in one of the barangays.

The Book Distribution Project which is on its 5th year have distributed a total of 3,000 boxes of books to community libraries and public elementary and high schools. This is in partnership with the Second Wind Foundation, the Rotary International's foundation arm that supervises its books for the World Program based in the USA.



At the onset of the global pandemic brought about by COVID-19, our programs were put on hold and we coordinate remotely. Metro Manila and other nearby provinces were on Enhance Community Quarantine from March 16 to May 15, 2020, and will continue to be under lockdown until the end of May. Our Affiliates were able to undertake online activities and outreaches to respond to this pandemic.

YWCA of the Philippines opened its doors to stranded young women members as a temporary shelter. These women were provided with shelter and basic needs. They likewise decided to open an online forum for young women to share stories and experiences of ECQ. Other activities conducted online are as follows:

1. Info Graphics – Understanding and Preventing COVID-19 (published in facebook page)
2. Cartoon graphics – for children to understand COVID-19
3. Coffee and Conversations on women economic empowerment amidst COVID-19
4. Gift distributions in YWCAs of San Jose del Monte, Bulacan; YWCA of Makati and San Pablo.

NCWP provided donations in kind (detergent and bar soap). Packs included basic necessities and facemask/vitamin C. PATAMABA Inc., another affiliate, distributed rice and cooked food to front liners and informal women workers who lost their livelihood. NCWP contributed sacks of rice for distribution.

**Reported by Teresita Gonzalez, Former President of NCWP**

## 🌐 Women's Union of Russia (WUR)

On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization announced a pandemic of a new coronavirus infection, and we all learned the terrible word, COVID-19. This news had a serious impact on all aspects of our lives. The whole planet changed its usual way of life dramatically: borders between states were closed, major international and Russian events were canceled, sports competitions were postponed, unprecedented security measures were introduced, etc.



Ekaterina Lachova,  
President of WUR

Every one of us will remember 2020 as a new reality, but, most importantly, a new border between grief and joy, cowardice and heroism, and a border between death and life. We have faced this reality that may affect everyone sooner or later. Everyone tried to seek reasons behind the new disease, and the mass media escalated the situation: hundreds and thousands got sick, we were plugged with pictures of different countries of the world, hospitals, and doctors looking like astronauts.

The work of public organizations even changed. What could we have done in this unusual situation? The regional branches of the Women's Union of Russia (WUR) were not taken aback. Each regional branch, in addition to common and traditional events, came up with one's own activities, that could be conducted online this time. This was a new experience for all of us.

The pandemic has taught us a lot: appreciation for life, communication with each other, and simple handshakes. It has changed the way we work in order to unite us even more, and has identified the groups of people in need that we had not addressed previously (for example, families where people have lost their jobs). The crisis has prompted us to restructure our work in order to further cooperate with cultural and social workers, medical professionals, disabled people's societies and veterans' councils. The pandemic period is not the time for idleness, it is the time for development and new joint activities. With extension of the isolation, we witnessed more and more interesting initiatives, and read with interest about diverse online projects of WUR regional branches in the news feed of the Women's Union of Russia.



### < The project "Women's Face of Victory" started in February >



WUR had planned the exhibition of 36 posters devoted to participation of Soviet women in the Great Patriotic War to become a touring exhibition displayed at various sites across Russia. In reality, we had to launch it online. Women's councils chose the most suitable web sites such as the sites of libraries, cultural institutions, educational schools, or museums. In many regions, within the framework of this project, information was collected about women who lived in this area, who were participants of the war, home front workers, to later present in books and albums under various names: “Family album of war years” (Ivanovo regional branch), “Collection of essays about women librarians (participants of the Second World War) in the Kadomsky district, Ryazan region”, “Collection of memoirs about A. Zubkova, pilot from Ryazan, and "In frontline skies".

The **Yaroslavl** Women’s Council published the booklet “Women’s Face of Victory. Glory to you, Yaroslavl women”, which became a part of the book fund of the central library system in the electronic library and the Yaroslavl region. District affiliations of the **Orenburg** regional women’s council basing on the collected materials keep a chronicle of Orenburg women (participants of the Second World War), and have already released the video “Victorious women” and published the brochure “We are proud of women-combatants from Orcha”.

The **Valuy** district women’s council (Belgorod regional branch) has published the book “Battlefield legends from Valuy women”. The regional branch in the Republic of **Crimea** has created the “Crimean notebook”, a portrait gallery of women - participants of the Second World War, and developed a brochure for publication. At the initiative of the WUR regional branch in the Republic of **Bashkortostan**, the creative team of the State TV and Radio Broadcasting Company of Bashkortostan produced the film “The Maidens’ Echelon” about volunteer girls – Komsomol members.

Public information during the period of isolation has become top priority for WUR regional branches with the message, “Together We Will Win.” Regional branches have developed and distributed informational memos and videos and informed the public about the new infection by emails and SMS, as well as via social networks.



The **Penza** regional branch established a regional group for prompt communication of information and counselling on “COVID-19”, and distributed fact sheets with contact information about training for prospective volunteers of the all-Russian project “MYVMESTE (We are together) 2020. RF”. The **Tver** regional branch launched the online psychological counseling project “What to do if you are scared...”

The **Yaroslavl** regional branch organized assistance to people in the call center, and answered hotline calls. All incoming requests were processed and referred to the authorities for response, many issues received via the “hotline” were resolved at once.

The **Kemerovo** regional branch took part in the virtual flash mob of the Legislative Assembly of the Kemerovo region-Kuzbass #moemrukipravilno (Washing hands correctly), posted videos “Tell us about prevention measures” on their pages in social networks, joined the work of the hotline: called pensioners and disabled people explaining the danger of coronavirus and prevention measures; conducted preventive conversations about limiting exit to the street, posted memos in public places, shops, house entrances, at transportation stops, and in the private sector.

The regional branch in the Republic of **Bashkortostan** published a series of articles about the rules of life with coronavirus in the newspaper “Companion of residents of Nurimanov district”. The regional branch in the Republic of **Mari El** organized a series of webinars on informational assistance to women facing difficulties in quarantine and self-isolation. The workshops addressed emotional and economic aspects of security, dealing with despair, building healthy boundaries, and seeking resources in oneself. The classes were held within the framework of the project “School of safety and well-being”.

The **Ulyanovsk** regional branch conducted daily online consultations “How to maintain normal relations in the family during the quarantine period”. 13 consultations were held: “Parents' communication with teenagers”; “To hit or not to hit? Effects of punishments”; “How to restore lost relationships with teenagers”; “How to avoid conflicts with teenagers”; “Crucial moments of child-parent attachment”; “Anger management”; “Distance learning. How adults can facilitate a new regime for themselves and their children”; “How to teach children to be independent”; “Game addiction in adolescents”; “If you feel lonely”; “How to prevent traumatic shaken baby syndrome”; “Punishment without cruelty”; “Stepfather and child – why mothers do not protect their children”.

The **Pskov** regional branch has opened the public Internet reception office “Pskov. Women's Union of Russia” in social networks. On this platform, consultations were

held on protecting the population against Internet fraud, women's rights, and voting for amendments to the Constitution. The regional branch in the **Jewish Autonomous Region** has actively participated in the work of the "hotline" devoted to life support of local residents. The **Moscow** regional branch has provided an opportunity for single Moscovites to connect with relatives living in other countries and cities via Skype.

The **Kaluga** regional branch has organized the work of psychologists, doctors, and social workers, including those in self-isolation. They provided contacts to the regional anti-coronavirus Task Force and accepted calls from those in need of advice and moral support.



The **Voronezh** Regional branch has conducted telephone monitoring of the socio-economic status of people in all municipal districts in the context of the coronavirus pandemic, as well as social monitoring "Labor migrants in Voronezh". Several seminars were organized on "Coronavirus is our common concern". All materials are posted on the organization's website.

The time has come to help those in need. In the difficult epidemiological situation, women's councils have shown great flexibility, efficiency and ability to work together.

To facilitate communication with each other, almost all regional branches have created regional chats (the regional branch in the Republic of Bashkortostan called the chat "My Home is My Fortress"), which in addition to heads of district and city women's councils and members of the boards, often included deputy heads of cities and districts, supervisors of public structures and active citizens. The chats are called to quickly and simultaneously convey information to all women's councils, get their rapid feedback, and discuss initiatives. Major benefits of the chats are team building and team spirit. The chats provide prompt assistance to persons in a difficult situation, arrange fundraising and humanitarian assistance. The Council of Women of the Yanaul district (Republic of Bashkortostan) has created a chat with participants of the "Active Longevity" project for communication and mutual support.

The regional branch in the Republic of **Mari El** has established the practice of weekly remote communication on the ZOOM platform. The **Belgorod** regional branch has organized volunteers from among members of women's councils known as "Women's

Expeditions” to help those in need.

Members of the **Kuzbass** Women’s Union, and members of the regional branch in the **Chukotka Autonomous Region** have joined volunteer groups as part of the All-Russian campaign, #Myvmeste (We are together). Food packages were delivered to families whose children received subsidized meals at school, and those on distance learning.

The **Amur** regional branch has headed the work of the commission studying the provision of dry rations to children with health limitations and children from low-income families. The commission examined the composition of rations, expiration dates, and prices.

**V. Deripasko**, Board of the **Vladimir** regional branch, has headed the regional volunteer task force and coordinated the #Myvmeste (We are together) campaign. In all regions, members of WUR became part of volunteer task forces or headed them. As part of this campaign, many good deeds were done: purchase of food supplies, medicines, and personal hygiene products under different names: “Wagon of goods”, “Shelf of goods” (products left in special boxes in stores for those who needed but could not afford to buy them), “Basket of kindness from the Women’s Union”, “Volunteer expeditions”, “Caravan of good deeds”. The names were different, but the goal was the same - to provide targeted assistance to large, low-mobility and low-income families, the elderly, and the orphaned children. Members of WUR delivered food stuffs to remote villages. Farmers delivered potatoes and other vegetables for distribution to the needy in the framework of the “Strategic reserve” campaign. Pastry chef **Tugarinova T.A.**, member of the regional branch in the Republic of **Buryatia**, personally formed food baskets for fellow country people.



Regional branches in **North Ossetia-Alania** and **Sevastopol** have managed to resume the work of “Dairy kitchens”, providing children with baby food without genetically modified components.

The **Karelian** regional branch has proposed to the State Budgetary Institution “Integrated Center for Social Services of the population of the Republic of Karelia” to organize a joint activity uniting lonely elderly people in a chain of communication. Social workers offered their charges to do a simple task: call two friends (the more, the better), wish them

good morning and ask about their health and mood. Also, ask them to continue the chain further, supporting communication of several other people. Thus, a simple and cheap game-idea resulted in that hundreds of people started communicating, overcame the fear of rejection and found the opportunity to support not only themselves, but also others with their warmth and sympathy. If the virus is spreading along the chain, why not launch from the opposite direction a stream of kindness and attention passed from person to person?

The **Moscow** regional branch “House of Friends of Cheburashka” has offered assistance to private parks, farms and animal transfer units that have suffered due to the pandemic, and where animals are in urgent need of food. Members of the **Yaroslavl** regional branch, volunteers and families of the city of Yaroslavl has taken part in the campaign “Feed Masha the Bear” in the Yaroslavl open-air museum. **T. A. Chumakova**, Chair of the Stavropol regional branch, has purchased 500 anti-plague suits, and has helped with furniture to the Pyatigorsk municipal hospital by purchasing full-sized beds with orthopedic mattresses and the bedding.



The **Altai** Regional Council of Women has undertaken the Social Van project. Members of WUR delivered stationery, clothes, shoes for children from families in difficult life situations, and provided services of social hairdressers, assisted in collecting documents and processing benefits for large families for school readiness, also provided psychological assistance. Due to the acute shortage of masks, all regional branches quickly asked everyone who was an expert in sewing for making masks. Some used their own materials, others revamped the production, still others distributed sewing patterns of masks on the Internet, and used their imagination. For example, the Syzran chapter of the Samara regional branch announced a photo contest for the most interesting image of the mask.

The **Volgograd** Regional Women’s Union has accumulated charitable donations in the amount of over 25 million rubles, which helped implement several important projects. During three months of lockdown due to the pandemic, over 30,000 local elderly people received free food assistance. Assistance was also provided in the framework of the project “To you, our dear ones”. On the eve of the 75th anniversary of the Victory in the Second World War, WUR purchased and put together charitable gift bags. On May 8-9, 1097 WWII veterans received congratulations and food packages. In addition, taking into account the needs of medical institutions and the situation in the region, the Union at the expense

of benefactors purchased a lung ventilator (1 million 800 thousand Rbbls), 15 oxygen concentrates for prevention and treatment of lung diseases, 2,000 disposable suits with shoe covers and over 7,000 respirators to protect medical workers who are in direct contact with patients. All funds were transferred to Volgograd hospitals for medical workers.

By order of the Governor of the Penza region, a Fund to combat the spread of coronavirus was established on the basis of the Penza WUR regional branch, which also implemented and coordinated the fundraising and targeted assistance. The collected funds were accumulated on the account of the regional branch, and helped purchase several thousand protective masks and a large number of protective suits later handed over to hospitals.

**A. F. Kaskulova**, chair of WUR regional branch in the **Kabardino-Balkar** Republic, and chief doctor of the City Polyclinic No. 1 in Nalchik, was at the forefront of the struggle against coronavirus. More than 80 thousand local citizens and residents of the Belaya Rechka village are attached to the polyclinic. From day one, A. F. Kaskulova joined the operational team under the KBR Ministry of Health opposing the importation and spread of the infection. At the polyclinic, she created rapid response teams to serve patients with suspected coronavirus, opened a filter box for fever patients, spoke several times on information broadcasting channels, calling residents of the republic to comply with preventive measures. Health care workers from the polyclinic opened control posts at the airport and at the railway station, where everyone arriving in the republic was subjected to temperature measurements and swabbing for “COVID-19”. Staff of the polyclinic worked almost around the clock, seven days a week and beyond regular schedules, and was subjected to extreme pressure. On the eve of the Health Worker Day, A. F. Kaskulova launched the campaign “Thanks to doctors and nurses for serving people”. 600 food packages with boxes of candies, tea and coffee were delivered to hospitals in different districts of Nalchik. District doctors noted the consolidating role of the KBR Women’s Union, this activity was favorably received in social networks, and served as an example of charity for other public organizations.

**I. G. Morozova**, chair of the WUR Kirov regional branch, chief physician of the Kirov City Hospital No. 2, from day one took the full force of the epidemic, working around the clock seven days a week and taking care of the staff and patients. Instant reactions, instant decision-making. On her feet all day, wearing a protective suit. The only thought in her head – to have enough time to help. The patients’ feedback was positive, and the Women’s Council supported its chair as best it could, because she was at the forefront.



**N. Skosyrskaya**, activist of the regional branch in the Republic of Buryatia has committed to feed volunteers with homemade cakes until the end of the self-isolation.

### < Digital assistance >

Since all schools, universities, technical schools and colleges switched to the distance learning, many families, especially large and low-income families, found themselves in a difficult situation, as children did not have the necessary equipment for studies. Regional offices have joined the campaign to organize digital assistance:

The Kuzbass Women's Union has joined the regional charitable campaign "Digital Help", which aimed to expand educational space for children and remote work opportunities, and help schoolchildren with organizing full-fledged distance learning. Anyone who had unclaimed computer equipment, mobile devices (produced after 2012) in working condition, could share with those in need. 20 sets of equipment, including new tablets, were provided.

The **Ulyanovsk** regional branch has launched the project #CompSharing. **Ivanovo** regional branch has involved so-called "technical volunteers", who repaired equipment and computers – the things cannot do without. Almost all regional branches succeeded in raising funds for the purchase of computers for children.

How to comfortably organize the environment for children? why is it important to observe the daily routine, what books to read, what games to play in quarantine? To answer these questions, many regional branches proposed several forms of communication to be used while at home in quarantine, and prepared recommendations for women's councils. The following widespread activities have aroused much interest:



"I read with my mom (dad)", "ME and a BOOK: we read at home", "Leisure time with a book under self-isolation" (Aksai district, Rostov oblast); "Reading residents of Lipetsk" (Lipetsk regional branch) (aimed at involving into joint reading of works of local writers and poets, study of local lore and history on the basis of the reads).

The **Kirov** regional branch has joined the campaign #antivirusreading.



Many regional branches have actively participated in the all-Russian campaign “Let’s embrace a child with a book”, and as part of the campaign “We are for reading Russia”, they posted memories of members of women’s councils about their favorite children’s books on their websites. The Union of Women of Chuvashia donated books by Chuvash authors to all kindergartens of the republic in order to replenish their methodological fund, which was very symbolic as part of the celebration of the centenary of the Chuvash autonomy.

Mothers with many children from Khabarovsk have also joined the campaign, “For Reading Russia”, and the Minister of Culture of the Khabarovsk Kray, who also supported the campaign, read the fairy tales by A. Lepetukhin, Far Eastern author, live on Khabarovsk TV.

The **Kaluga** Regional branch has launched the online project, “We manage the quarantine”, calling to do morning exercises together. The **Tambov** regional branch has launched the project “How to amuse children at home?”

The **Tver** regional branch has launched the campaign “Start the morning with us” (every morning famous local yoga coaches conducted morning exercises live), and the psychological project “How to maintain stability in the unstable situation”. Together with the Youth Theatre, the Tver branch launched the marathon “We stay at home”, running short videos that address various aspects of acting skills. The period of isolation helped understand one more thing: the importance of organizing leisure activities for children with disabilities. Many ideas for interactive communication with children were developed and implemented. Online greetings, various master classes on making crafts and postcards were organized for those birthday persons. For example, famous Tver actors online read fairy tales for children “ONLINE MAKARONINA”.

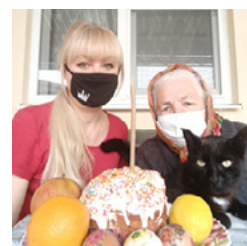
The **Yaroslavl** regional branch has launched a very intense and diverse project “#MamaDoma” (MomAtHome). Such programs as #FizkultUrokiSMamoy (PhysicalTrainingWithMom), #MamaGuide, #GotovimSMamoy (CookingWithMom), #MamaDoctor, #MamaAdvice, #MamaDesigner, #PhotoMama, #MamaPsychologist, #MamaDoma - everything well-organized, with various hashtags, were launched in social media: how to keep one’s house in order, involve children and teach them to store their stuff correctly and properly. The interesting “Poetic lunch” project was broadcast live at lunchtime on Facebook, with V. Shchelkacheva, member of the Yaroslavl regional branch, reading poetry. Yaroslavl mass media grew interested in the anti-quarantine informational and educational online project #MamaDoma and broadcast video lessons

from members of the Women's Council in the morning program of Yaroslavl television. Within the framework of the project #MamaDoma, the Yaroslavl chapter of the All-Russian Volunteers' Society called Medical Volunteers launched its project "Your guide to the healthy lifestyle"; the cooperation turned very useful. Many regional branches held online events "Activities at home during the pandemic" (crafts, cooking, karaoke, home puppet theater, dancing, sports, and poetry parties).

The **Moscow** city women's council has organized Instagram lessons on anti-stress singing therapy.

The period of quarantine coincided with several holidays, traditionally celebrated by the Union in the format of public events; this time, they were held with all precautions.

As part of the "Easter Days of Charity" campaign, members of regional branches baked cakes, collected sweets and delivered them to lonely elderly people, large and low-income families. For example, in the health resort "Pyatigorsk Narzan" (headed by Chumakova T. A., Chair of the Stavropol Regional Women's Council) they have baked 3,000 cakes.



Members of the **Tula** regional branch has held an online master class on making willow twigs, "Easter eggs in the technique of corrugation-tubes", amulety "God's Eye", bell-shaped dolls, and twist dolls "Trinity". Members of the **Orenburg** regional branch has organized remote classes "Easter multicolor" for children with disabilities.

**N. Skosyrskaya**, activist of the regional branch in the Republic of Buryatia, on the Easter Holiday arranged a festive lunch for volunteers with cakes and ice cream.

In Victory Day, May 9, as part of the campaign "Women's Face of Victory", and on the occasion of the Victory Day, all regional branches organized campaigns "Labor Forces" and "Memory of Generations" to clean up monuments and places of military glory, improve areas around monuments, in courtyards where veterans live, in cemeteries and in parks. With all necessary precautions, many alleys of lilac bushes, thuja, fir trees and pines, etc. were planted in honor of the 75th anniversary of the Victory and

the 110th anniversary of V. S. Grizodubova- the first chairwomen of the Antifashist Women's Committee. Members of women's councils wrote "Postcards to veterans", congratulated veterans, gave them gifts and arranged concerts. Almost all regional branches participated in all-Russian activities #OKNAPOBEDY (Windows of Victory) and # svechapobedy (Candle of Victory), timed to celebrate the 75th anniversary of the Victory Day.



During International Day of Families on May 15, many events were held in all regions of the country. The **Voronezh** regional branch has held a remote competition to encourage families' creative work, "Family is a source of inspiration" in the categories family tree, my family's occupation, family creativity, etc, and presented the educational program, "I live on a beautiful planet kindly called "Family" in the "Odnoklassniki" social network.

The **Tula** regional branch has held the online competition "Family Theater" (videos based on Russian folk tales) and announced an online campaign of family photos "We are strong when we are a family". The **Orenburg** regional branch together with the "Orenburg Madam" newspaper has announced an online contest of family photos "Happy together".

The **Penza** regional branch together with the "Novoe Vremya" (New Time) newspaper has conducted online contests "Happy moments of family life..." (photos in the family circle), and "Daily family routine from A to ..." (joint works at home and on household plots). The regional branch in the **Udmurt** Republic has launched the network campaign "Family Stories". The regional branch in the Republic of **Chuvashia** (Sumerlinsky city branch of the Union of Women of Chuvashia) has organized the virtual tour "Entertaining seed-beds. Garden on the windowsill".

On International Children's Day, June 1, the **Pskov** regional branch organized the flash mob "I am a mother": women shared the importance of being mothers and the pride for their children, and showed a video clip with photos of Pskov families. The **Kaluga** regional branch congratulated newborns in the perinatal center and the city maternity hospital. Everyone was presented (via head physicians) with fairy-tale books and toys, and mothers with many children received special gifts.

The **Tula** regional branch conducted the campaign "Summer trick - reading books together", and held the photo contest "Happiness in our palms" and the flash mob

“Childhood in Pictures”. The **Kirov** regional Branch held a charitable event “Good Deed” on the eve of the Children’s Day to collect children’s things for large and low-income families, as well as families in a difficult life situation. The **Orenburg** regional branch summed up the results of the online marathon “Let our children never see the war...”.

On this day, the Samara regional branch took part in the first regional championship “Holidays without road accidents” – online broadcast of a remote game for family teams.

Almost all regional branches of the Women’s Union of Russia have conducted virtual tours of various museums. As part of the campaign “Russia - the Territory of Childhood”, children were congratulated, gifts were presented, and summer trips across book pages were organized.

The Regional branch in the Republic of **Mordovia** has supported alternative free online classes “Russian literature lessons “Soul and Word” for teenagers from 9 to 12 years old and has arranged for children to read their favorite fairy tales by A. S. Pushkin online.

The **Bryansk** regional branch has organized the flash mob “Wonderful world of magical lines” for the birthday of Alexander Pushkin.

The **Pskov** regional branch has organized the action “Day of the Poet” in Internet, where famous Pskov poets recited poems posted on WUR pages.

To mark the 200th anniversary of A. S. Pushkin's journey to the “blessed Tavrida”, the regional branch in the Republic of Crimea has held the poetical marathon “Pushkin's Living Word”.

In the first half of the year the Women’s Union of Women of Russia has organized and successfully held the flash mob “Poems and songs of war years” (over 500 videos of people performing military songs and poems), as well as the large-scale video contest “Together, we are invincible” in three categories, one of them – “Stop Coronavirus”. More than 300 original videos were submitted to the contest, and over 60 regional branches and collective members of the Women’s Union of Russia were rewarded for active participation. Our first experience was successful beyond expectations.

During the pandemic, most of our regional branches took part in the all-Russian campaign “Thank you, doctors” and in the campaign “From artists - to doctors”. The **Vladimir** regional branch has handed a unique author's icon from a personal collection to local doctors. **N. Eikina**, member of the Kaluga regional branch, has composed a song dedicated to medical workers from the First World War to the present day, and made a video composition commending doctors for their work.

The **Ryazan** regional branch has produced the video, “Thank you, doctors”. In **Kirov**, children and entire families, while staying at home, have painted their “hello” and “thank you” to doctors and sent them electronically to the newspaper, which was later delivered to local hospitals.

Almost all regional branches have baked pies for doctors. The regional branch in the Republic of Mari El has presented doctors with handmade herbal teas and words of gratitude. The Khabarovsk regional branch has organized the art exhibition “Goodbye, coronavirus, or the Spring of 2020”.

Regional branches (Tula, the Republic of Mari El and others) have taken part in another all-Russian campaign “Heroic deeds of villagers”. Participants posted in social networks the photos of themselves and their relatives, who worked in the rear in rural areas during the Great Patriotic War, provided the front with foodstuff, and helped restore the country in the post-war period. Regional branches were awarded commemorative medals for selfless contribution to the organization of the all-Russian campaign #MyVmeste (We are together).



Despite the isolation, WUR continued their work, initiated new projects, and planned future activities.

The **Kursk** regional branch has announced the launch of the new project #MoyaPerspektiva (My perspective) – a new educational approach to career guidance for children in orphanages and boarding schools (the project became winner of the Presidential Grants Fund competition), and initiated the project, “Symbols and pride of the Kursk Region”, supported by the Russian Rosmolodezh Agency. Continuing their work, they developed and conducted five webinars for self-employed people in the framework of the program, “ABC for self-employed”.

The **Penza** regional branch (O. V. Izranova, winner of the national “Business Success” award) has held a series of webinars for small businesses in a new sphere - work on the stock market, which were broadcast across Russia. The Penza regional branch implements the charitable project “School of Motherhood” with support from the regional Ministry of Health.



The regional branch in the Republic of **Mari El** initiated the photo contest “Dad in the Lens”, which was first held in the Republic in 2020 and will become an annual event in the future. Its main goal is to strengthen the social value of the institution of fatherhood, the role of fathers as conscientious and responsible educators of children, and support families headed by fathers. The project was supported by the Ministry of Social Development of the Republic.

The **Samara** regional branch has launched the Instagram project “Attention! Live broadcast: struggle for the survival of school education”. The project proposes to explore the current reality, understand new meanings, search for and find resources.

The Women’s Union of Russia has launched a new online campaign “Women's Union of Russia in persons” on the occasion of its 30th anniversary. The main goal of the campaign is to create a regularly updated gallery of respected women leaders of our Union, capable of inspiring others for good deeds.

The **Orenburg** regional branch on its pages in social networks speaks about best heads of women’s councils in villages, cities and districts. They have also summed up the results of the XIV competition of regional and municipal printed and electronic media “Woman-heroes and creators”, initiated by the Orenburg regional branch.





In conclusion, all these large-scale activities of the Women's Union of Russia were implemented for the first time ever, but time has shown that the Union consists of well organized, responsible and selfless activists, ready to help those in need, working tirelessly and sparing no time. The Women's Union of Russia continues its work, uniting all those concerned in the struggle against COVID-19. The experience of the past months has shown that public consolidation is our main protection during the pandemic.

The main lesson of the pandemic for Russia and all regions of our multiethnic country is universal values recognized by Russian society, which helped survive the difficult months of the spread of the new infectious disease. Currently, the issue of self-preservation of the nation is particularly acute: it is necessary to take care of oneself, one's family and children, and the elderly – this is the main task for those responsible for their future.

We have no doubt that the experience gained by women's councils during the pandemic will have a positive impact on strengthening relations with local authorities, maintaining and developing new forms of interaction with other socially-oriented NGOs and the business community. Many women's councils actively used the distant mode and social networks.

Thanks to modern technologies, many have opened up new opportunities for creativity, development, support and popularization of their activities in the Internet space. We saw how large-scale and diverse the activities of the Union are, regardless of where women's councils work - in megapolises, regional centers or in the rural hinterland. Working in extreme conditions has once again confirmed our slogan: Our strength is in unity; our wealth is in diversity.

**Reported by Helena Bashun, Secretary of WUR**

## National Council of Women of Spain

The Haurralde Foundation, one of National Council of Women of Spain's partners, carried out activities to fight against the COVID-19. The main care program is called as COVID-19 Crisis and its impact on gender equality.

The services that we offered:

1. Food safety line: food distribution and protection kits
2. Line of psychological support / psychosocial support and prevention of dysfunctions
3. Education / school support line, reducing the digital / educational gap
4. Training and qualification of young volunteers



From May to June, 197 families received a benefit, of which 80% are single mothers. In psychological care, 95% of clients were women in vulnerable situations such as sexual violence, women over the age of 61, loneliness, and anxieties. In the education system, we supported 9 to 15-year-old students to avoid losing the school year.

Immigrant women and Basque women were instructed in the use of the computer to access online administrative procedures. Of the total population served, 90% were immigrant population in a regular and irregular situation, and the remaining 10% were Basque population in a vulnerable situation. The program had 32 trained and active young volunteers who supported the 4 lines of work.

### < A series of virtual discussions >



From May to October, a series of virtual discussions took place between women from the global North and South, in response to the COVID-19 crisis. Different topics were discussed: Political Incidence and women's movements in the management, sexist violence, sexual trafficking, COVID-19 and trans women - health, safety and human rights, teleworking, and conciliation and co-responsibility.

< Videoclip Edition: “LUCHA” >

We worked with three feminist rappers from Basque Country, Colombia, and El Salvador to produce an edition of videoclip denouncing the impact of COVID-19 on girls in Latin America and the Caribbean, who have faced the great risks of sexual violence and forced pregnancies with the motto #NiñaNoMadres



**Reported by M. Rosa Llurba Caparo, President of NCW Spain**

## National Council of Women of Taiwan (NCWT)

The unexpected COVID pandemic arrived in Taiwan by early February 2020, wreaking havoc and generating tidal changes to life in Taiwan. The National Council of Women of Taiwan, ROC (NCWT) and its affiliates quickly adapted their programs to answer the challenges posed by the COVID pandemic.

### **1. Provide Masks, Goggles and other Personal Protection Equipment**

When COVID first arrived in Taiwan in early February 2020, people immediately swept up all the masks and alcohol from the store shelves. The National League of Women, an organization related to the National Council of Women of Taiwan (NCWT) ordered a huge supply of masks and personal protection equipment, 200,000 masks, 6,400 personal protective equipment (PPE) and 10,000 goggles, and distributed to small local hospitals, medical clinics and high-risk social organizations such as care and nursing homes around Taiwan. Providing protection equipment to these organizations helped to keep their front-line high-risk workers safe.

### **2. Use Technology to Hold Meetings and Disseminate Information**

To comply with social distancing requirements, members of the NCWT family canceled all their planned programs and held their board and committee meetings online. Members also conducted seminars, exchanged the latest information on the pandemic and maintained contact with each other through digital communications and social media platforms.

### **3. Education on the COVID pandemic**

By June 2020, the COVID situation was under-control and many restrictions were lifted. NCWT held a Forum on 7 October 2020, for its members, “Getting Acquainted with COVID-19.” Dr. Hwang Bo-Yen, a doctor of infectious disease at Chang Gung Memorial Hospital, comprehensively introduced the virus, its fatality rate, the various routes of transmission, means of prevention, and the current situation in the world and in Taiwan. Crediting the role and policies of the medical and public health community in containing the virus to only several hundred people, he stressed that the people must be equal partners with the public sector in order to prevent community spread and control the virus.

Soon after the virus first arrived in Taiwan, the government immediately ordered COVID-testing and contact tracing controls at the airports for incoming passengers. Any passenger with fevers were sent to the hospitals for further testing and medical care. Once a passenger tested positive for the virus, they traced all those who were in contact with the passenger on the plane or in the community with someone who tested positive for the virus and ordered them to self-quarantine for 14 days. Community district leaders were given a list of people in quarantine and their contact numbers so that they can contact them every day to check on their situation. Through cell phone tracking and through community vigilance, people who violate their quarantine would be reported and fined a penalty of NTD 100,000 (USD 3,500).

As the numbers of positive cases rose, the government closed its borders to all tourism, banned activities of 100 people or more, and required the wearing of masks in public areas, public transportation, and all public facilities. People who refused to wear masks could be turned away from the public facility and refused access to the public transportation. With the worldwide spread of COVID, the tourism industry suffered severe blows. The government provided strict guidelines for hotels to transform into COVID hotels wherein people under quarantine could stay. The citizenry also complied with the government regulations and strictly observed quarantine requirements set by the government. Many private office buildings followed the government's model to require the wearing of masks and providing contact information for all visitors to the building.

Though compliance of the people with quarantine and lockdown rules is most important, Dr. Hwang stressed that to control the virus, every person must be considerate of others, and employ good hygiene habits in one's daily routines, such as washing hands often, not touching the face or eating before washing hands, having good nutrition, exercising and staying healthy, maintaining a clean home, keeping quiet on elevators, covering your mouth and nose when you cough or sneeze, maintaining social distance, avoiding going to crowded or non-ventilated places, and wearing masks in public. He also shared information about how to make solutions to disinfect the home or environment.

After the seminar, NCWT produced a comprehensive report on the information gathered from the seminar and published the report in its annual report so that all of its members would have access to the information from the seminar.

#### 4. Campaign against Violence Against Women and Girls

During these perilous COVID times, people spent more time at home resulting in the unfortunate increase in cases of domestic gender-based violence, which has become a shadow pandemic within the COVID pandemic. In their campaign to raise attention on ending violence against women, NCWT member, ZONTA



District 31, specially ordered orange-colored masks for all their members to wear along with their orange-colored clothing to promote the UN Women campaign, “16 Days of Activism Against Gender Based Violence.” The Zonta Women created a sea of orange wherever they held public activities to “Say No to Violence.” All their members around Taiwan also wore the orange ZONTA mask in their daily lives to “Say No to Violence Against Women and Girls.”

#### 5. Survey on the Impact of COVID Pandemic on the Lives of Women and Girls in Taiwan.

NCWT board members decided to focus their activities for the year on raising awareness of the COVID pandemic’s impact on the lives of women. On 14 September 2020, NCWT launched a survey of the socio-economic impact of COVID-19 on the lives of women to determine how best to advocate for women during the COVID pandemic and to gather data that may help in establishing policies for the economy and society to recover better and with more gender equality. The survey was closed at the end of November.

Among the respondents, 84% were over 50 years of age, 46.6% were working, 30.8% were retired, 18.5% were homemakers, 4.1% were employers and 1.8% were students. The survey found the following characteristics for the women whose lives were most disrupted by the COVID pandemic. The biggest impacts lied in the decrease in social and volunteer activities cited by 90% of the women, and the increase in unpaid care work cited by 68.5% of the women. The most severe impact was that 19.2% of the women experienced the reduction of more than 50% of their income, while 11.4% of the women either lost their jobs or could not find employment. As expected, most of these women lived in popular tourist areas. In the area of health, only 9.7% of women reported a



significant impact on their ability to seek medical care, while 27.1% replied that there was no impact. Nevertheless, the majority of women (63.2%) noted that there was some impact on their ability to seek medical care. Meanwhile, 66.2% of the women surveyed reported a decrease in exercise and sports activities. The results of the survey have been compiled and will be published on the NCWT website and reported at seminars and events to determine the effects of the COVID pandemic on women.

## **6. Monitoring government stimulus programs**

NCWT also engaged in monitoring the gender sensitivity of various economic stimulus packages offered by the government to help the people weather the pandemic. As the public sector has been gender sensitized over the years, many of the programs were not overtly discriminatory against women. When data on these stimulus programs become available, NCWT shall conduct a study to determine if there are issues of gender equality in their implementation and how to prevent such inequalities in future implementation and design of the stimulus programs.

Despite only having 911 confirmed cases with 8 deaths by the end of January 2021, the pandemic nevertheless exerted a significant impact on women's lives and economic well-being as well as an undesired increase in domestic gender-based violence. With the possibility of future outbreaks of the virus in Taiwan in 2021, the work is yet to be done and NCWT shall steadfastly stand by its mission to respond to the needs of this society and promote the advancement of women's equality and the improvement of the lives of women and girls.



Linda Liu,  
President of NCWT

**Reported by Linda Liu, President of NCWT**

## National Union of Tunisian Women (UNTW)



Radhia Jerbi,  
President of UNTW

COVID-19 has hit the whole world; from a simple virus, it has turned into a global pandemic. As a result, Tunisia has been seriously impacted negatively on the economic and social levels.

Since then, Tunisia has taken a series of proactive measures and has made outstanding decisions so that we could fight the spread of this virus and also help vulnerable groups overcome the social and economic consequences of this global crisis, especially after the country entered general lockdown.

Ever since the first signs of the COVID-19 crisis appeared, as a component of the civil society in Tunisia, the National Union of Tunisian Women (UNTW) began its support of national efforts and focused them on the following themes: health, social rights, economics, citizenship and rights, and research and publications.

### 1. Health

Given the seriousness of this pandemic's effect on the people's health, the UNTW has focused on raising awareness, providing medical aid as well as supporting medical staff, municipal officials and rural women.

#### ① Raising awareness

- Awareness campaigns to take precautions and preventive measures against the Coronavirus, which has hit 500 women in rural and urban areas, targeting groups of women workers, housewives and peasants.
- Going door-to-door urging citizens for compliance to the general lockdown, collaboration with relevant instructions, and commitment to not leaving their homes for weekly markets and public places. In this context, UNTW has taken the initiative to help the elderly, the disabled and people with chronic illnesses with specific needs by purchasing their needs (food products, vegetables, fruit, medicine) and delivering them to their homes.



- UNTW has worked on reproductive health by raising awareness on breast cancer and sexually transmitted diseases such as AIDS.
- In addition, UNTW celebrated Pink October with a virtual seminar entitled, “Breast cancer: Better understanding, Better Action!” UNTW also held a zoom webinar led by 3 specialists, a carcinologist, a gynecologist, and a psychologist.



- ② Assistance and Support: The UNTW has provided its support to the most sensitive categories such as medical staff, municipal agents, women cleaning hospitals, police officers with helpers with 15,000 bibs, 100,000 disinfectant gels, protective clothing for the benefit of cleaning agents and women in the agricultural sector, 15,000 medical gloves and 110,000 liters of sterilized products and cleaners. Furthermore, the organization paid for medical fees for children from disadvantaged families (Aziz Othmana hospitals, Bab Saadoun).

## 2. Socio-Economic Rights:

During the two waves of COVID-19, UNTW has worked in depth and on site:

- ① In depth work on several topics:

- Solidarity and social economy: UNTW organized a seminar. The ESS is offered as an alternative, a local, collective, responsible and civic economy, respectful of people and resources, creating economic value and society in the territories.



- Green agriculture (Selma Project) funded by the EU in collaboration with the Italian association ARCS. It consists of organizing vocational training in the agricultural field for women and girls living in rural areas in order to equip them with modern and professional know-how and techniques to enhance their work and improve their economic and social condition.

- Agreements with banks (BTS, Zitouna, BNA, Attijari Bank, etc): as a part of the effort to encourage young people to create their own projects (in the agricultural, commercial, pastry-making, mosaic, painting on silk and sewing fields, during the year 2020), the economic work service under the UNTW granted microcredits to the benefit of 350 men and women for a total amount of 450,000 dinars.



## ② On Site:

- UNTW built training centers in rural areas such as Fernana, Bouhajla, Fawar, Hergla.
- UNTW put effort into helping needy families, especially in disadvantaged areas (Kairouan, Sidi Bouzid and Kasserine) by building houses and equipping them with furniture, household appliances and the basic necessities.

## 3. Citizenship and Rights:

### ① Citizenship:

During the period of general lockdown, the rate of violence against women has been remarkably high for several reasons. Responding to this, the women's organization has made the means and tools to prevent cases of battered women available.

Through social networks, the hotline, and telephone communications, UNTW received the statements of women victims of violence and offered them free legal consultations provided by Attorney Radhia Jerbi, president of the UNTW (through an agreement signed with the national body to fight against corruption providing care for battered women). UNFT has translated organic law no.58 of 2017 on violence against women into Tunisian dialect, Braille language and signs in the form of audiovisual CDs in collaboration with the Friedrich Elbert Foundation in order to raise awareness and prevent as many cases of battered women, including people with disabilities, as possible.

## ② Consolidation of the rights of refugees in Tunisia:

COVID-19 has worsened the situation of African migrant women in Tunisia. In this context, UNTW has undertaken all the necessary interventions to protect refugees residing in Tunisia through social and economic assistance.



*Social Assistance* is accomplished through the distribution of food aid, sterilizing and cleaning products, medical aids (bibs, masks, and disinfectant gel) and financial aid (vouchers, payment of rent). The beneficiaries are approximately 450

refugees. The president of the UNTW visited a large number of families who live in the Soukra region.

Under an agreement signed by UNHCR (the UN Refugee Agency), the Tunisian Council for Refugees, and the Arab Institute for Human Rights, UNTW provided accommodation for 28 refugees from different nations at the reception center and housing assistance from August 13 for six months in favorable conditions.

*Economic Assistance:* During this period, refugees suffered from social and financial hardships and a majority lost their jobs and became unemployed. So, UNTW organized a fair for the benefit of refugees in order to exhibit their own products (jewelry, clothing, rugs, cosmetics, hair extensions) and have a source of funding that meets their primary needs (rent, food, medication, care, etc.).



## ③ Illiteracy:

UNTW presented its new adult education strategy. This strategy aimed to develop educational programs to better meet the needs of learners noting that the adult education program is experiencing funding difficulties and requires a lot of expenditure, particularly in terms of logistics and human resources. UNTW currently has 69 adult education centers across the country.



#### 4. Research and Publications

UNFT continued to focus on the issues that emerged as a result of COVID-19: domestic workers, women victims of violence, and the profitability of microcredit. Therefore, UNFT published several research studies:

*- **Study on female domestic workers:** The study found that 58% of the domestic workers were forced by father or husband to do domestic service and 42% did so for personal reasons. Regarding the age at employment in this sector, 6% of the respondents started this work before the age of 8, 6% between 15 and 18 years, 18% between 19 and 25 years and 70% over 26 years old. Among the domestic workers interviewed, 34% said they had problems with their employer, 30% of them had not received their salary, 28% had been victims of verbal violence, 16% of physical violence and 14% of harassment.*

The study concluded that domestic workers and housewives live in difficult financial and psychological conditions, derived from the feeling of instability as the company treats them as an unskilled category.

*- **Study on the role of UNFT in providing assistance and support for battered women during the COVID-19 crisis:** This study has shown that the COVID-19 crisis, especially in the period of general lockdown, has led to a huge increase in the rate of violence against women (for economic, social and psycho-sociological reasons). The UNTW has made all the means of communication (phone, social network sites, toll-free number) available in order to ensure attentive open ears to protect the women who are victims of violence (Tunisian and refugee).*

UNTW, through its 28 regional delegations throughout the entire Tunisian territory, received 6,720 declarations of violence, including 89% of domestic violence, 8% of sexual violence and 3% of general violence.

The protection of women victims of violence (Tunisian / refugees) is based on 2 types of interventions: **direct interventions** through social assistance, psychological support and legal advice and **indirect interventions** through awareness-raising campaigns on Law 58 relevant to violence against women, seminars, forums and training workshops to strengthen the capacities of stakeholders.

In this context, UNTW is responsible for the care of battered women through the hotline, as there was an agreement signed with the INLUCC (national body for the fight against corruption).



- *Study on the implementation of decision support for the analysis of the profitability of micro-credit within the UNTW: Demand for credit within the UNTW is positively correlated with the training obtained. A close link is observed between the desire to renew the loan application and the payment facilities granted by the micro-credit service. The only problem noted is the guarantor (sponsor).*

**International:** election of Tunisia as Secretary General for North Africa within the Organization of African Women.



**Reported by Radhia Jerbi, President of UNTW**

## 🌐 National Council of Turkish Women (NCTW)



Fatma Fatos Inal,  
President of NCTW

Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) has spread all over the world starting from Wuhan, China since December 2019 and was declared as a pandemic by the World Health Organization (WHO) on March 11, 2020. As of the beginning of March 2020, while the pace of the epidemic slowed in China, an increase in COVID-19 cases and deaths due to this infection in Iran, Spain and Italy has been seen. In the ongoing process, serious case increases have been observed first in Europe and then in North

America. The first case in our country was seen on March 11, 2020, and then an increase in the number of cases was observed in our country, similar to the spread in the world.

The coronavirus disease damages vital organs such as the lungs, heart, liver and kidneys. The spectrum of this diseases can range from the common cold to severe acute respiratory failure syndrome. We are getting new information about the disease every day. The disease is mainly transmitted from person to person through close contact and droplets. However, it can also be transmitted from objects contaminated with the virus. Children are frequently infected by adults. Therefore, the use of masks and keep physical distancing are very important in preventing the disease.

There is no effective treatment for the disease yet, various antiviral treatments are being tried in the treatment of patients all over the world and vaccination studies are continuing. In COVID-19, the whole society is sensitive to the disease, but healthcare workers are the most risky occupations. In this difficult process in our country and in the world, there are people who get sick and die due to coronavirus, especially healthcare workers fighting the disease at the forefront. All institutions, especially our Ministry of Health, work with great devotion in preventing this epidemic. In this epidemic, we must take the necessary precautions and follow the hygiene rules.

Everything will pass, good days will come. We will continue to guard the Atatürk Revolutions and with the love of our homeland in our hearts. Continue to fight for women rights. Let's be in solidarity in this period. The light behind the tunnel appeared with the good news of the vaccine.

NCTW virtually established the Culture, Arts and Letters Commission on 18 July 2020.

We will collect literary works, poems, novels, paintings, ceramics, photographs and music and will turn them into a Pandemic Art booklet. Some members draw pictures, learned how to play piano and mandolin online, wrote poems and novels. We will compile the photos of all these art pieces in a book called, “Pandemic Art Book of NCTW 2020”.



Marbling art made by Nüket Ocak



COVID-19 whip of god  
by Patouche



S.Mutlu, President of Kuşadası Branch,  
painted trays and gave online painting lessons



Stay at home-ceramic plates  
by Esra Uysal



Novels written by our members İnci Gürbüzatık  
and Sibel Özdemir



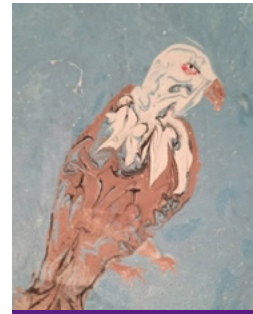
Stay at home-ceramic plates  
by Esra Uysal



Online piano course  
by Sanem Altınok



Open-air concert  
by Belgin Güragaç



Marble art  
by Nüket Ocak

During lockdown, we cooked ancient and newly invented dishes at home. We decided to collect them in a book. We started collecting recipes from our branches. I hope you we will enjoy our Pandemic Cookbook 2020. We will also put information about old Turkish etiquette and today's table manners.

Associate Professor Nazlı TÖRE was elected as president of the Legal Commission in June 2020. She enlightened members online on legal rights of women and informed us of the conferences and virtual meetings of UN, EWL and Women in Peace.

### **「 Economic Outlook in 2020 reported by Ayfer Yılmaz, Vice President 」**

The global economy is facing an increased risk of stagnation. Climate change is striking harder and more rapidly than expected, and fragmented cyberspace threatens the full potential of next-generation technologies — all while citizens worldwide protest political and economic conditions and voice concerns about systems that exacerbate inequality. The challenges before us demand immediate collective action, but fractures within the global community appear to only be widening. Stakeholders need to act quickly with purpose within an unsettled global landscape.

In 2019, street protests were raised, with large-scale popular movements in 17 countries in Asia, Europe, South America, and the Middle East. Corruption, injustice in income distribution, allegations of cheating, rises and demands for freedom caused street protests. Hundreds of people lost their lives, thousands of people were injured, detained, and arrested in these popular movements where the clashes, violence, and looting events between the police forces and demonstrators turned the streets into the battlefield.

Natural disasters such as earthquakes, cyclones, wildfire, and other extreme weather events cause the loss of many lives and destroying landscape and property. Also, since 2020, the coronavirus outbreak and expanded to 27 countries.

In the 15th edition of the World Economic Forum's Global Risks Report, it says that "The global economy is faced with a "synchronized slowdown", the past five years have been the warmest on record, and cyberattacks are expected to increase this year—all while citizens protest the political and economic conditions in their countries and voice concerns about systems that exacerbate inequality. Indeed, the growing palpability of shared economic, environmental and societal risks signals that the horizon has shortened for preventing—or even mitigating—some of the direst consequences of global risks. It is sobering that in the face of this development, when the challenges before us demand immediate collective action, fractures within the global community appear to only be widening."

According to the Oxfam report, economic inequality is out of control. In 2019, the world's billionaires, only 2,153 people, had more wealth than 4.6 billion people. The report indicates that "This great divide is based on a flawed and sexist economic system that values the wealth of the privileged few, mostly men, more than the billions of hours of the most essential work. On the other hand, the unpaid and underpaid care work done primarily by women and girls around the world, tending to others, cooking, cleaning, fetching water and firewood are essential daily tasks for the wellbeing of societies, communities and the functioning of the economy. The heavy and unequal responsibility of care work perpetuates gender and economic inequalities."

We all agree that this has to be changed. Governments around the world must act now to build a human economy and value what truly matters to society, rather than fueling an endless pursuit of profit. Nearly half the world's population is trying to survive on \$5.50 a day or less, according to new figures from the World Bank. Inequality is one of the major reasons for this; a huge share of global income growth consistently accrues to those at the top, leaving those at the bottom further and further behind.

Gita Gopinath, the IMF's chief economist, said, in a written statement, that the projected recovery for global growth remains uncertain. It continues to rely on recoveries in stressed and underperforming emerging market economies, as growth in advanced economies stabilizes at close to current levels.

Some risks have partially receded with the signing of the agreement of the U.S.-China Phase I trade deal and Brexit approvals by the parliaments. However, further trade tensions could emerge between the United States and the European Union, and U.S.-China trade tensions. Also rising geopolitical risks and intensifying social unrest could reverse easy financing conditions, expose financial vulnerabilities, and severely disrupt growth.

There are signs of stabilization but there are no clear signs of a turning point for the world economy. There is simply no room for complacency, and the world needs stronger multilateral cooperation and national-level policies to support a sustained recovery that benefits all. Donald Trump, the 45th president of the United States also said that globalization is coming to an end and the world need a new system.

The decision makers and experts who attended the Davos 2020 meeting expressed their views on the following issues within the context of these uncertainties: income inequality, political polarization, environmental and climate crisis, the state of the global economy, capitalism of stakeholders, sustainable development, technology, trade and the 4th



industrial revolution, healthy future, how the planet survives, fair economies, beyond geopolitics, technology for good, better job, the future of society and work.

For the first time, the Global Risks Report is dominated by the environment. Geo-economic and political pressures is top short-term concerns. Climate-linked issues like extreme heat and ecosystem loss are highlighted. Teenage climate activist Greta Thunberg was chosen as Time's Person of the Year following a year of floods and droughts, when fires ravaged Australia and the Amazon, and, we hope that leaders' have more concerns for environmental issues for a better future.

The world is facing an ever-growing number of interconnected geopolitical threats. US sanctions policy, stalled revolutions, protectionism, digital disruption, climate change, political violence, and other forces of disruption have introduced unprecedented levels of volatility for businesses to navigate. Some of the worst business disruptions in 2020 are likely to come from the intersection of multiple geopolitical risks.

According to the surveys done by World Bank, business losses due to political risk were higher than ever. Comprehensive, systematic risk analysis are imperative to minimizing losses and maximizing opportunities.

In the survey's 10-year outlook, the top five global risks are related with environmental issues such as extreme weather, human-made environmental damage and disasters, major biodiversity loss and natural disasters from earthquakes to tsunamis. In terms of the severity of impact over the next 10 years, the top risk was deemed to be the failure of climate change mitigation and adaptation.

“Geopolitical turbulence is propelling us towards an ‘unsettled’ unilateral world of great power rivalries at a time when business and government leaders must focus urgently on working together to tackle shared risks,” the report stated.

World Economic Forum insisted that collaboration between world leaders, businesses and policy-makers was needed to stop severe threats to the climate, environment, public health and technology systems. Borge Brende, president of the World Economic Forum, also added that the political landscape is polarized, sea levels are rising and climate fires are burning. This is the year when world leaders must work with all sectors of society to repair and reinvigorate our systems of cooperation, not just for short-term benefit but for tackling our deep-rooted risks.



According to the report from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), women play a critical role in driving economic development throughout the world. The increase in female employment has been the main driving force of economic growth in the last few decades. Empowering women economically can lift entire families and communities out of poverty. Women in poor countries are more likely than men to spend their income on food, education and healthcare for their children – creating powerful, positive and measurable benefits to society.

According to the UN Development Program, women make up a majority of the world's poor. Since women will suffer most during the economic crisis, there is a great need to expand economic opportunities for women. Furthermore, women can play a major role in rebuilding the world economy. Ngozi N. Okonjo-Iweala, (World Bank) says that it is not just about fairness, it is “smart economics.”

**This unfair situation causes;**

- Increased exploitation in both the legal and illicit economy. The reduction in jobs for women may mean higher levels of exploitation as women are forced to work in increasingly poor conditions, or worse, the illicit economy.
- Greater vulnerability to human trafficking. During economic decline, more women and girls migrate away from their home communities in search of economic opportunities within their own countries or abroad. Unfamiliar with fair labor practices, many fall prey to human traffickers, who deceive them into situations of forced labor or commercial sexual exploitation.
- Increased school drop out rates among girls. Parents may be forced to take their children, especially girls, out of school and into the workforce to supplement scarce household incomes.
- Jobs created during an economic crisis target men. During an economic crisis, governments and donors tend to emphasize large infrastructure projects, generally dominated by men, to create jobs.
- Increased difficulty accessing credit. In general, women have a hard time accessing credit. Credit tightening by banks during an economic crisis may make it even harder.

So, as women can be a driving force for economic recovery, but they must be meaningfully included in economic and workforce development strategies. The following are some recommendations that will help increase women's economic security during the ongoing uncertainties.

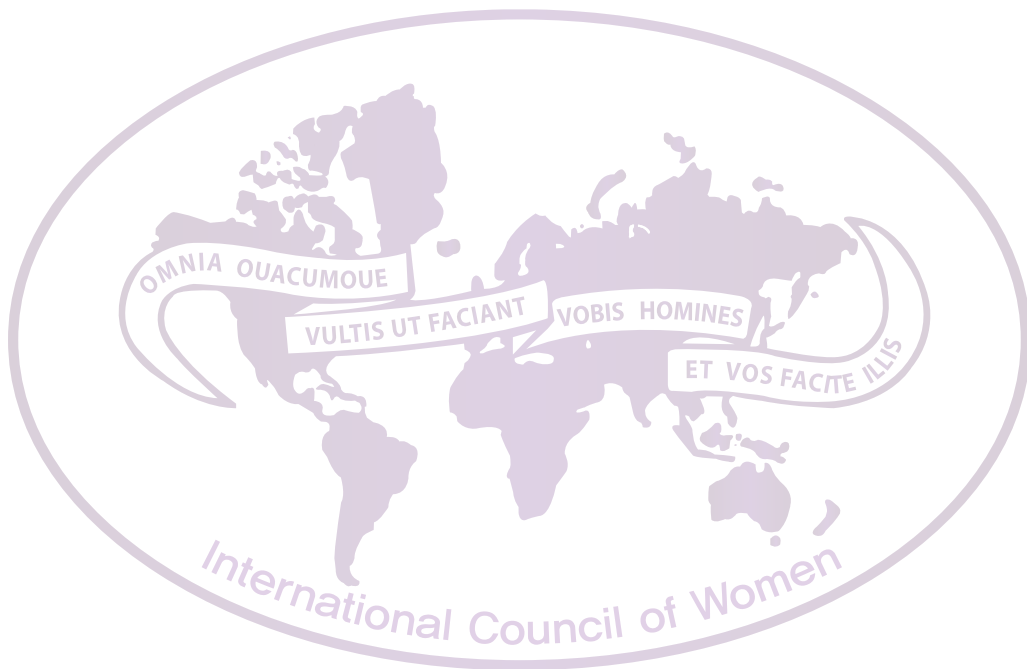
- Increasing support for education opportunities for women; Creating a workforce development strategy that targets women while meeting market demands; Enhancing women's ability to succeed in business through general and industry-specific business training programs and networking opportunities;
- Establishing or expanding business development services to help start and scale-up women-owned enterprises (e.g. women's business resource center or a one-stop-shop for local entrepreneurs);
- Expanding access to credit; Creating a leadership and mentoring program that links successful women entrepreneurs with up-and-coming business women;
- Establishing and protecting housing, property and inheritance rights of women;
- Reinforcing legal services that can support women in defending their property rights;
- Expanding public education to support women property and economic rights;
- Creating opportunities for women's leadership in economic recovery.



Mrs. Ayfer Yılmaz (Former Minister of Economics),  
Mrs. Sengül Gün (Treasurer),  
Mrs. Aydanur Mursal (Vice President)

**Reported by Fatma Fatos Inal, President of NCTW**





Add.: #1910, Korea Business Center, 309 Gangnam-daero, Seocho-gu, Seoul, 06628, Korea

Tel: +82-2-3474-2002 Fax: +82-2-3474-6193 Website: [www.icw-cif.com](http://www.icw-cif.com)

Email: [icw.jskim@gmail.com](mailto:icw.jskim@gmail.com), [icw.secretariat@gmail.com](mailto:icw.secretariat@gmail.com)

Publisher: Jung-sook Kim Editor: Mijin An

