



# **G20 Conference on Women's Empowerment**

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**Background Document**  
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## Introduction

The Italian Presidency of the G20 intends to promote a vision of a more equitable development for all, aimed at eliminating previous, new inequalities, and promoting gender equality, posing a particular crosscutting emphasis on women's empowerment. To this aim, the first Conference dedicated to the issue of women's empowerment in the G20 context has been organized, bringing attention to the quality of women's role within society and the implementation of policies aimed at increasing women's participation in the public and private sphere and the protection of their rights, also to tackle gender-based violence. The COVID-19 outbreak has further highlighted how women's empowerment is particularly conducive to a post-pandemic global reconfiguration that will exploit the full potential of the resources deriving from female talent. The aim of the Conference is to give structure to a discussion platform that can promote synergetic actions and shared commitments, also by systematising and organising the many references to gender equality and women's empowerment that emerge from the G20. This objective responds to the acknowledgment of the crosscutting nature of gender equality, whereby it is no longer possible to reason in "silos", but a global and more articulated vision is required, also able to ensure policy coherence and coordination across a wide spectrum of institutions and partners.

Gender equality has been a topic of discussion in the G20 since its inception, while the issue of the economic participation of women has been present in the G20 Agenda since 2014, when the dialogue process of Women20 (W20) started. In that occasion, the goal of reducing the gap in participation rates in the labour force between men and women by 25% by 2025 ("25 by 25", the Brisbane Goal) was agreed by the G20 at the 2014 Summit in Australia, paving the way for the inclusion of a new engagement group in the official sphere. In October 2015, the first working meeting of W20 took place in Istanbul under the Turkish G20 presidency. Since 2016, these lines of work have had continuity in the G20 presidencies of China, Germany, Argentina, Japan and Saudi Arabia. In addition to W20, other engagement groups – including L20, C20 and B20 – have extensively worked on the themes of women's empowerment, also issuing specific recommendations to G20 countries. In particular, in 2021 C20 and B20 have had working groups dedicated to gender equality issues, namely "Gender" and the "Women Empowerment" special initiative respectively. This shows that the topic of women's empowerment is transversal not only to different fields but also to different actors, including the private sector. Indeed, during the 2019 G20 Summit in Japan, the G20 Alliance for the Empowerment and Promotion of Women's Representation in the Economy (G20 EMPOWER) was launched, and then established during the Saudi G20 Presidency, aiming at accelerating the leadership and empowerment of women in the private sector. A valuable example of partnership is also represented by the Women Entrepreneurs Finance Initiative (We-Fi), an international partnership initiated at the G20 summit in 2017 in Germany and dedicated to financial and non-financial support to women-led businesses in emerging markets.

In this year, however, the theme of women's empowerment emerges as an even more necessary challenge at global level, also in light of the fact that the COVID-19 pandemic has disproportionately affected women – especially younger, low skilled, or from vulnerable groups – having widespread negative implication for their condition and rights in all G20 countries. Indeed, women have experienced greater job losses, more occupational exposure to the virus due to their overrepresentation among frontline workers (globally women make up 70% of the health workforce) and a higher burden of unpaid caregiving and household responsibilities (women spend 3 times as many hours as men in unpaid care and domestic work) (United Nations, 2020). The national restrictions imposed in most countries have also been conducive to the increase of violence against women, particularly domestic violence but also in the work sphere, which represent a violation of women's fundamental rights and a serious obstacle to their agency and empowerment. Globally, 1 out of 3 women and girls are subjected to physical or sexual violence by an intimate partner or sexual violence from a non-partner, a number that has remained largely unchanged over the past decade (WHO, 2021). In addition, the Rome Declaration adopted at the Global Health Summit on May 21, 2021, introduces the gender perspective in the response to future health crises.

Therefore, in continuity with previous actions and with the desire to give renewed impulse to the political action aimed at promoting gender equality, the G20 Italian Presidency has addressed women's empowerment in a transversal way in several Ministerial Meetings. Education Ministers recognised the need to provide equal access to all levels and types of education, particularly for girls and women, as one of the means to address educational, professional, economic, and social inequalities. Labour and Employment Ministers highlighted the need for more, better, and equally paid jobs for women and adopted the G20 Roadmap Towards and Beyond the Brisbane Target,



for the achievement of equal opportunities and outcomes for women and men in labour markets as well as societies in general. Indeed, the Roadmap is structured as a document that goes beyond the (very specific) Brisbane Target using the crosscutting lens of gender equality, by underlying the importance of overcoming the barriers to the achievement not only of the Brisbane target, but also of full gender equality in the labour market and in societies. This outcome can only be reached through targeted and continuative actions such as fuelling rich and inclusive hiring pipelines that will favour women's access to leadership positions in the long-term. The Foreign Affairs and Development Ministers acknowledged the need of implementing effective actions for the empowerment of women in the rural-urban continuum, emphasizing the need for policies, technical assistance, capacity building and investments that create new decent work and agri-entrepreneurship opportunities for women. Ministers in charge of Energy and Climate also emphasised the essential role of energy access in achieving gender equality and encouraged gender equality and diversity in the energy sector, as well as initiatives that promote a more inclusive and equitable energy future, also referring to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change - UNFCCC Gender Action Plan (adopted for the first time in 2017). Digital Ministers recognised that improving measurement could help shape and underpin the policy discussion on the role of women in the digital economy. In doing so, they called for close coordination to promote statistical guidance and move from outcome measures of the digital gender divide to the analysis of enabling and disabling factors, a fundamental dimension of women's empowerment. Culture Ministers highlighted the importance of recognising the social impact of the cultural, educational and creative sectors to promote inclusiveness, cross-functionality and synergies and to support health and well-being, as well as gender equality and women's empowerment.

With the aim of giving new impulse and full implementation to a process capable of ensuring the achievement of full gender equality, the goal of the G20 Conference on Women's Empowerment is to create a moment to focus the attention in a transversal way on the issue of women's empowerment, bringing together governmental and non-governmental actors. The results of the discussion, embedded in the Chair's statement, will be collected by the Italian Presidency for the G20 Leaders' consideration ahead of the Rome's Summit of October 30-31, 2021. Such an acceleration is particularly needed considering that, as of today, only the UK and Japan have reached the Brisbane Target (in 2019) and, by decreasing at the current 2015-2019 Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR), only 7 additional G20 countries will reach the target in 2025 (Germany, Indonesia, South Korea, France, Brazil, Argentina, Australia) (The European House – Ambrosetti, 2021).

Even if women's empowerment is undoubtedly a crosscutting theme, to encourage a cohesive and participated debate its emerging issues (already identified in the previous issue note) have been grouped under 2 thematic macro-areas, namely:

- STEM, financial and digital literacy, environment and sustainability
- Labour and economic empowerment and work-life balance

### **Future perspectives**

The strong correlation among the issues related to the two thematic areas highlights the necessity for an integrated vision on women's empowerment, which recognizes and takes into account some outstanding transversal needs, namely:

- a transformative agenda for gender equality;
- institutional arrangements for effective governance and coordination;
- more and better gender data for the measurement of progress through monitoring systems;
- partnerships, including with the private sector.

To ensure that women's empowerment is given the required amount of attention worldwide, with a transversal approach to all the aspects of women's life, setting a transformative agenda for gender equality is of paramount importance. The latter can guarantee policy integration and coherence. Indeed, women's empowerment is not equally addressed in all countries and, when addressed, it often follows a vertical pattern that only focuses on certain aspects of women's life. However, the outstanding issues preventing a full empowerment of women are strongly correlated to one another, entailing that full gender equality cannot be attained without transversal transformative policies that tackle all aspects of women's life experience. As a matter of fact, a global transformative and transversal agenda would ensure that women's empowerment is equally addressed in all G20



countries in a homogeneous way, while favouring an integrated and crosscutting approach towards women's empowerment and allowing G20 countries to become benchmarks for all other countries worldwide. The contribution of G20 countries to the Conference and their commitment to translate its discussion, in all its thematic strands, in a review of national policies and measures are extremely valuable for the establishment of the transformative agenda. The latter also requires the commitment to continued attention to the issues covered by the Conference in future G20 Presidencies, in line with the inputs coming from international and regional intergovernmental systems and organizations.

In order to promote the adoption of the above-mentioned global transformative agenda, there is the necessity for institutional arrangements in countries that guarantee effective governance and coordination at a national level, collecting information and monitoring data from entities with sectoral responsibility. Likewise, global arrangements would ensure that women's empowerment is equally addressed worldwide and in a coherent way. The G20, global by definition, provides a unique setting for defining a global transformative agenda to ensure that women's empowerment policies are defined in a cohesive and coordinated way. After decades of fragmented discussion on the subject, this would lay the foundations for the effective implementation of adequate measures.

After setting a transformative agenda and putting in place institutional arrangements, the progress achieved on women's empowerment issues should be measured through adequate monitoring systems. For this to happen, there is an urgent need to access more and better disaggregated gender data that would allow for an even and reliable measurement across countries. In this regard, institutions such as ILO and OCSE could provide invaluable assistance and support to G20 countries. Indeed, the measurement of progress through specific indicators ensures the evaluation of policies and their results, their subsequent adaptation according to the strengths and weaknesses emerging from their evaluation and the establishment of standards and goals at the global level through the identification of the desired performance in each dimension of measurement. An example is represented by the COVID-19 Global Gender Response Tracker developed by UN Women and UNDP, a database that monitors policy responses to the pandemic, focusing on measures that address the surge in violence against women and girls, the unprecedented increase in unpaid care work, and the large-scale loss of jobs, incomes and livelihoods. The OECD also regularly develops its Social Institutions Gender Index, which reports on discriminatory practices, social norms and laws that obstacle the path towards the achievement of gender equality, and a brochure on gender and environmental statistics, reporting statistical data on gender and green innovation. The G20 Roadmap Towards and Beyond the Brisbane Target adopted by the Labour and Employment Ministers in Catania also contains a set of indicators that G20 countries can use to report on the progress made towards the Brisbane Target and in reducing gender gaps in job quality. Following this path, it would be appropriate to develop a globally agreed measurement and monitoring system that embraces all aspects of women's life in a transversal way, by integrating national monitoring systems (where available) to better capture progress around the different dimensions that relate to women's empowerment. This would promote the establishment of quantitatively measurable global goals, thus steering the action of each country, also allowing to adapt measures and policies according to the outcomes of their evaluation.

Moreover, engagement groups in the G20 system represent a particularly valuable venue for discussion and coordination among different actors: progress in gender equality would hardly been made without the commitment and collaboration of the private sector, since women's empowerment is also enhanced from the grassroots – thus from members of the civil society and companies that experience first-hand the stereotypes and cultural framework that negatively impact women to this day. Successful examples exist, such as G20 EMPOWER, which brings together the private sector and governmental representatives to promote the common goal of accelerating the leadership and empowerment of women in the private sector. The G20 EMPOWER Alliance, under the Italian Presidency in 2021, has built a network of over 400 private sector "Advocates" in each G20 and host country. These are CEOs or Heads of foundations and associations who act as advocates and promoters of the G20 EMPOWER vision, message and commitment within their companies, business areas and countries. Building on these initiatives, the development of partnerships with the private sector should be promoted, so to encourage the diffusion and sharing of best practices and accelerate progress in the field of women's empowerment.



Guiding questions for participants (Opening and Closing Sessions):

1. Which should be the priorities of the transformative agenda for gender equality to achieve the desired outcome?
2. Which institutional arrangements are the most suitable for an effective governance and coordination? How can multi-dimensional, multi-level and multi-actor coherence be ensured?
3. How should monitoring systems be designed for the most accurate measurement of progress? Which are the most relevant indicators? Is a specific mechanism necessary to systemise the different data collection and analysis procedures already in place?
4. What data is missing and should be invested in so that all G20 countries can be compared?
5. How should public-private partnerships be designed to exploit their full potential?

### **STEM, Financial and Digital Literacy, Environment and Sustainability**

Women's empowerment undoubtedly is a transversal theme with respect to STEM, Digital Literacy and Environment and Sustainability, which are strongly correlated fields, subjected to mutual influence. As a matter of fact, STEM disciplines and digital competences are a prerequisite for women to work in sectors related to environment and sustainability, and to be able to develop the technologies needed for energy transition, environment preservation and the fight against climate change. The achievement of a fully circular economy, that also requires a high degree of financial literacy among the population, is one additional fundamental aspect on the path towards sustainable development.

#### **STEM, Financial and Digital Literacy**

Digital transformation is changing the world, but the existence of a digital gap between men and women risks to further fuel the gender gap, potentially generating a paradox: a tool that has the potential to drive a greater inclusion of women in society could become the cause of the exacerbation of their exclusion. The rapid uptake of digital technologies during the COVID-19 pandemic makes it even more urgent to empower women with the skills and opportunities necessary to play their full role in the digital economy.

Today, only 48% of women globally use the Internet, compared to 58% of men (ITU 2019), while 200 million fewer women than men own a mobile phone (GSMA, 2015) and even those who own one tend to use it less than men (Demirguc-Kunt et al., 2015), mainly due to a lack of skills in using digital tools. The use of digital technologies requires appropriate soft skills, access and connectivity, and a certain aptitude to engage with them, in relation to which women today have a gap with respect to men. The digital gap can also be fostered by the negative experiences that many women encounter online, including cyber-bullying, gender stereotyping and online harassment, which make women not feel safe online. These experiences can have a negative impact on the well-being of young girls and women, with spill over effects not only on their self-confidence, but also ultimately on their mental health and physical safety. Equal access and use of information and communication technologies are fundamental to achieve digital inclusion.

Digital transformation does not only mean more inclusion for women, but also job opportunities and economic independence. Digital equality entails equal opportunities between women and men to participate in the design, development, and production of digital technologies, as well as equal access to leadership and decision-making roles in the digital sector (W20, 2020). This is ever more urgent as women, on average, already had lower levels of some of the skills needed for the digital era before the pandemic. These divides, as well as other pre-existing inequalities between men and women (such as the gender wage gap), are likely to be exacerbated by the COVID-19 crisis, which has both accelerated the digital transformation and affected female labour market participation. Further - since skills related to management, communication, and self-organisation are especially acquired and improved through learning-by-doing and experience - the gender skill gap is at risk of widening if women are given less opportunity to work in such roles and perform these tasks during and after the pandemic (OECD, 2021).

On the side of developing economies and rural areas, women face higher probability of being out of school, working more frequently than men in agriculture, having their work often unpaid or considered as a contribution to the family, having shorter term and more precarious jobs and being generally less protected than men (UN Women Watch, 2018). This translates in being confined in technology-poor environments where it is difficult to use digital technologies (OECD, 2018).



STEM disciplines are a prerequisite for seizing the opportunities arising from the digital and green transformation, but fewer STEM graduates in the female population with respect to the male one result in reduced participation in economic development, amplified by the fact that even if graduating in STEM disciplines, many women seem to be denied access to related opportunities. Based on evidence, while in most countries women represent a majority of all graduates from tertiary education, women are significantly less likely to choose natural sciences, engineering, and ICT studies, representing only 20% of tertiary graduates in ICT fields. In addition, STEM female graduates worldwide are 20% less likely to hold a senior leadership position in the mobile communication industry, make up only 8% of the investing partners at the top 100 venture capital firms and represent only 21% of scientists who are identified as leaders in the world of research (OECD, 2017). The relatively low frequency of women in STEM fields is mainly due to barriers, including those raised by cultural background and stereotypes, frequently passed by their families, teachers, and society at large, with parents being more likely to expect their teenage sons than their daughters to work in STEM occupations (OECD, 2015).

The gender gap is also aggravated by a financial literacy gap between men and women, which causes women to struggle in securing their financial independence and wellbeing and in confidently participating in economic and financial activities. On average, only 78% of women in G20 countries has a bank account compared to 82% of men (World Bank, 2020). Despite mobile money having grown to a significant size, women are less likely to own and use a mobile money account (W20, 2020). OECD financial literacy surveys have shown that more men than women achieve a minimum target score for financial knowledge (on average in G20 countries 54% of men and 43% of women), and that such differences are consistent over time and in a large number of developed and emerging countries (OECD, 2017 and OECD, 2020). Discriminatory practices, such as banks requiring permission from husbands or fathers to approve loan applications for women, still exist in some G20 countries (OECD, 2019).

Regarding the digital gender gap, the opportunities arising from STEM disciplines and the financial background, schools are particularly important as they create a space for education to help tackle the gender divide. Granting equal access to education to all individuals is therefore a necessary condition to bridge the gender divide, also in the digital world. Data Science, Internet of Things, Artificial Intelligence and Fintech are some of the major skills and know-how required by the future economic system.

Guiding questions for participants:

1. Which are the priorities of action for women to exploit the full potential of digital transformation? Can these priorities be defined by the public and private sector independently or through partnerships?
2. Which systemic actions should be put in place within a period of 5 years in order to increase women's participation in STEM disciplines?
3. Which obstacles (legislative, procedural, administrative, etc.) should be overcome for a gender equality in the financial sphere?
4. In which educational context (primary, secondary, and tertiary) should women's digital finance skills be enhanced?

## Environment and Sustainability

Environmental factors affect men and women differently. For instance, there are negative correlations between high concentrations of air pollutants, water and soil contamination and the health of women. In many low-income countries, women experience greater exposure to air pollution from solid fuel use, increased harm from poor sanitation and higher exposure to toxic chemicals in occupations. In advanced economies, there are stark differences in exposure to pollution and hazardous chemicals between men and women, linked to consumption habits, physiological differences and gaps in socioeconomic backgrounds. Long-term exposure to elevated levels of PM<sub>2.5</sub> and ozone could increase the risk of depression in middle-aged and older women (Kioumourtzoglou et al., 2017), but also have an impact on violence (since air pollution increases anxiety and violent behaviour). Water can become a problem too, as in low-income countries women are often in charge of disposing wastewater, exposing them to the transmission of diseases (The Lancet, 2018). Women are also more susceptible to death from cardiovascular disease than men, which can result from exposure to high temperatures (Achebak et al.,



2019). In a single day in 25 sub-Saharan African countries, women spend 16 million hours collecting water, compared to only 6 million hours spent by men (UN, 2016).

Furthermore, women often face greater burdens from the impacts of climate change. For example, the 2003 heatwave in France resulted in the premature death of 15,000 people, and the mortality rate for women was 75% higher than that for men (Fouillet et al. 2006). In developing countries, women are more likely to be in charge of fetching water, gathering food from forests, harvesting small-scale and inland fisheries than men, and are often heavily engaged in small-scale agriculture (Agarwal, 2018). Hence, the degradation of ecosystems can lead to greater gender inequalities and a rise in female poverty. In developing countries and indigenous communities, women's role in ensuring water as well as collecting wild edible and medicinal plants makes them most sensitive to deforestation, land degradation and desertification (OECD, 2019). Environmental degradation can spoil or reduce clean water and ecosystem goods, forcing women to travel further to collect them for household use.

With reference to the nexus between female leadership and environmentally sustainable development, in rural areas women play a key role in the protection, restoration, and promotion of sustainable use of ecosystems, management of forests, fight against desertification or biodiversity safeguard. Moreover, traditional crafts and materials used by indigenous and local women offer great potential to drive climate action and sustainable development. However, women's ability to shape environmental choices is sometimes limited by legal, cultural and social constraints. For instance, women in many developing countries face restricted access to productive and financial resources and are marginalised when it comes to decisions about land tenure. Women's limited ownership of land reduces their capacity to change how land is used, hampering their ability to deal with environmental damage (OECD, 2019). Equal access to land rights could have positive effects in forestlands restoration and ecosystems sustainable management (FAO, 2018).

On the technological side, women's contribution to sustainable development is still lower; therefore, their role in green technology field must be fostered. Indeed, looking to environment-related technologies, female inventors are fewer compared to more traditional domains. For example, in power generation and engineering technologies the rate of female inventors with respect to male ones is lower (10% and 8% respectively) compared to the ones registered in chemistry and health-related technologies (20% and 24% respectively). Differences in women's involvement in these domains could be explained by their traditionally rather low participation in STEM disciplines, as seen in the previous section (OECD, 2020).

Women follow more sustainable consumption patterns, such as the use of public transportation, but the design of cities and transport infrastructure often does not take into account their specific needs (e.g., personal safety or scheduling of public transport services), hindering their capacity to follow their environmentally friendly preferences (OECD, 2020). There are additional key areas of consumption that have a strong gender dimension, and where influencing behaviour needs a gender perspective to be effective in improving sustainability. For example, traditional division of household responsibilities influences consumption patterns, as women often have responsibility for buying short-term use products while men tend to decide on the purchase of more durable items (Yaccato, 2007; Kelan, 2008; OECD, 2018). Women tend to be more sustainable consumers and are more sensitive to ecological, environmental and health concerns (Johnsson-Latham, 2007; Kaenzig et al., 2010; Khan and Trivedi, 2015; OECD, 2008). Women can therefore be key actors in the shift towards more sustainable consumption patterns. In this regard, public policies and new approaches to influence consumption decisions should take into consideration a gender perspective. The same should apply to the transition towards a low-carbon economy, to ensure equal opportunities for both men and women in the workforce. As of now, women account for only 32% of the workforce in the renewable energy sector and 22% in the oil and gas industry sector (OECD, 2020).

The gender specific outcomes of environmental policies are rarely considered, and consequently little gender specific environmental data is collected in OECD countries. The lack or insufficient disaggregation of data by sex impedes analysis needed to shape sustainable and inclusive policies. Thus, countries must work to improve the ability to read these impacts in a way that is internationally harmonised and universally applicable.

Finally, the connection between women and environment can also be discussed from the point of view of environmental justice (i.e., the fair and inclusive engagements in the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental legislation at national and international levels). The latter directly refers to the access to environment-related goods, such as clean water and energy or safe urban areas, or to the protection



from negative environmental pressures, like air and water pollution or deforestation. It also translates into equal access to the decision-making process of environmental policies, in which women frequently embody the environmental and human rights defenders. Children, youth, and women often lack voice and representation in decision-making processes. An intergenerational equity perspective on environmental policy is key to ensure that benefits and costs are distributed in a fair way across generations.

Guiding questions for participants:

1. Which are the most urgent issues on which to act to reduce the negative effects of environmental factors (co-factors of different nature and entity) on women?
2. How should women be safeguarded from the negative effects of climate change?
3. How should contributions of women to environmentally sustainable development be enhanced? How to promote their role and participation in decision-making processes at a national and international level that tackle gender issues from an environmental perspective?
4. How to improve women's access to green jobs and how to enhance their participatory role in the creation, availability and access to climate justice procedures?

## **Labour and Economic Empowerment and Work-life Balance**

The Labour and Economic Empowerment of women is strongly intertwined with the achievement of an adequate and satisfactory Work-life Balance for female workers, also regarding personal freedom and safeguard from violence and harassment. For any real progress to be achieved concerning women's economic empowerment and participation in the labour force, unpaid care and domestic work needs to be recognized and evenly shared among men and women. Likewise, overcoming gender-based violence and harassment is a prerequisite for equal access to opportunities in the labour market for women, who will no longer be forced to choose career pathways associated with lower risks, and will thus be more likely to reach leadership positions.

### **Labour and Economic Empowerment**

It has been shown how an increased economic empowerment of women is central to business advancement, economic growth and sustainable development (UN, 2018). However, despite international commitments such as the 2014 G20 Brisbane Target, the gender gaps related to the labour market have not narrowed in any meaningful way across the last 20 years (ILO, 2019). Today, the global labour force participation rate for women is approximately 49%, 26 percentage points lower than the one of men (ILO, 2018). The gender gap in the labour force participation rate is particularly high in relation to managerial and decision-making roles, where a “glass ceiling” exists preventing adequate female representation. Despite an increase in education, in G20 countries women only account for 22% of seats on the Boards of publicly listed companies (ILO, 2020) and occupy a mere 27% of all managerial positions (GGGR, 2021). Moreover, women represent only 27% of the Members of Parliaments (UNDP Human Development Report, 2020) and account for slightly more than 11% of Head of States globally (Women's Power Index, 2021).

The imbalances laid out are also rooted in a persistent occupational segregation: across the world, only 28% of women are chief executives, senior officers and legislators versus 88% of personal care workers (ILO, 2020). Indeed, women are still more likely to be employed in jobs that are considered to be low-skilled, facing worse working conditions with respect to men. This is particularly true for the informal employment sector, to which women are traditionally the most exposed, especially in developing countries. In South Asia, Sub Saharan Africa and Latin America, respectively 95%, 89% and 59% of women are estimated to be employed in the informal economy (UN Women, 2016). For this reason, initiating a transition from the informal to the formal economy that will prioritize the social protection and rights of women is of the utmost importance (ILO, 2015).

Mainly due to gender differences in employment and working conditions, a gender pay gap also exists that negatively impacts female workers. In 18 of G20 countries, women earn on average 15% less than men (W20,





2021), with detrimental effects also concerning pension benefits received by the female workforce (OECD, 2019). Due to a lower labour participation rate and a lower number of hours worked per week, the gender pension gap is generally higher than the gender pay gap.

Furthermore, an average of 22% of women in G20 countries lack access to formal bank accounts (W20, 2021) and thus struggle to reach economic independence. Access to finance is often regarded as a main constraint to the growth of female-owned enterprises (World Bank, 2020), resulting in a female-to-male ratio of 0,77 among entrepreneurs in G20 countries (Global Entrepreneurship Monitor, 2019). Studies also reveal that female entrepreneurship prevalence rates tend to be higher in developing countries, due to the fact that women facing greater barrier to entry into the formal labour market resort to entrepreneurship as a way out of unemployment and, often, poverty (Minniti et al., 2010). As a matter of fact, because of all the critical factors mentioned so far, a gender inclination toward poverty exists. In general, women are more likely to live in extreme poverty compared to men (UN Women, 2020).

It is essential to underline how access to credit and economic opportunities and female entrepreneurship are crucial elements to the economic empowerment of women, including those who have experienced gender-based violence and harassment, and therefore have to be provided with appropriate means to regain independence. To eradicate these phenomena, a stronger common framework of legal and social protection is urgently needed.

Overall, the World Economic Forum predicts that, at the current pace, gender parity will not be attained for over 135 years (GGGR, 2021). The root cause of the absence of equal opportunities in the workplace is largely cultural. Indeed, gender stereotypes regarding the role women are expected to play within society, in accordance with their traditional duties as “angels in the house”, are still widely spread among both men and women (ILO & Gallup, 2017). Stereotypes of this kind generate cultural biases that in turn foster a discriminatory and unequal environment for women. Also due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it is now mandatory to recognize the importance of women’s labour and economic empowerment for the achievement of a sustainable and balanced development (Kumar Mishra, 2018). In addition to being a fundamental element in the pursuit of the Sustainable Development Goals, gender labour and economic equality is a paramount opportunity of economic growth. Based on the estimate that gender gaps cost the global economy approximately 15% of its GDP (Cuberes et al., 2016), achievements such as the increase of the female employment rate in OECD countries to match that of Sweden could generate an economic impact of up to USD 6 trillion, and of up to USD 2 trillion by closing the gender pay gap (Women in the Work Index, 2021). It appears clear that, going forward, the opportunities that lie behind women’s economic and labour empowerment can no longer go unnoticed.

Guiding questions for participants:

1. How should gender gaps preventing equal access to opportunities in the labour market be tackled?
2. How should women’s employment in the informal economy be addressed?
3. How can we describe women's economic empowerment beyond the common interpretation connected to equal pay issues?
4. How significant is economic independence for a woman? What weight does it gain in the path out of gender-based violence?
5. In which ways can public-private partnerships help achieving women’s labour and economic empowerment? How should they be structured for efficiency maximization?
6. Which are the fundamental measurement mechanisms to be put in place for the adoption of appropriate policies?

## Work-life Balance

A primary dimension of gender equality concerns the disparities that affect women and men in relation to work-life balance and the time dedicated to different life activities, such as caring for children and elderly and disabled family members. In this regard, parenthood is a highly influential factor when it comes to women’s empowerment. A progressive decline in female labour participation rate can be observed in conjunction with the beginning and



evolution of the motherhood phase (ILO, 2018). In other words, motherhood brings about employment, wage and leadership penalties for women that can persist across their working life. The main causes involve long career breaks for paid and unpaid maternity leave, part-time working and gender-biased hiring and promotion choices, which ultimately penalize mothers (OECD, 2019).

While lengthy work breaks obstacle women's reintegration into the workforce, choosing to work part-time hinders women's professional growth in the long-term. Today, more than 1 woman out of 4 works part-time (ILO & OECD, 2020). A primary originating cause is the fact that women bear a disproportionate burden for unpaid care and domestic work. In fact, women tend to spend more than three-quarters of their working day, precisely 76.2%, in unpaid care work and dedicate on average a total of 4 hours and 25 minutes per day to it, compared to the male average of 1 hour and 23 minutes (ILO, 2019). This undoubtedly has a negative correlation with women's labour force participation (OECD, 2014). Despite being valued to be between 10% and 39% of the global GDP, women's unpaid care and domestic work still fails to be fairly recognised as a crucial tool to subsidise the costs of care that supports family and economies, and often compensate for the lack of specific social services (UN Women, 2017). The unequal responsibility between men and women in these terms has been greatly enhanced by the COVID-19 pandemic, during which women have experienced an uneven intensification of their unpaid care and domestic workload. For this reason, in September 2020 four times more women than men dropped out of the workforce globally (Boston College Center for Work & Family, 2020). Due to lack of proper regulation, smart working has not been able to prevent such outcome, thus failing to become an instrument able to support women in balancing their personal and professional life. On the contrary, smart working has ultimately hindered women's potential, leading to a detrimental overlap of their different responsibilities, with consequences on their performance and mental wellbeing. Therefore, it must be taken into consideration that this instrument cannot serve as a substitute for other forms of family welfare and care services.

The inadequacy of supporting systems and social infrastructures able to guarantee an optimal work-life balance to both men and women exacerbates pre-existing conditions of disparity and further limits women's professional development. In accordance, an average gap of 17 percentage point exists between women who are willing to participate in the labour force and women who are actually included in the workforce among G20 countries (ILO & Gallup, 2017). As a consequence of the negative correlation between motherhood and satisfactory employment, G20 countries have been facing progressively declining birth rates for over a decade, going from an average of 14.9 births per 1000 people in 2010 to 12.7 in 2019 (World Bank, 2020). If appropriate action is not taken, the issue of an ageing population will hamper the economic and social sustainability of countries on a global scale - leading to rising healthcare and pension costs, economic slowdown and lack of workforce (Jones, 2020).

As it clearly emerges, the struggle to balance paid work and family responsibilities is one of the biggest barriers to entry for women in the labour force. Women are subjected to great pressures to conform to gender stereotypical roles that depict them solely as mothers and caregivers, as opposed to the stronger figure of the "male breadwinner" (OECD, 2021; Rosina et al., 2019). Moreover, female workers often have to be confronted with the ongoing stigma regarding mothers who decide to keep working instead of fully focusing on family life (Skorinko et al., 2020). The current unequal asset of society is the by-product of a dominant culture that sees womanhood and motherhood as all-consuming experiences, which require women's undivided attention. In this scenario, the reiteration of the idea of a perfect and unchanging work-life balance is at risk of reinforcing a gendered depiction of what a woman's life should ultimately look like. In order for balance to be truly reached, the international community has a responsibility to initiate a lasting adjustment from motherhood to parenthood and from female caregivers to solely caregivers that will allow women to engage in a healthy prioritization of their different life roles. This newfound concept of work-life balance must entail the possibility for men and women to make free choices while being continuously supported by the work and social environment surrounding them. In this sense, extended paid parental leaves are a great example of a suitable supporting policy, as evidence shows they can boost female employment, increase its continuity and promote women's labour market re-entry (ILO & OECD, 2019). A wider offer of early childhood education services also implies greater opportunities for mothers and caregivers to participate in the workforce, thus increasing household earnings, breaking cycles of intergenerational poverty and incrementing fertility rates (OECD, 2017; UNICEF, 2019).

Finally, a stronger and more adequate support system for working mothers could lead to a sharp increase in the number of women working full-time, with an immediate economic gain for countries. If in all G20 countries every



woman currently working part-time was to be employed full-time, there could be an economic impact of up to USD 1.2 trillion, equal to more than 2% of the overall G20 GDP (The European House – Ambrosetti, 2021). An economic growth of this kind could be a salient first step towards the long overdue gender equal and sustainable development of countries.

Guiding questions for participants:

1. Which are the actions to be prioritized in order to ensure the right work-life balance to women?
2. Which are the most effective measures that can favour equal parenthood?
3. How can we ensure a more equitable sharing of unpaid care work within the family? How much can a cultural change affect this specific issue?
4. In which sectors of the labour market are work-life balance disparities most pronounced?
5. Which existing technological solutions could be employed to ensure work flexibility and to support parent's responsibilities concerning care and domestic work?

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