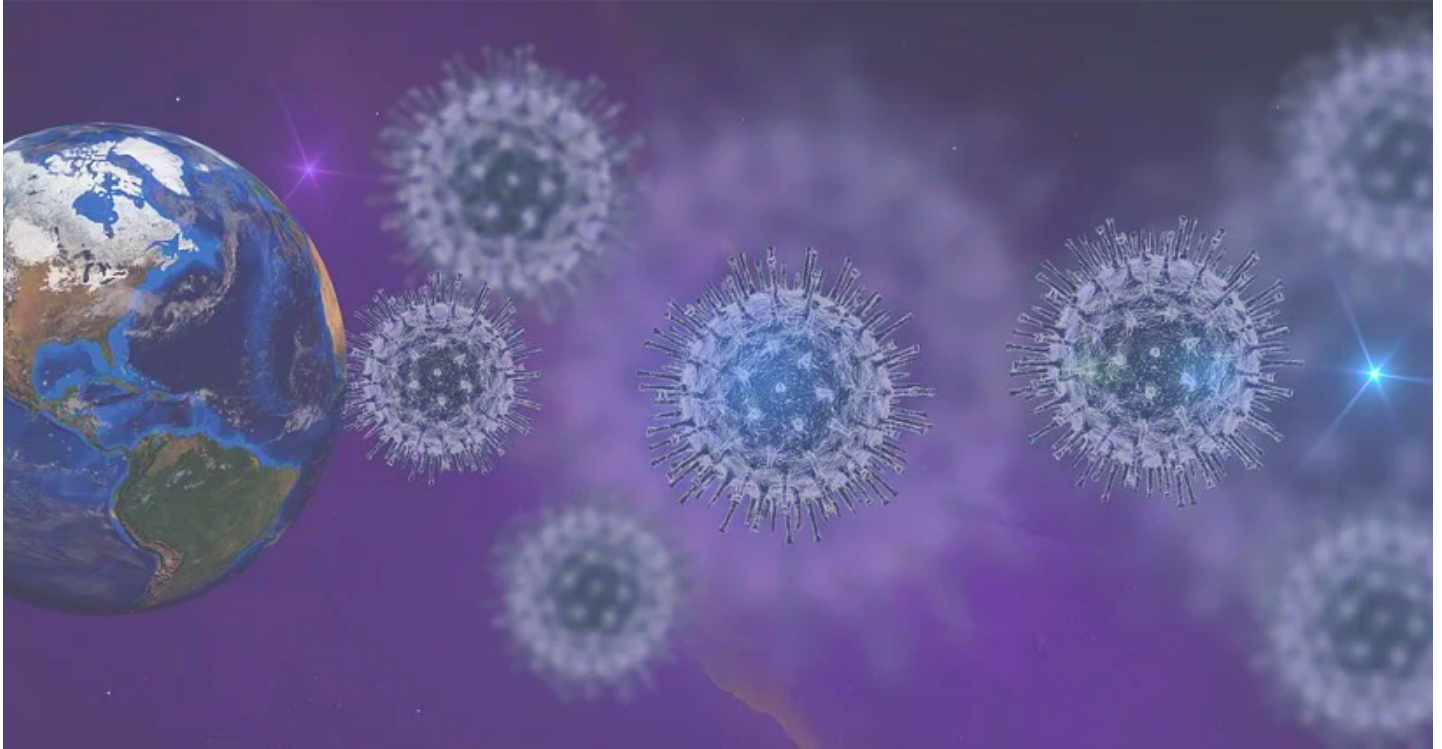


EQUALITY MATTERS

Equality and the Covid-19 pandemic



Message from the Editor

The Covid-19 pandemic has affected countries all over the world and impacted the lives and well-being of many people. However, as the situation develops, it is important that the core values of equality and non-discrimination continue to be protected and promoted for all.

Since coronavirus struck, the pandemic has transformed the way of life of most people. It has changed the way people greet each other, the way people travel, public gatherings, doing politics, and the economy amongst other sectors.

This newsletter gives an overview of the pandemic's impact on the grounds of gender, family responsibilities, age, race and ethnic origin, religion and belief as well as sexual orientation and gender identity. Reference is also made to teleworking; the benefits and challenges of teleworking, the role of equality bodies and the National Commission for the Promotion of Equality (NCPE) on-going work.

We augur that you will find this newsletter interesting!

Covid-19 is generating complex challenges and risks and while the virus does not discriminate, it is very clear that it hits marginalised communities in our societies disproportionately hard [1]

The Covid-19 pandemic's impact on:



Gender

Family responsibilities

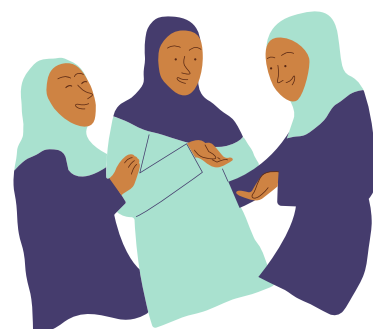
Age



Race and ethnic origin

Religion and belief

Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity



[1] https://www.ilga-europe.org/sites/default/files/COVID19%20_Impact%20LGBTI%20people.pdf

Gender

The European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) presented gender statistics [2] to highlight the different realities that women and men face in light of this pandemic:

Gender-based violence

- Violence against women is an ever present scourge in our societies that was exacerbated with the coronavirus pandemic.
- As more people stay at home, the risk of intimate partner violence is likely to increase. Victims, who are usually women, can be exposed to abusers for long periods of time and cut off from social and institutional support. In this context, loss of income or unemployment can further discourage victims from leaving their abusive perpetrator.
- Many member states have reported an increase of such cases including Malta, France and Lithuania. In Malta, domestic violence reports have increased by 7% during the first quarter of 2020 [3] while France and Lithuania registered an increase of 32% and 20% respectively.

Frontline workers

- Furthermore, health-care workers are at the frontline of the pandemic, putting themselves and their families at risk to care for patients. Although both women and men working in this sector are exposed to the virus, women make up the majority (76%) of healthcare workers in the EU.

Economic hardship and gender

- The economic impact of the Covid-19 pandemic will likely result in a recession in the EU.
- Women are more likely to be in temporary, part-time and precarious employment than men. These jobs often come with lower pay, weaker legal protection and difficulties accessing social protection. Levels of

precarious work are particularly high among young women, women with low qualifications and migrant women.



Moreover, with the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic, even the achievements gained in the past decades are at risk of being rolled back, according to UN Women. [4] The pandemic is bringing to the forefront pre-existing inequalities.

Indeed, the pandemic proves that it is now more important than ever to continue working for pay transparency and closing the gender pay gap. [5]

The UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW Committee) called for joint action against the Covid-19 pandemic from a women's rights perspective and solicited participation from all key stakeholders, and in particular States parties to the CEDAW Convention. [6]

[2] <https://eige.europa.eu/topics/health/covid-19-and-gender-equality>
 [3] https://www.maltatoday.com.mt/news/national/102153/domestic_violence_reports_increase_by_7_during_first_quarter_of_2020_#.XtjyCDozblU
 [4] <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2020/04/policy-brief-the-impact-of-covid-19-on-women>
 [5] <https://euobserver.com/coronavirus/148155>
 [6] <https://www.coe.int/en/web/genderequality/reactions-by-other-international-organisations>



Family responsibilities

As a result of the lockdown measures to combat the spread of the coronavirus, household chores, caring and home schooling for children and care for the elderly, are taking up more of people's time.

Although both women and men are facing some of these responsibilities, women are more likely to be in charge of unpaid childcare and schooling, unpaid adult care and unpaid domestic work while men tend to concentrate on fewer tasks, like shopping for the household and playing with children. [7]

[7] <https://data.unwomen.org/resources/surveys-show-covid-19-has-gendered-effects-asia-and-pacific>

Age

The pandemic is posing a particularly severe threat to the lives and health of older people. Indeed, the fatality rate for older people is higher overall and for those over 80, it is five times the global average. [8]

During quarantine **older persons** face an increased risk of violence, abuse and neglect by family members and caregivers. [9] Measures taken during the pandemic could leave victims of elder abuse in further isolation without access to assistance and support services. This may make it even more difficult for older persons to seek help or report abuse.

Moreover, as older persons in residential care homes tend to be dependent on the care of others, they are already vulnerable to neglect and abuse whilst physical isolation from friends and family may put them at an additional risk.

Being identified as more vulnerable to Covid-19 can cause anxiety and stress. [10] On a positive note, there are many activities that older people can initiate themselves or with the support of a carer, if needed, their mental

health. These include undertaking physical activity, keeping to routines or creating new ones, and engaging in activities which give them a sense of achievement.

Youths are also vulnerable to the challenges the pandemic has caused. Indeed, many youths are now at risk of being left behind in economic opportunities, education and health and well-being during a vital stage of their life development. [11]

Prior to Covid-19, youths aged 15 to 24 were already three times more likely to be unemployed compared to adults, while 126 million young workers were in poverty worldwide, according to the International Labour Organization (ILO).

The increase in unemployment as a result of Covid-19 is expected to exceed the rise in rates of unemployment in the aftermath of the 2009 global financial crisis. It is likely that youths will again be disproportionately affected by a global recession with a higher percentage of youths being unemployed compared to adults.

In light of this, it is crucial that measures to ease the financial impacts on households are comprehensive and sufficient to bridge the gap resulting from loss of earnings.

The global pandemic is also having an unprecedented impact on education systems all over the world. Around 191 countries implemented nationwide school closures, resulting in over 91% of enrolled students or 1.5 billion youngsters not being able to go to school.

School closures have a particularly negative effect on students without internet access at home and children relying on help from their schools in meeting their nutrition and health needs.

The World Programme of Action for Youth (WPAY) calls on governments to ensure that their services meet the needs of youths.

Additionally, youths with physical or mental health conditions also encounter risks. The pandemic and economic recession may further fuel stigma and discrimination against certain groups of youths, which in turn would further exclude them from accessing healthcare and maintaining their livelihoods.



[8] <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=25879&LangID=E>

[9] <https://www.age-platform.eu/press-releases/covid-19-reveals-violations-older-people%E2%80%99s-human-rights-new-age-report-says>

[10] <http://www.euro.who.int/en/health-topics/health-emergencies/coronavirus-covid-19/news/news/2020/3/mental-health-and-psychological-resilience-during-the-covid-19-pandemic>

[11] <https://www.un.org/development/desa/youth/news/2020/05/covid-19/>

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Race and ethnic origin

Since the early months of the spread of Covid-19, people of Asian descent in particular have been victim of racist speech online and offline, being blamed for the coronavirus and its spread in Europe. There have also been several cases of violent racially motivated attacks against Asian people. [12]

The European Network Against Racism (ENAR) collected data on the impact of Covid-19 on racial groups. It included cases of discrimination against racial groups in a range of key areas, such as denial of access to the healthcare system, denial of access to basic services such as water and electricity, refusal of access to accommodation, and racist violence and speech amongst others.

In this context, the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) calls on Council of Europe member States to take due account of ECRI's general policy recommendations and to consult with equality bodies and civil society organisations in combating racism and intolerance when developing, implementing and evaluating their responses to the Covid-19 pandemic. [13]

Moreover, it is important that post-Covid-19 task forces or advisory boards set up by governments include specialists in human rights, particularly the fields of equality and non-discrimination.

[12] <https://www.enar-eu.org/Evidence-of-the-impact-of-Covid-19-on-racialised-communities-exposes-need-to>

[13] <https://www.coe.int/en/web/european-commission-against-racism-and-intolerance/-/ecri-s-bureau-holds-exceptional-meeting-and-exchanges-views-with-director-of-fra-and-eu-special-representative-for-human-rights>

Religion and belief

The current pandemic has brought out the best in religious cooperation, even when churches, mosques and temples have been forced to close their doors. [14]

During an online meeting with religious leaders, United Nations Secretary-General, António Guterres said that our shared vulnerability to the coronavirus pandemic reveals “our common humanity”. [15]

Indeed, religious organisations and communities across Europe are playing a vital role in supporting the most vulnerable members of societies. [16]



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[14] <https://mailchi.mp/a6934a115567/enorb-newsletter-april-may-2020?e=e1cb54a388>

[15] <https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/05/1063782>

[16] <https://ecr.leu/now-more-than-ever-we-stand-together/>

Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity



LGBTI people are now facing new challenges in the context of the coronavirus pandemic. [17] Stigmatization, discrimination, hate speech and attacks on the LGBTI community have drastically increased globally.

LGBTI people can experience domestic violence and abuse due to home confinement and unsupportive family-members, leading to anxiety and depression.

The authorities should monitor closely the impact on human rights of LGBTI people as a result of emergency measures, whether as a result of official derogations or internal national guidelines.

Additionally, discrimination at work is another widespread challenge.

[17] <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/LGBT/LGBTpeople.pdf>

Covid-19 and the world of work

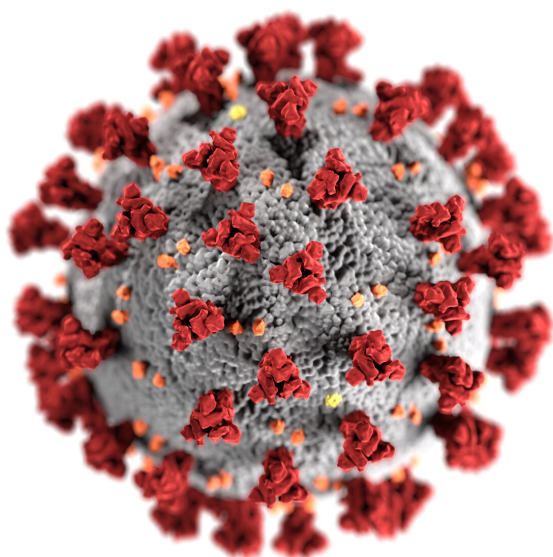
The workplace is another space that remains a key challenge to achieving equality **at work** especially during this pandemic.

Full or partial lockdown measures are now affecting almost 2.7 billion workers representing around 81% of the world's workforce. [18]

Misconceptions about the virus resulted in verbal insults, harassment, physical aggression and online hate speech, as well as adverse actions in some workplaces. [19]

Women, people with disabilities, migrant workers, and those in the informal economy are being further disadvantaged as a result of the pandemic.

While many people have lost their jobs and income, many others continued to work at home i.e. **teleworking**.



[18] https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/documents/briefingnote/wcms_740877.pdf

[19] <https://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2020/covid19-rights-impact-april-1>

Teleworking

On a positive note, the Covid-19 pandemic has demonstrated that teleworking can be an effective flexible working arrangement.

During the past years, the NCPE has continually been promoting family-friendly measures such as telework to facilitate the reconciliation of work and family life.

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“While telework is typically used for limited periods, normally one or two days per week, many workers are now teleworking full-time to cut down the risk of contracting the virus” [20]- ILO

Yet, before the coronavirus outbreak teleworking was not common in the EU, with only 5.4% of employed persons aged 15-64 regularly working from home in 2019. [21]

Nowadays, many companies have shifted to teleworking in order to strike a balance between ensuring work continuity, while safeguarding the health of their employees.

Research shows that in Malta only 4.7% of employees used to work from home several times a week before the outbreak of Covid-19, while 35% of employees started to work from home as a result of the Covid-19 situation. [22]

[20] https://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/newsroom/news/WCMS_739879/lang--en/index.htm

[21] <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/-/DDN-20200424-1>

[22] <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/country/malta>

Some of the potential benefits and disadvantages of telework to employers, workers and societies as a whole as published by the ILO [23]:

	Benefits	Challenges
Employers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduced overheads • Increased margins • Lower turnover • Greater talent pool • Inexpensive, desirable benefit 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased IT demands • Security issues • May not work for some tasks • Some loss of control
Workers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduced commuting time/costs • Life choice flexibility • Dependent care flexibility • Higher autonomy • Higher job satisfaction • Lower stress • Lowered work–family conflict 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Blurring work–life boundaries • Working on holiday • Difficult to unplug from work • Social and professional isolation • Missed opportunities
Societies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Environmentally friendly • Reduced infrastructure stress • Better management of public health risks • Better for individuals with disabilities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Urban sprawl (workers can afford to live at a greater distance from office) • Reinforced gender division in unpaid household work



[23] https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---asia/---ro-bangkok/---ilo-hanoi/documents/publication/wcms_738257.pdf

The role of equality bodies and NCPE's on-going work



The national equality bodies across Europe are providing insights on how the Covid-19 pandemic is impacting equality in their countries, and they are trying to anticipate future challenges that may arise. [24]

New challenges are appearing and the need to monitor and protect the principles of equality and non-discrimination remain vital to ensure that equality is truly safeguarded.

The NCPE is committed to address the increasing challenges related to equality and human rights. The NCPE

has continued working on various initiatives, including communications and awareness raising, and is monitoring the situation vis-à-vis equality.

The NCPE is offering its services to the general public and other stakeholders, and can be contacted, as per usual, for the lodging of complaints of alleged discrimination as well as for seeking information or assistance on matters related to equality.

[24] <https://equineteurope.org/2020/covid-19-national-equality-bodies-report-impacts-on-equality-and-share-their-responses-to-the-coronavirus-pandemic/>

Moving forward after the pandemic

Different countries are at different stages of the coronavirus pandemic. Some are starting to come out of emergency measures while others are extending or reinforcing them. In either case, the restrictions need to be necessary, proportionate, and non-discriminatory. [25]

Support actions [26] are being taken by different countries to combat the Covid-19 pandemic. In Malta, various measures are being adopted to support companies and families to ease hardship, including wage supplement, deferral of payment of taxes, social measures, medical benefits, and quarantine leave amongst others.

In addition, it remains yet to be seen what the aftermath of this health crisis will bring, namely what the overall impact will be and what equality bodies will need to focus on in the coming future. [27]

In view of this, equality must be strengthened, and individuals must show solidarity with one another. As the Croatian Deputy Ombudsman Tena Šimonović Einwalter said, “we need more solidarity and unity in Europe, as well as globally. We need more solidarity and unity as equality bodies. And we need more solidarity and unity as people, because only staying together and on an equal basis, will we overcome this crisis”. [28]

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[25] <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=25828&LangID=E>

[26] <https://covid19.maltaenterprise.com/>

[27] <https://eno.ombudsman.europa.eu/home/news/maincontent/enonews-275.html>

[28] <https://equineteurope.org/2020/no-crisis-can-undermine/>