



SUMMARY STATUS OF WOMEN AND MEN REPORT – THE IMPACTS OF COVID-19



A GENDER ANALYSIS OF THE IMPACT OF COVID-19
ON WOMEN AND MEN IN 12 CARIBBEAN COUNTRIES
FEBRUARY/MARCH 2021



COVID-19
RESPONSE

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WOMEN 



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Photo: Saint Vincent and the Grenadines woman producer, Ms. Alita Garraway of AURORA'S who produces and sells pepper sauce. She is a member of the St. Vincent and the Grenadines Network of Rural Women. Photo compliments – *The Gender Affairs Division of the Ministry of National Mobilisation, Social Development, The Family, Gender, Persons with Disabilities, Youth, Housing and Informal Human Settlements, St. Vincent and the Grenadines.*

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SUMMARY

STATUS OF

WOMEN AND

MEN REPORT –

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ABBREVIATIONS

CARICOM	Caribbean Community
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
CT	Cash transfer
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
IDB	Inter-American Development Bank
ILO	International Labour Organization
LAC	Latin America and the Caribbean
NGM	National Gender Machinery
PAHO	Pan-American Health Organization
SIDS	Small Island Developing States
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF	United Nations Children’s Fund
UNWTO	United Nations World Tourism Organization
UN Women	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
MCO Caribbean	UN Women Multi-Country Office – Caribbean
WTTC	World Travel & Tourism Council
WFP	United Nations World Food Programme
VAWG	Violence against Women and Girls



EXECUTIVE
SUMMARY

The COVID-19 pandemic has posed a tremendous threat to global health, poverty reduction gains and advances made towards gender equality. Globally, by April 13, 2021, 136,115,434 confirmed cases, and 2,936,916 deaths¹ had scarred nations. The 35 countries/territories in the Caribbean region alone had suffered 630,239 confirmed cases and 8,571 deaths, as of April 6, 2021². Still, this pandemic has had impacts far beyond public health. The crippling economic and social fallouts of the pandemic threaten to derail hard-earned gains towards the sustainable development goals.

Across the Caribbean, governments acted quickly, imposing lockdowns, shutting borders, restricting movement and closing non-essential businesses from March 2020. Yet, volatile infection rates and dreaded second waves have caused prolonged disruption. The region's innate vulnerabilities – including those characteristic of Small Island Developing States (SIDS) – have created significant challenges during the pandemic. High debt-to-GDP (gross domestic product) ratios, heavy reliance on external markets, susceptibility to climate change, and predominantly tourism-dependent economies have strained the region's resilience. As COVID-19 paralysed the international tourism sector, GDP constricted, fiscal space shrunk and unemployment soared in the world's most tourism-dependent region.

However, men and women also face distinctive vulnerabilities as a result of deep-rooted social, cultural and economic dynamics. Women are more concentrated in tourism-affected industries³, particularly in the more informal activities earning lower wages, shoulder the majority of unpaid care work and endure more domestic violence (Azcona et al., 2020; Budlender & Iyahan, 2019). Lone parent households (the majority of which are headed by women) are often over-represented in economically vulnerable and poor quintiles (UNDP, UNICEF and UN Women, 2020f, 2020g; Barbados Survey of Living Conditions, 2016/2017). These intersecting vulnerabilities mean women are more exposed to negative shocks than men.

1 Cases reported to the World Health Organisation (WHO). WHO COVID-19 Dashboard as of April 13, 2021, 5:56AM AST – <https://covid19.who.int/>

2 CARPHA COVID-19 Tracker Dashboard as of February 18, 2021 11:47 – <https://carpha.org/Portals/o/Images/Dashboard-TrackingCOVID19-CARPHA.jpg>

3 Labour Force Surveys and National Statistics Offices

Crises, like the COVID-19 pandemic exploit these vulnerabilities and disparities. This summary report provides a snapshot of the status of Caribbean women and men in COVID-19, grounded in this context of unequal vulnerability.

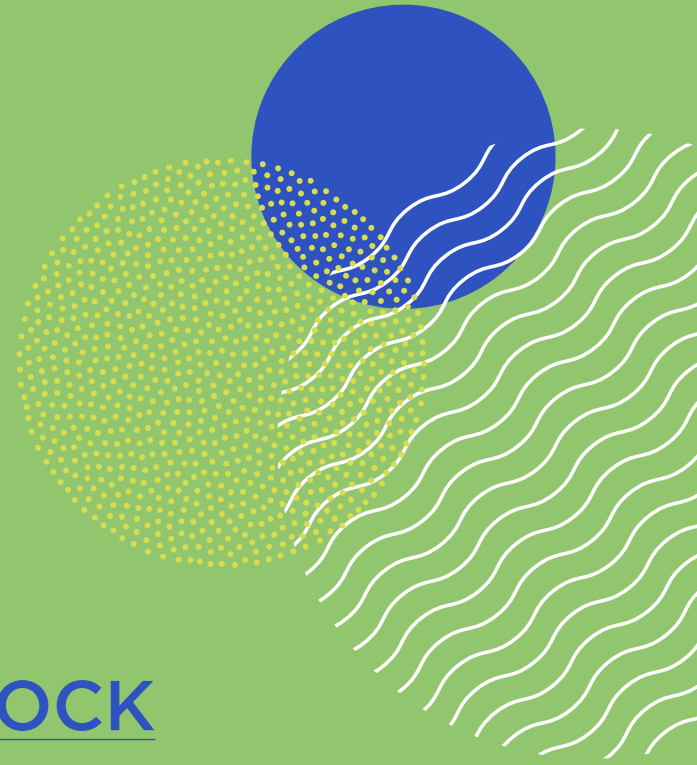
The report highlights the differential and varied impacts of the pandemic on women and men, uncovers their coping mechanisms, and provides a gendered analysis of governments' response efforts. It finds that, while everyone has suffered, COVID-19 has forced women into greater social, economic, and physical insecurity than men. As significant gaps remain in implementing gender-responsive relief and recovery measures, it makes key recommendations for the pandemic environment and beyond. In so doing, it joins the global call for sex-disaggregated data to ensure effective, evidence-based and gender-responsive policy-making.

The data used are derived from secondary research and a small survey conducted among regional national gender machineries (NGMs) and civil society organisations (CSOs). The report analyses 12 countries and territories: Anguilla, Antigua and Barbuda, the Bahamas, Barbados, the British Virgin Islands, Dominica, Guyana, Jamaica, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Saint Lucia, Suriname and Trinidad and Tobago.

Key Findings

- Women are concentrated in tourism-related services and sales sectors, making them more exposed to economic shocks than men, whose employment is more diversified.
- While the majority of persons have experienced income loss, more women than men experienced job losses as a result of COVID-19.
- Informal workers (many of whom operate in tourism-affected industries) have been forced into particularly precarious situations due to their exclusion from critical forms of social protection.
- Drastic increases in unpaid domestic work and childcare duties throughout the pandemic have disproportionately burdened women.
- Men and women have experienced significant drops in overall wellbeing due to financial strains, health concerns and social isolation.

- Stay-at-home orders have resulted in the eruption of a 'shadow pandemic' of domestic violence that see women trapped in violent situations with diminished personal support networks and financial stability, to report abuse.
- Significant numbers of mothers and fathers started eating less or going hungry to ensure their children were fed in the face of income loss and food insecurity.
- The pandemic brought large uptake of, and reliance on, pre-existing and COVID-19 specific social protection programmes.
- With a reduction in remittances, more persons relied on borrowing from family, friends and employers amidst livelihood disruptions.
- Women were in the minority on decision-making bodies while gender experts were largely absent from high-level committees.
- While some national gender machineries and civil society organisations were actively involved in relief efforts, they were largely absent from long-term recovery planning and initiatives.
- Though commendable exceptions exist, most COVID-19 measures and policies have not been gender-responsive.



A WIDESPREAD SHOCK
WITH UNEQUAL IMPACT

Uneven Distribution of Men and Women’s Jobs

Globally, the tourism industry has taken a phenomenal hit as borders were closed and travel restrictions imposed. Simultaneously, tourism-related industries, mainly service and trade sectors, were stunted as lockdowns prohibited non-essential businesses for extended periods. The Caribbean’s heavy reliance on tourism for both GDP and employment has seen the region face enormous difficulties in light of the pandemic. Women both dominate and are concentrated in tourism and tourism-related industries, making them more exposed during an economic shock like that created by the COVID-19 pandemic.

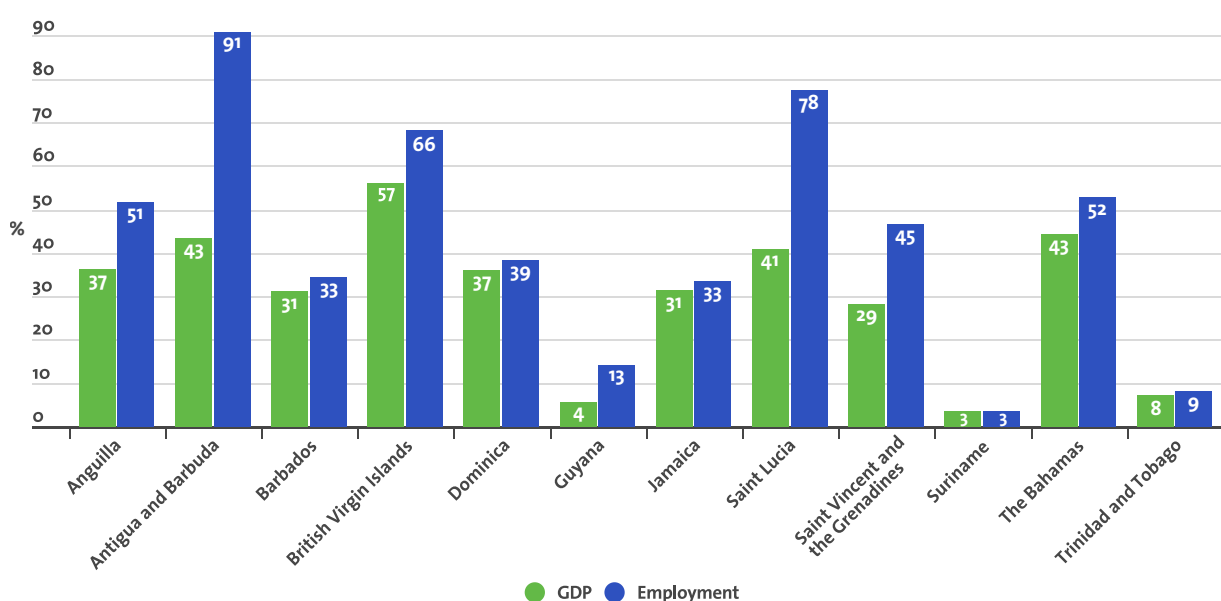
Excluding three commodity producers (Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago and Guyana), countries are heavily reliant on tourism for both economic activity and employment. According to the World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC), tourism (directly and indirectly) contributes an average of 30.3% of GDP and 42.8% of employment across the 12 countries, which increases to 38.7% and 54.3% respectively when excluding the three commodity producers (see Figure 1).

This makes Caribbean countries particularly vulnerable to external shocks like that posed by COVID-19. According to the UN World Travel Organization (UN WTO), the pandemic has brought a 74% decline in international arrivals globally⁴. The ILO declared Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) as the region most impacted by the pandemic in terms of labour income and hours worked. Hours dropped by 20.9% while income decreased by 19.3%. To date, the largest impact on employment and economic participation was felt in the second quarter of 2020 (ILO, 2020).

However, this impact has not been felt equally by men and women because women are concentrated in the tourism sector. Direct contributions of the tourism industry (to GDP and employment) are represented through the accommodation and restaurant sector. Every country included in the UNDP, UNICEF and UN Women **HEAT Report Series** for which sex-disaggregated information is available maintained a 50-70% female tourism workforce (See Figure 2).

4 UN WTO World Tourism Barometer <https://www.unwto.org/unwto-world-tourism-barometer-data>

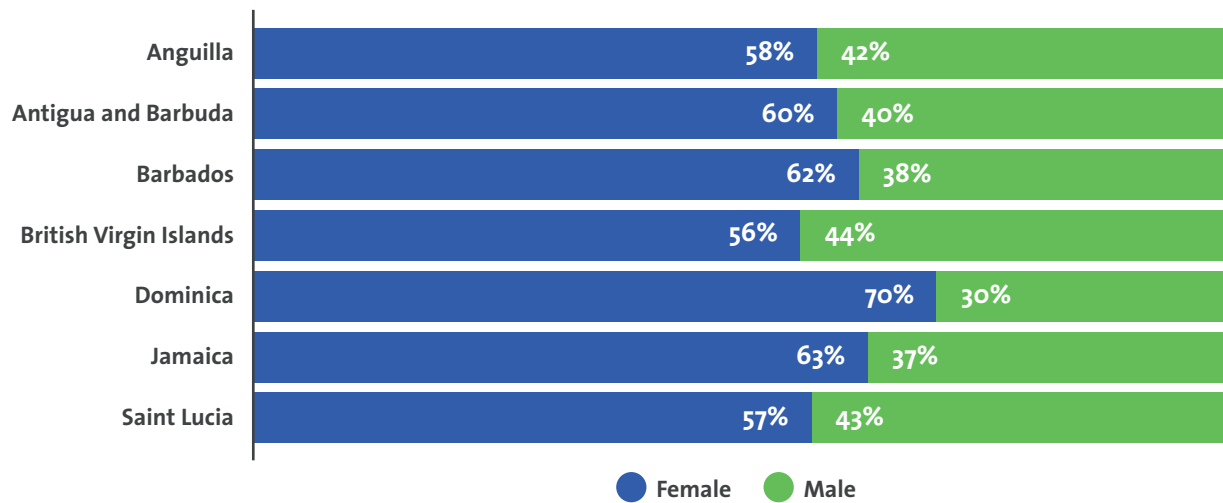
FIGURE 1
Total Tourism Contribution to GDP and Employment



Source: World Travel & Tourism Council (2020) based on pre-COVID-19 data

FIGURE 2

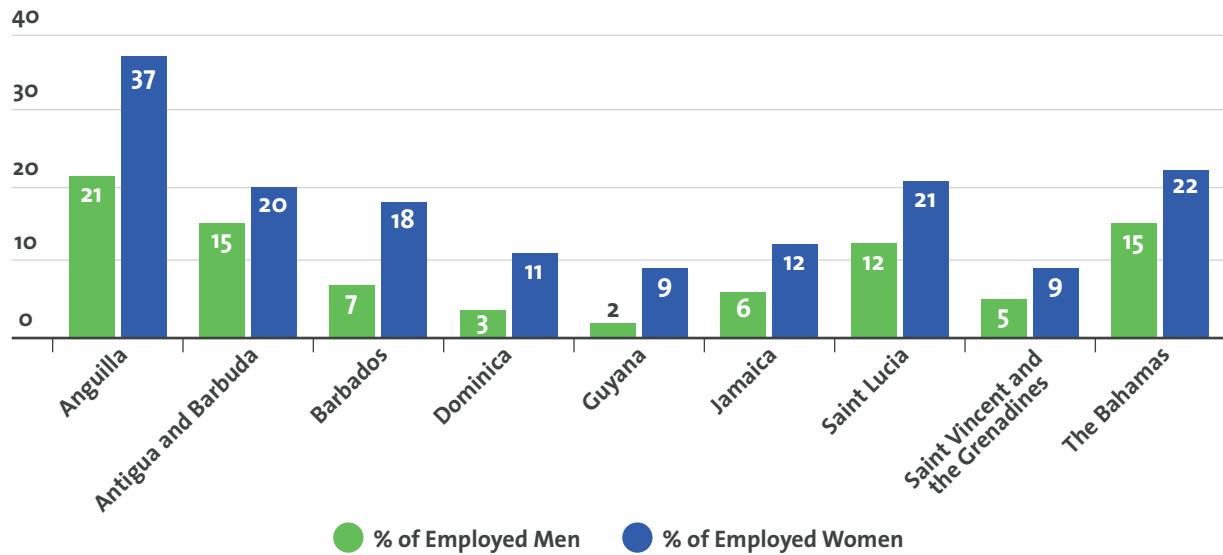
Sex Distribution of Accommodation and Restaurant Industry Workers



Source: UNDP, UNICEF and UN Women HEAT Report Series based on pre-COVID-19 data

FIGURE 3

Accommodation & Restaurant Industry as % of Employment

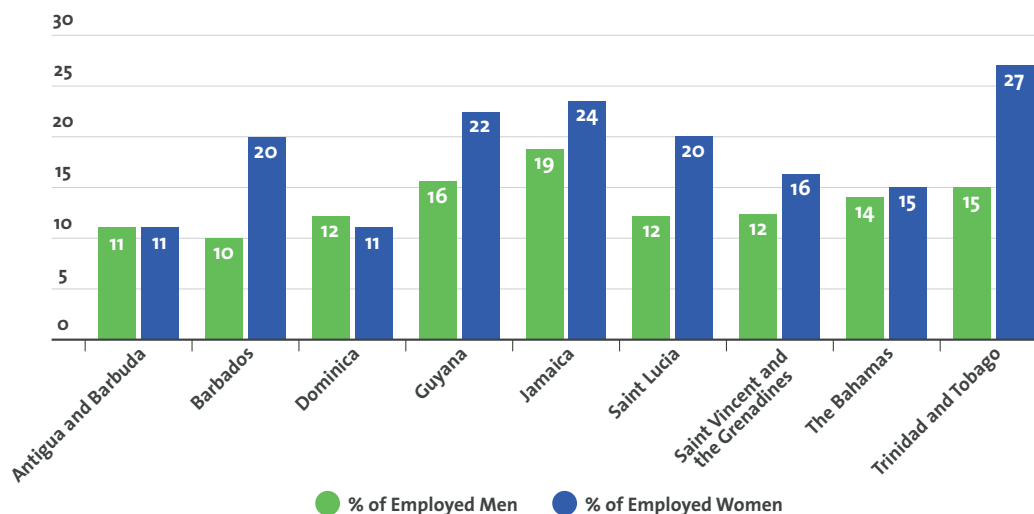


Source: Calculations using Labour Force Surveys and data from national statistical offices. Based on pre-COVID-19 data

Though less drastic, the Wholesale and Retail Trade Industry also sees a greater concentration of women than men in seven out of the nine countries with

disaggregated data. In the remaining countries, there is only a small difference between the share of women and men employed in the industry (see Figure 4).

FIGURE 4
Wholesale and Retail Trade as % of Employment

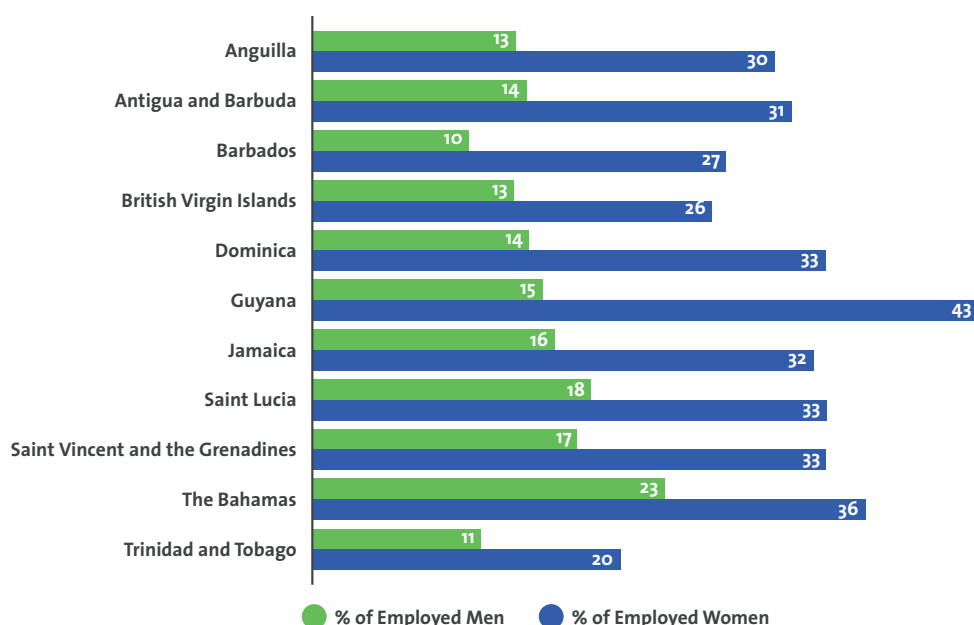


Source: Calculations using Labour Force Surveys and data from national statistical offices. Based on pre-COVID-19 data
N.B. Trinidad and Tobago classifies 'Wholesale and Retail Trade, Restaurants and Hotels' together creating an inflated number

Women’s vulnerability is related not only to the sector in which they work, but also to their jobs in the different sectors. While women dominate in the tourism and tourism-affected industries, they also dominate in the service and sales occupation, as sales workers (e.g. shopkeepers), personal care workers (e.g. hairdressers)

and personal services workers (e.g. housekeepers) amongst others. This service and sales occupation contributes to over a quarter of all women’s employment in every country except Trinidad and Tobago. In eight of the eleven assessed countries, 30% or more of women’s employment (see Figure 5) lies within this category.

FIGURE 5
Service and Sales Workers as % of employment



Source: Author’s calculations using Labour Force Surveys and data from national statistical offices. Based on pre-COVID-19 data

Cumulatively, these data show that women’s employment is less diversified than men’s which diminishes women’s resilience to economic shocks. With the COVID-19 restrictions specifically targeting such customer-facing industries and occupations, the women disproportionately occupying them are placed at even greater risk of employment loss or wage reduction as a result of COVID-19 restrictions and lockdowns. Consequently, the unequal distribution of men and women’s jobs creates unequal vulnerability in times of crisis.

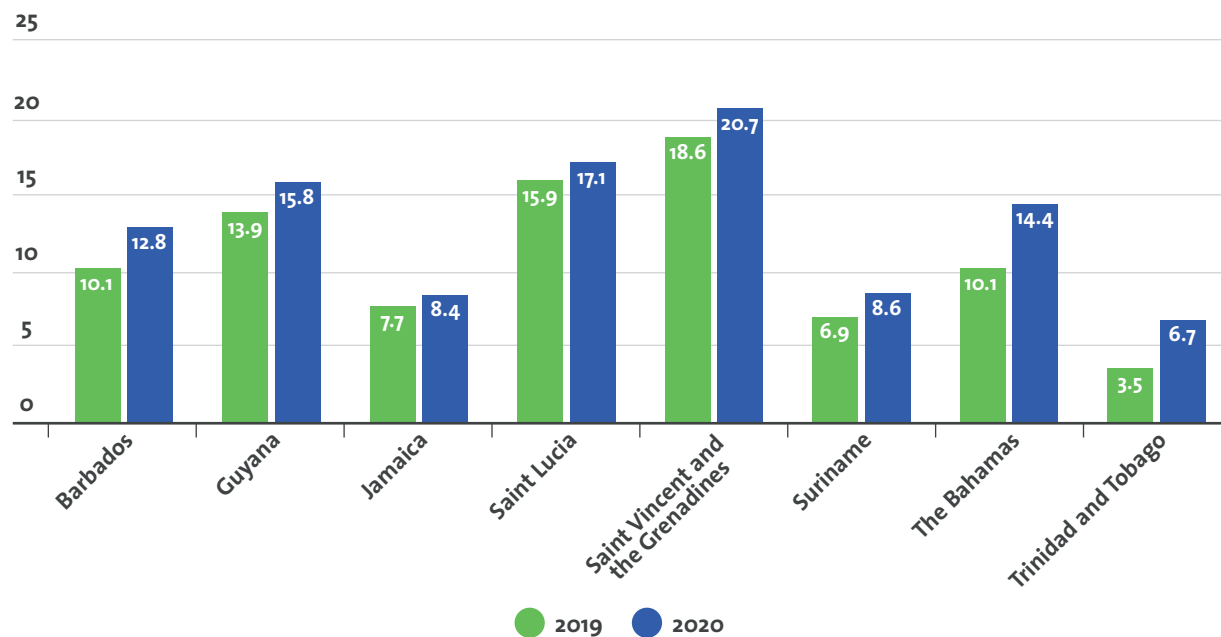
Income and Job Loss

As a result of the severe economic shock and tourism paralysis caused by COVID-19, income and employment loss has been felt across the board, but by women more so than men. Direct strains placed on business continuity in non-tourism sectors (e.g. lockdowns, decreased demand/supply, limited cash flow) have also

been exacerbated by the fall in tourism. For example, the UNDP, UNICEF and UN Women Barbados HEAT Report (2020) notes that Barbados has an elasticity between tourism and non-tourism industries of 0.24 meaning tourism declines directly impact non-tourism industries through decreased demand for non-tourism goods and services. Therefore, an employment slump has been felt across whole economies. Figure 6 shows ILO estimates of the extent to which the unemployment rate increased in eight of the countries.

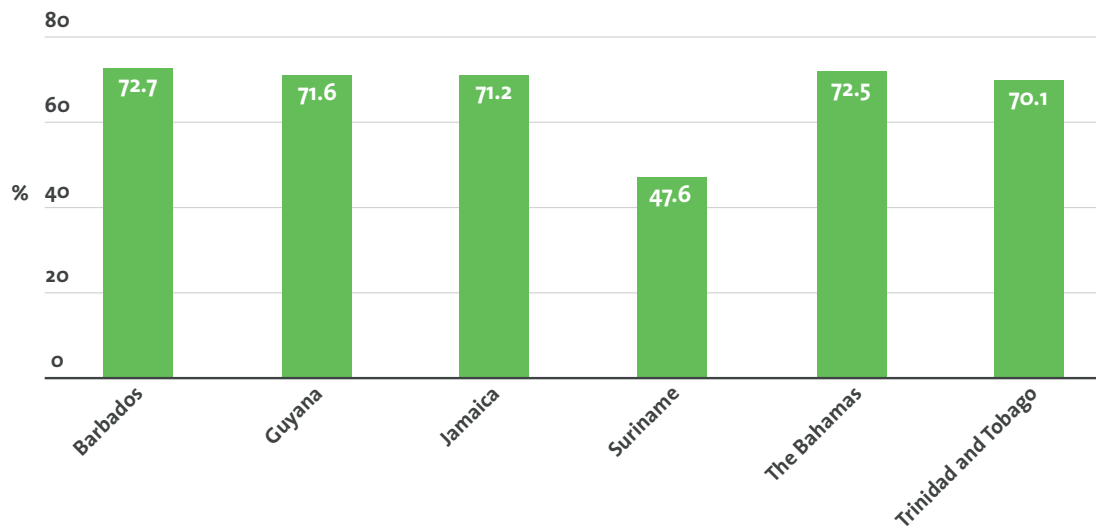
An IDB socioeconomic survey of almost 14,000 households across six Caribbean countries found that in all countries except Suriname, more than 70% of households reported reduced income in the week preceding their interview (see Figure 7). Similarly, a smaller WFP and CARICOM household survey in June 2020 revealed that 69% of respondents experienced job loss and/or reduced income since the onset of the pandemic, a drastic 21 percentage point increase from a survey conducted in April 2020.

FIGURE 6
Unemployment Rates (%)



Source: ILOSAT database

FIGURE 7
Households Reporting Reduced Income in the Pandemic

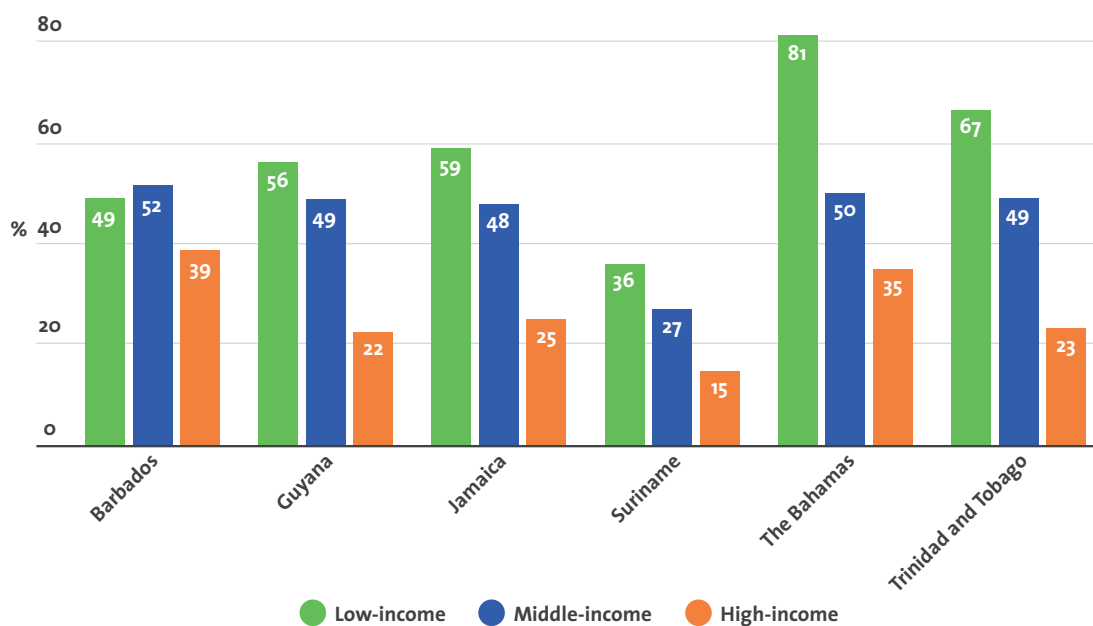


Source: IDB – The COVID-19 Crisis: Results from an Online Socioeconomic Survey July 2020

Yet losses were felt unequally across income groups and sexes. According to the IDB survey, households with low incomes pre-pandemic (in January 2020) were more vulnerable to employment loss than high-income

households (See figure 8). This has worrying implications for those already economically vulnerable or poor who are pushed further into poverty.

FIGURE 8
Employment Loss by Pre-Pandemic Household Income Level



Source: IDB – The COVID-19 Crisis: Results from an Online Socioeconomic Survey July 2020

While the smaller WFP and CARICOM study found little difference between the sexes, the considerably larger IDB survey found that more women than men lost employment, at least temporarily, in all surveyed countries, excluding Suriname, although the gender difference was very small in Trinidad and Tobago. Some employment loss was temporary as some workers were promised by their employers that they would be rehired after the crisis ended. Yet even if temporary, this disruption and loss was widely felt across the region, by women more than men.

To illustrate, Jamaica’s biggest industry declines for 2020 were in Arts, Entertainment, Recreation and other Services (27.9%), Accommodation and Food Services (22.1%), and Wholesale and Retail Trade (6.6%). Within each sector, far more women lost jobs than men. Women’s job loss superseded men’s by 22.5, 6 and 10.2 percentage points in the arts, tourism, and trade industries respectively.⁵

In Barbados, 81% of hotel workers (of whom thousands were female housekeepers) were estimated not to

be working in April 2020⁶. The 2020 **HEAT Report Series** predicted widespread climbs in unemployment regionally, ranging from 11.9% to 18.5% for women in Saint Lucia, for example, depending on the scenario modelled.

These national pictures mirror regional and global trends that see widening of employment gaps as youth and women, more than men, are experiencing the greatest job losses due to COVID-19 (Azcona et al., 2020; ILO, 2020; ILO Office for the Caribbean, 2020). Notably, the ILO Office for the Caribbean (2020) found that labour force participation rates have fallen across the region in the wake of the pandemic, somewhat distorting measured rises in unemployment rates. This represents persons (temporarily) seizing the search for employment amidst the pandemic because of widespread lockdowns and (temporary) business closures.

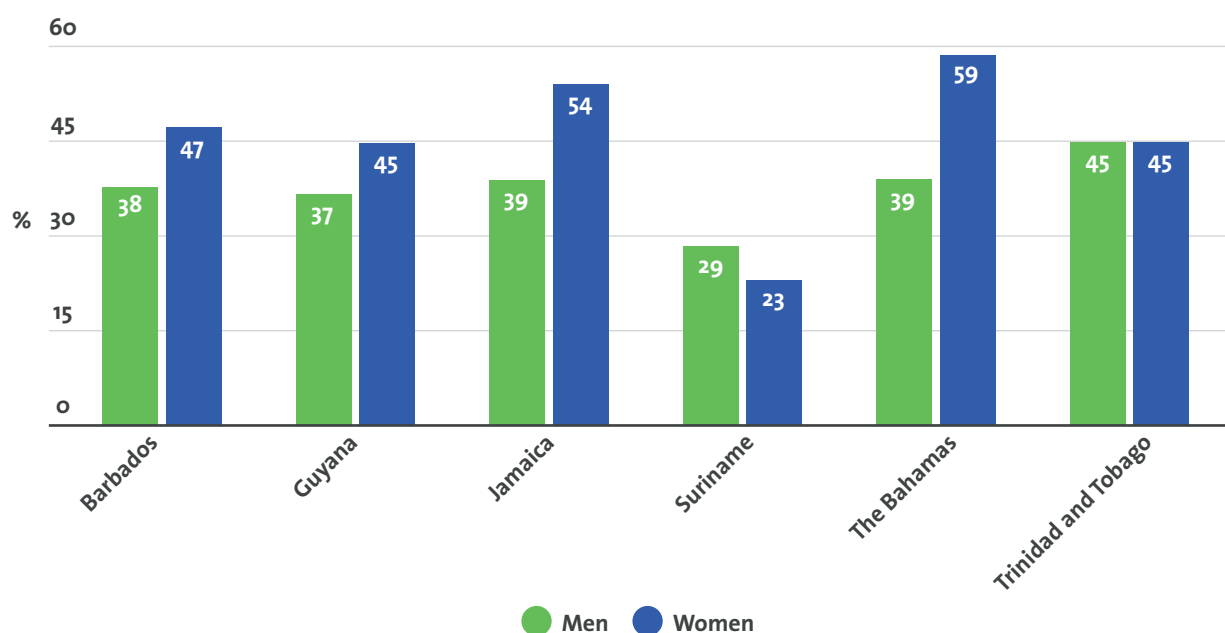
Informal and Unprotected

In times of crisis, informal workers are particularly vulnerable as they are not covered by the formal social protection systems such as unemployment benefits, nor

5 Author’s calculations using data in STATIN Labour Force Survey, October 2020

6 Barbados Today News 16/04/2020 – <https://barbadostoday.bb/2020/04/16/nine-out-of-ten-hotels-closed-in-industrys-worst-crisis/>

FIGURE 9
Job Loss by Sex



Source: IDB – The COVID-19 Crisis: Results from an Online Socioeconomic Survey July 2020

A Widespread Shock with Unequal Impact

do they qualify for employee benefits such as paid sick leave as their formal counterparts do. In the Caribbean, tourism-affected industries employ many informal workers. These include, for example, domestic workers in villas and homes who experienced severe livelihood disruptions as lockdowns and socialising restrictions were imposed. Without robust safety nets, crisis quickly forces such, often low-income, workers into precarious situations.

A September 2020 technical note by the ILO found more informal workers and self-employed persons in LAC lost jobs than formal workers and wage-earners. A UN Women report (Azcona et al., 2020) noted that domestic workers in the LAC region saw a whopping 81% decrease in income in the first month of the pandemic. This heavily disrupted economy hosts slightly more women than men in the region. According to the ILO (2018), informal work accounts for 50% of non-agricultural employment in LAC; 52% of women compared to 47% of men.

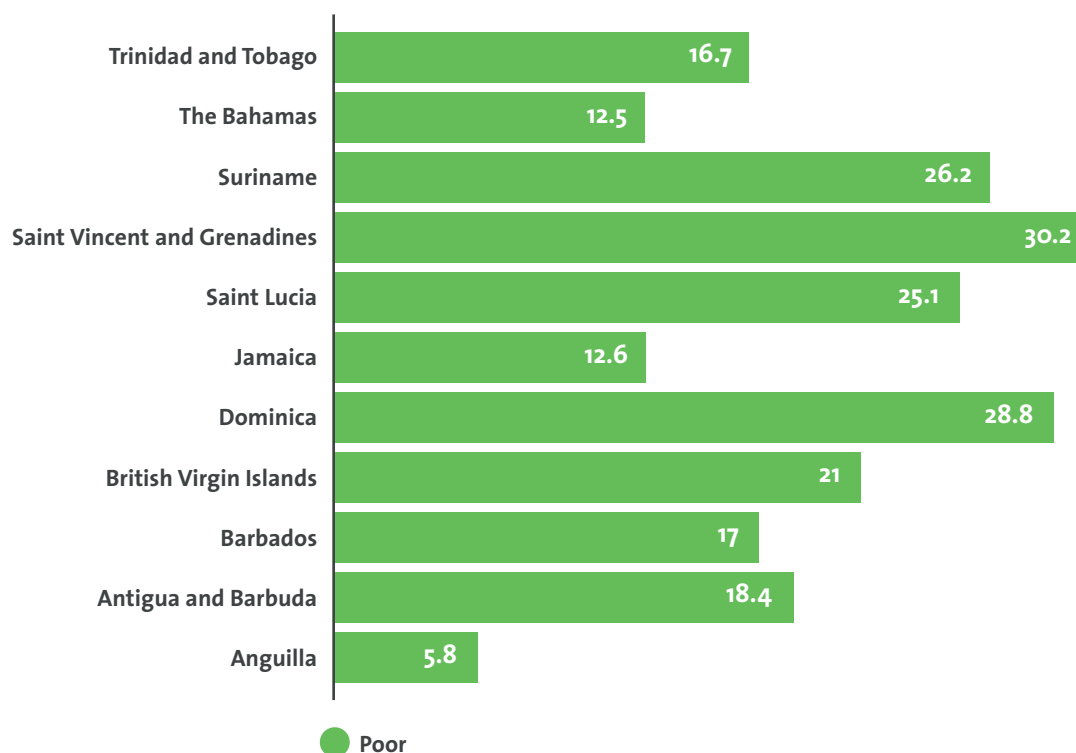
Though some countries have expanded social protection schemes to include informal workers in light of the

pandemic, they generally remain outside of formal safety nets and are thus forced to rely on emergency public assistance. More often than not, this is insufficient to lift them out of precarity.

The Gendered Face of Poverty and Economic Vulnerability

Understanding the Caribbean's poverty situation means understanding vulnerability and its gendered face. When compared to other regions, the Caribbean has relatively low poverty rates. However, significant portions of the population remain economically vulnerable i.e. living just above the poverty line. These groups live in precarity and are at risk of slipping into absolute poverty should unexpected events – like the COVID-19 pandemic – occur. All six countries for which data are available have vulnerability rates of 9% of higher. Saint Vincent and the Grenadines has a vulnerability rate of 18%.

FIGURE 10
Pre-Pandemic Regional Poverty Rates (%)



Source: National Statistics Offices and Surveys of Living Conditions, IDB Barbados Survey of Living Conditions 2017, UNICEF Child Poverty in the Eastern Caribbean Area Report 2017, IDB The Bahamas Household Expenditure Survey 2013

Gendered inequalities persist that make women more vulnerable to poverty impacts. For example, gendered inequalities result, in part, from persistent gender wage gaps in many countries across the region. Prior to the pandemic, in Saint Lucia, the average wage for women was 22% less than that of their male counterparts (UNDP, UNICEF & UN Women, 2020f). In Barbados, female tourism workers earned a mere 68% of men’s wages. It is therefore no surprise that 85% of economically vulnerable tourism workers in Barbados were women and 55% of those were below the poverty line (UNDP, UNICEF & UN Women, 2020c).

The COVID-19 pandemic has posed one of the biggest threats to poverty gains in recent history. Unfortunately, existing data on the impact of COVID-19 from the IDB socioeconomic survey of 14,000 households confirms worrying projections of worsened conditions. The percentage of households with incomes below country-specific minimum wages⁷ spiked significantly in Trinidad and Tobago (35 percentage points), Guyana (31 percentage points), Barbados (28 percentage points)

7 The countries do not necessarily have national minimum wages. The analysis uses minima set at \$210 per week for the Bahamas, \$600 per month for Barbados, \$44,200 per month for Guyana, \$30,310 per month for Jamaica, \$8.40 per hour for Suriname, and \$17.50 per hour for Trinidad and Tobago.

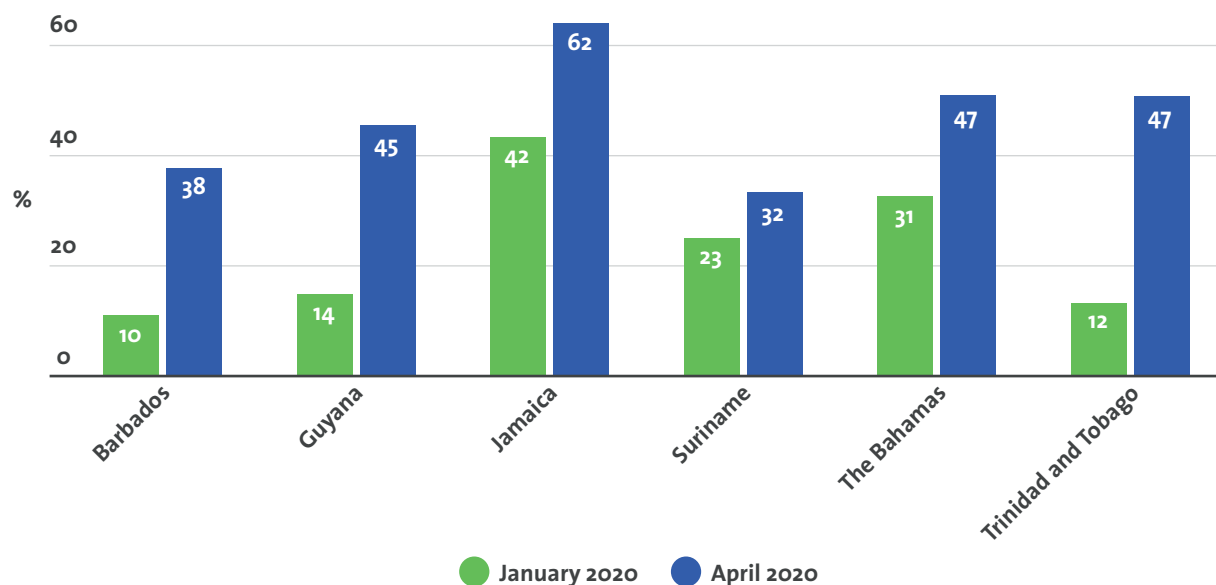
and Jamaica (20 percentage points) between January 2020 and April 2020 (see Figure 11).

While updated sex-disaggregated poverty data is currently unavailable for many countries in the region, available data show that women and girls are especially hurt by the economic and social fallout of COVID-19. Globally, 47 million women and girls are estimated to have been pushed into poverty as a result of the pandemic, bringing the total number of women and girls in poverty to 435 million (Azcona et al., 2020). The Caribbean region is likely to mirror these trends by exposing and exploiting women’s intersecting vulnerabilities.

Stay-at-Home Orders, Online Education and Women’s Unpaid Care Work

Stay-at-home measures, school closures and lockdown protocols have seen marked increases in unpaid domestic and care work for both men and women. However, women are bearing the majority of the burden, globally and regionally (Azcona et al., 2020). Again, this represents an exaggeration of pre-existing socio-economic gender dynamics.

FIGURE 11
Households with Income Below the Minimum Wage



Source: IDB – The COVID-19 Crisis: Results from an Online Socioeconomic Survey July 2020

A Widespread Shock with Unequal Impact

With children at home, parents are spending considerably more time entertaining, feeding and assisting children with online learning. Regionally, the WFP and CARICOM, found 54% of women and 47% of men experienced an increase in unpaid domestic work, while 46% of women and 35% of men increased their childcare duties.

Findings from the larger IDB online socioeconomic survey indicate the extent to which women are more affected than men. Compiling regional averages, twice as many women compared to men reported increases in cleaning, cooking and home schooling children. Almost twice as many women compared to men reported increases in entertaining children (see Figure 12).

This places an additional burden on women who must also continue their paid work simultaneously. Women are forced to balance, and in some cases choose between, caring for their children and pursuing livelihoods to feed them. This has major implications for women's productivity alongside their physical and mental health. Very few measures have been put in place by Caribbean governments to mediate this burden, even in non COVID-19 times.

Even where flexible working arrangements are possible, the burden is immense and decent work standards are often not in evidence (ILO, 2021). Flexible working arrangements are also more prevalent for workers in middle- and high-income households thereby forcing low-income women into a dangerous corner. This is a particularly concerning reality in single parent

households (the majority of whom are women) where family/friend support units may no longer be accessible due to COVID-19 movement restrictions.

An Attack on Wellbeing

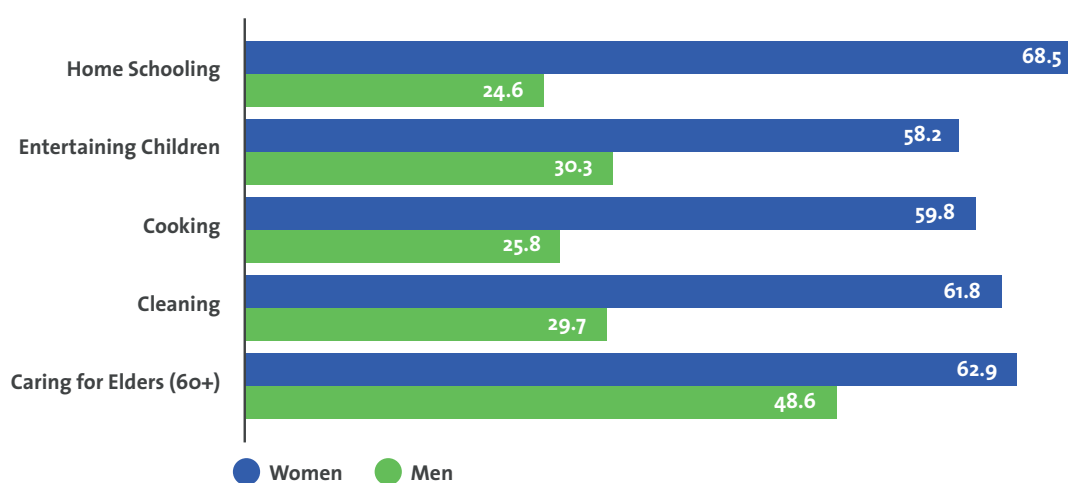
As the Prime Minister of Grenada Keith Mitchell aptly noted,

“COVID-19 is not only a health issue... it presents economic challenges and at the same time it embodies an attack on the mental wellbeing of citizens”⁸.

With the tremendous uncertainty, strains and anxieties brought by the pandemic, men and women alike have been facing a notable decrease in overall wellbeing. Alongside the more obvious physical public health emergency in the form of physical illness and devastating death rates, mental health has taken an equally concerning hit. The fear of becoming ill and of loved ones doing so, high death rates, lockdowns and socialising restrictions have reshaped human interaction. Simultaneously, economic downturns, soaring economic insecurity and terrible unemployment have reaped a multidimensional impact on persons globally.

⁸ Prime Minister's Address to the Nation on the 47th Anniversary of Independence, February 7th 2021,

FIGURE 12
Reported Increase in Unpaid Care Work by Sex (%)



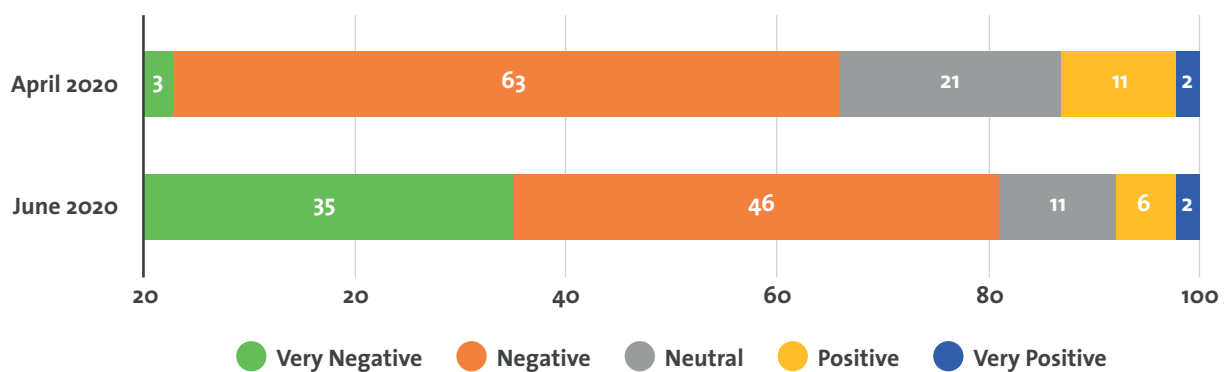
Source: Author's regional calculations using country-specific results from the IDB – The COVID-19 Crisis: Results from an Online Socioeconomic Survey July 2020

The WFP and CARICOM's (2020) two-part survey quantified the pandemic's harmful impact on wellbeing across the region. It showed that persons were coping and adapting less well in June 2020, compared to April 2020. Worryingly, those feeling that the pandemic has had a 'very negative' impact on them increased from 3% of respondents in April 2020 to 35% in June 2020, pointing to severe fatigue and disruption. This correlates with survey responses from NGMs where

some respondents noted community mental health support emerging as a new priority.

Overall these findings show that the impact of the pandemic has been far-reaching yet often unequal. While the pandemic has infiltrated all lives and livelihoods, it has also exploited the region's vulnerabilities, creating worse suffering for women.

FIGURE 13
How Well People are Coping & Adapting to the Pandemic (%)



Source: WFP and CARICOM – Food Security and Livelihoods Impact Survey Round 2: Regional Summary Report – July 2020



HOW ARE PEOPLE COPING?

The ‘Shadow Pandemic’ of domestic violence

Alongside the COVID-19 pandemic there exists the ‘shadow pandemic’ of increased domestic violence and violence against women and girls (VAWG) (Azcona et al., 2020). Enormous stress, lockdowns, lack of access to personal support networks, and restrictions on movement have created a situation ripe for domestic violence as perpetrators and victims are forced into the home for extended periods (UN Women, UNFPA, PAHO, 2020).

Recognising this, the World Health Organization called on countries to include services for survivors of domestic violence as essential services. Similarly, UN Women MCO Caribbean, jointly with UNFPA and PAHO, has released guidance notes on COVID-19 and Shelters for Women and Children survivors while urging gender-responsive relief and recovery measures that address this spike.

Pre-COVID-19 levels of domestic and gender-based violence (GBV), were already too high in the Caribbean region. UN Women MCO Caribbean-supported GBV national prevalence surveys reveal that appalling numbers of Caribbean women have experienced intimate partner violence – 55% in Guyana, 48% in Suriname, 44% in Trinidad and Tobago, and 39% in Grenada and Jamaica⁹. An earlier UNDP Caribbean Human Development Report found more women than men experience fear of sexual assault (30.4% compared to 11.1% of men), of being beaten by a spouse (11.5% compared to 8.6% of men) and of being killed (35.4% compared to 32.8% of men) (UNDP, 2012).

Amidst the pandemic, these incidents have increased significantly. Barbados observed a 38% increase in domestic violence reports during the lockdown, many of which were intimate partner violence¹⁰. Trinidad and Tobago saw a 119% increase in call volume to the National Domestic Hotline¹¹ for the period January to October 2020. The Trinidad and Tobago Police Service observed a 78% year-on-year increase in domestic violence reports between March and August 2020. The

months of May, June and July 2020 saw staggering upsurges of 113%, 149% and 132% respectively¹² in Trinidad and Tobago.

Anguilla observed equally devastating trends. Monthly data available for the first two quarters of 2020 show a jarring 125% increase in reports of domestic disputes in March 2020, while April 2020 saw an 88% spike¹³. On a regional scale, the IDB found that all countries surveyed showed an above 10% increase in respondents experiencing domestic violence since the pandemic, with a 23% rise in Suriname (IDB, 2020).

While these trends highlight a concerning increase in domestic violence, they also point to an encouraging rise in both formal reporting of domestic violence incidences and access to survivor resources. This is possibly indicative of greater citizen trust in both the police system and social services, alongside a higher prevalence of domestic violence during the pandemic. However, underreporting still remains a serious problem. Women’s economic insecurity as a result of the pandemic can disincentivise reporting of violence. Support networks are also less accessible with movement and physical distancing restrictions.

The worrying regional trends mirror a global rise in domestic violence brought on by the pandemic (Azcona et al, 2020). According to the joint UNDP and UN Women COVID-19 Global Gender Responsive Tracker, seven Caribbean countries enacted gender-sensitive and gender-responsive measures to combat the rise in GBV (See Table 1, Appendix A). These include strengthening existing services, 24-hour helplines, GBV training for healthcare workers and police, mainstreaming GBV and counselling services into law enforcement infrastructure, curfew exemptions for survivors in case of incidents, online applications for protection orders, and the classification of shelters and support services as essential.

However, gaps remain. For example, some countries in the region still lack permanent shelters which are critical amidst lockdowns. As noted in the **Dominica COVID-19 HEAT Report**, survivors can only shelter with volunteers or in temporary hotel accommodation due to a lack of permanent shelters on the island.

9 UN Women MCO Caribbean. Caribbean Women Count: Ending Violence against Women and Girls Data Hub. Accessed 25 February 2021, and 20 March 2021
<https://caribbeanwomenscount.unwomen.org/countries.html?country=3>

10 Royal Barbados Police Force

11 Trinidad and Tobago National Domestic Hotline

12 Trinidad and Tobago Police Service Crime and Problem Analysis Division

13 Source: National Gender Machinery – Ministry of Social Development, Government of Anguilla

Eating Less and Going Hungry

In response to financial and social strains associated with the pandemic, individuals have been forced to reduce or adapt their food intake. Surveys found over 50% of respondents either had difficulty eating or made changes to their diet for the first half of 2020, as a result of the pandemic (WFP & CARICOM, 2020; UNICEF, 2020). This is most severely felt in low-income households, single-parent households, households with multiple children and migrant families. The WFP and CARICOM (2020) found that slightly more women (28%) than men (25%) employed these coping mechanisms by eating less or skipping meals in the seven days prior to being surveyed.

According to the IDB (2020), 34% of households with incomes below country-specific minimum wages experienced hunger while 51.8% reported deleterious changes to diet. Overall, the pandemic has led to an estimated 2.9 million food insecure people in the region – a 71% increase in the period between April and June 2020 alone (WFP & CARICOM, 2020). As always, those with intersecting vulnerabilities are most at risk.

Borrowing from family and friends

Globally, remittances have fallen as income and employment losses reduce disposable incomes, especially for migrant families. This has been particularly felt in Jamaica, Suriname and Guyana where remittances are generally high.

In response, persons are borrowing from friends, family and employers, alongside remittances where possible. According to the IDB, this was most prevalent in Jamaica, Guyana and Trinidad and Tobago and predominantly in low-income households.

This coping mechanism shows the immense impact of COVID-19 on incomes as well as the insufficiency of government social relief programmes to adequately support many of the vulnerable.

Reliance on Pre-Existing and COVID-19 Social Protections

Across the Caribbean, governments have recognised the importance of bolstering social protection and

relief programmes to mediate the harmful effects of COVID-19. Most countries established COVID-19 relief and recovery plans within the first few months of the pandemic. These included:

- vertical and horizontal expansion¹⁴, or creation, of unemployment benefits and other national insurance benefits (sick leave etc.) including, in some cases, expansion to non-contributors;
- upscaled public assistance programmes (including cash transfers (CTs) and care packages) for vulnerable households;
- bank moratoriums on loan repayments;
- assistance to Micro, Small and Medium enterprises (MSMEs);
- targeted assistance to particularly vulnerable industries.

The tourism and agriculture industries appear to have received the greatest support. The ILO (2020) reported that regional governments have developed systems for providing at least partial relief to redundant tourism workers through food, utility aid and income support. It also noted that 15 out of 21 governments funnelled their support through employers, not employees, presumably for administrative ease.

To illustrate, in Jamaica, the government developed a COVID-19 Allocation of Resources for Employees (CARE) programme which included CTs to enterprises based on the number of employees retained, temporary CTs to those unemployed as a result of the pandemic, a soft loan fund for hard hit individuals and businesses, and grants for the poor and vulnerable. They also provided subsidies for small enterprises, support and direct assistance for small farmers, and assistance to the elderly and homeless, amongst other sector-specific programmes.

Barbados implemented the Adopt a Family programme to raise citizen support for vulnerable families, established the Barbados Employment and Sustainable Transformation (BEST) Plan for tourism sector assistance, provided essential care packages to various categories of vulnerable individuals throughout lockdowns, and upscaled and expanded unemployment benefits to the self-employed, amongst other initiatives.

¹⁴ Vertical expansion refers to an increase in amount (\$) provided under the unemployment scheme. Horizontal expansion refers to an increase in (categories of) persons covered under the scheme.

How are People Coping?

Saint Lucia enacted an Economic Recovery and Resilience Plan, followed by a Social Stabilisation Plan that included a host of relief efforts and incentives for business continuity, staff retention, and vulnerability reduction, costing an estimated 119.7 million XCD as of July 2020. This included temporary income support through the National Insurance Corporation for contributors and non-contributors, liquidity assistance for businesses and credit for vulnerable households.

Despite revenue contractions, regional governments significantly increased social spending to support their citizens and industries. Many public assistance programmes strived to target the most vulnerable, including the elderly and female-headed households (e.g. Antigua and Barbuda, The Bahamas and Saint

Kitts and Nevis). The UNICEF Eastern Caribbean survey revealed 9% of households with children received government support since the pandemic. The IDB showed greater coverage with 28% of respondents from low-income households receiving assistance as of June 2020, though there were national variations.

For countries with comparable data available, Jamaica, Barbados and The Bahamas saw low-income households benefitting the most from government social assistance programmes, evidencing good targeting of the vulnerable (IDB, 2020). However, overall, significant gaps remain in gender-responsive programming, particularly with respect to relieving the unpaid care burden, which risks trapping women in socio-economic insecurity.



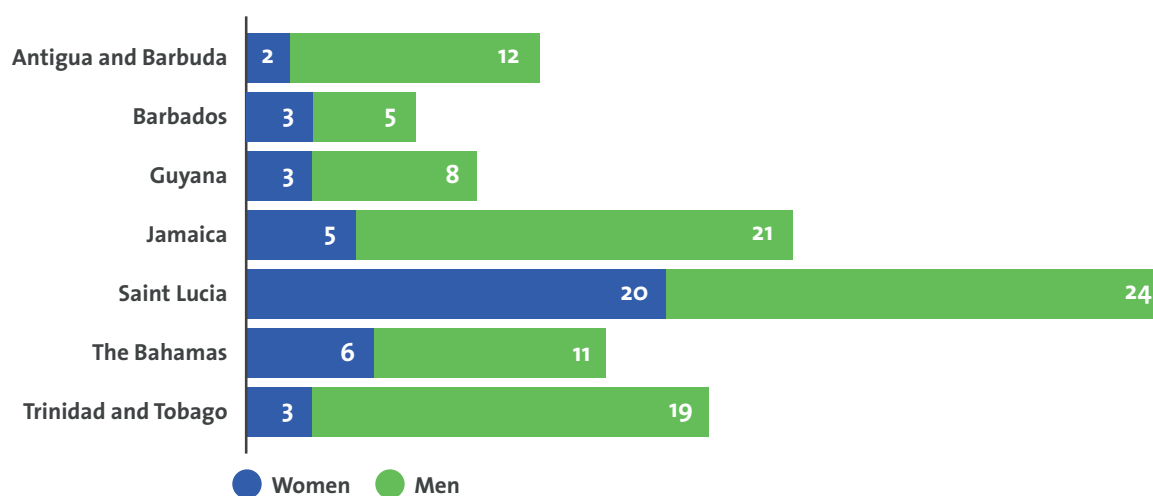
RELIEF AND
RECOVERY EFFORTS:
A GENDER LENS

Leadership and Decision-Making in Crisis Management

Generally, countries across the region created COVID-19 Economic Recovery Committees and/or COVID-19 expert health committees to guide their COVID-19 response. Health committees were generally populated with doctors, Ministry of Health officials and public health specialists convened to contain the spread of the virus, guide medical responses and advise on public health measures. In most circumstances economic committees were populated with cabinet members, alongside either permanent participation from, or consultation with, public and private sector actors including Chambers of Commerce, business and sector association representatives (e.g. Tourism Associations) and trade unions. Economic committees were convened to guide national socio-economic relief and recovery responses.

In every case where members of economic recovery bodies were publicly documented, women were under-represented. This mirrors global trends that see women making up only 24% of membership in COVID-19 task forces across 225 countries¹⁵. In Trinidad and Tobago, only three women sat on the 22-person Roadmap to Recovery Committee¹⁶. In Jamaica, six women sat on the committee of 27¹⁷. Some nations did slightly better than others. For example, Barbados maintained 3 out of 8 female members of the COVID-19 Cabinet Sub-Committee¹⁸, and 20 women sat on Saint Lucia's 44-member Economic Recovery Multi-Sectoral Committee¹⁹. This mirrors worrying, yet persistent, statistics that see women underrepresented in Caribbean public life and leadership positions, despite often achieving higher levels of education compared to men (Budlender & Iyehen, 2019).

FIGURE 14²⁰
Breakdown of COVID-19 Economic Recovery Committees



15 UNDP and UN Women Global Gender Response Tracker: COVID-19 Task Force Participation Fact Sheet https://data.undp.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/COVID-19-Global-Tracker-Methodological-Note-v_March2021.pdf

16 <https://www.opm.gov.tt/post-cabinet-media-briefing-thursday-16-april-2020/>

17 <https://jis.gov.jm/covid-19-economic-recovery-task-force-established/>

18 Senator The Honourable Jerome Walcott, MP in an address to the nation on 30 January 2021

19 <http://www.govt.lc/media.govt.lc/www/resources/publications/saint-lucia-economic-recovery-and-resilience-plan.pdf>

20 Remaining data retrieved from:

Antigua and Barbuda – <http://erc.gov.ag/index.php/ERC-report/>

The Bahamas – <https://opm.gov.bs/economic-recovery-committee-executive-summary-report-2020/>

Guyana – <https://dpi.gov.gy/nctf-announcements-following-virtual-meeting/>

Participant selection also seemed to generally lack sufficient consideration for expertise in gender-responsive policy, programming, and budgeting. While some women may have brought experience in women's issues alongside their present roles, most women on the committees were selected for their expertise in business, finance, economics, education or law and, while their value cannot be overstated, this alone is insufficient to tackle the intersecting vulnerabilities outlined in this report. Actively including women, particularly women with gender expertise in these bodies, increases the likelihood of adopting a gender lens in policymaking. This, in turn, encourages more understanding of how the crisis and responsive policies impact women and men differently, therefore providing a foundation for more suitable policymaking that targets women and men's unique vulnerabilities.

Notably, the Jamaican COVID-19 Economic Recovery Task Force included a gender activist which is, by all accounts, an excellent sign. Though a representative from the Single Father's Association of Trinidad and Tobago sat on the Trinidad and Tobago Committee, there was no such representation from women's organisations.

Civic Participation: Inclusion or Active Participation?

Many Caribbean countries implemented Town Hall public meetings (e.g. British Virgin Islands), held public Q&As (e.g. Barbados) or invited public recommendations (e.g. The Bahamas) to invite public participation. These provided valuable opportunities for citizens and civil society organisations to engage directly with government, enabling participation and consultation. However, this alone does not provide a seat at the decision-making table.

While NGMs were active in implementing and advising on scaled-up emergency relief efforts – by sitting on boards, advising programmes, providing policy/technical briefs – they were less involved in longer-term recovery planning. This represents a missed opportunity to tackle deep-rooted issues that perpetuate women's vulnerability in crises and outside of them. As a result, there was a distinct lack of gender-transformative policy which could have reduced women's, and by extension the region's, vulnerability to future shocks.

The result is mixed responses among NGM respondents on whether COVID-19 containment, relief and recovery

efforts have been suitably gender-responsive. Respondents point to the targeting of social relief towards the vulnerable (particularly female-headed households and low-income households with multiple children) and scaled up support for domestic violence survivors as a sign of gender-responsive programming. More critical respondents point to women's persistent suffering, their disproportionate job loss, and ineffective implementation of support in addressing the demands of unpaid care work.

COVID-19 Policies & Measures: Gender-responsive?

A joint UNDP and UN Women COVID-19 Global Gender Responsive Tracker²¹ monitors measures developed and implemented by governments in response to COVID-19 and highlights those that encompass a gender lens. Measures are considered gender-responsive if they address: **(1) Women's Economic Security** (social protection and support for feminised sectors); **(2) Unpaid Care Work**; or **(3) Violence against Women**.

Data are available for nine of the twelve countries included in this analysis, though Grenada and Saint Kitts and Nevis are also included in Table 1. Findings show that, in keeping with global trends, measures tackling Violence against Women and Girls were the most prominent (33) among the 12 countries analysed, followed by Women's Economic Security (10) and Unpaid Care work (7). Trinidad and Tobago enacted the largest number of gender-sensitive measures (10), while The Bahamas enacted the least (1)²².

Many of the VAWG measures included strengthened services for survivors (hotlines, psychosocial services, shelters, judicial access) and information campaigns about GBV and available resources²³. These efforts are encouraging and have prevented even worse suffering for women and girls, though gaps remain. Measures relieving the unpaid care work burden have unfortunately been largely overlooked despite vast increases in such duties, and more could be done to mediate women's economic insecurity through targeted stimulus and support.

21 <https://data.undp.org/gendertracker/>

22 Totals include author's additions from secondary research.

23 See Appendix A for comprehensive table of gender-responsive COVID-19 measures.

Recommendations

Implementing gender-responsive measures is critical to ensuring an efficient and effective COVID-19 response and recovery for all. Gender must be mainstreamed across all policies in order to remedy pre-existing inequalities and provide equitable assistance. Concrete recommendations to develop gender-responsive measures, including examples, are illustrated below for specific issues and sector solutions.

1. **Actively include women, national gender machineries, and gender specialists** into all stages of **response and decision-making** for transformative recovery, wider implementation and longer-term impact. This provides high-level access to nuanced knowledge, data, community networks and systems to enable more robust planning and informed decision-making for equitable policymaking. Jamaica has led the region by including a gender specialist on its COVID-19 Economic Recovery Committee. Antigua and Barbuda's former Minister of Social Transformation and Human Resource Development, Youth and Gender Affairs also sat on their economic recovery committee, though under a new capacity.
2. Invest in **sex-disaggregated data collection** and national gender impact assessments to inform **evidence-based policy-making**. Thus far Dominica and Suriname have committed to participation in UN Women MCO Caribbean's national COVID-19 Gender Impact Assessments. With the resulting data, policymakers are better equipped with the tools to make gender-responsive policy.
3. Enhance **social protections for women burdened by unpaid care work**, through flexi-work, paid leave, child benefits and accessible childcare services. Trinidad and Tobago's 'Pandemic Leave' has allowed women (and men) working in the public sector to take paid leave in situations where they have no alternative means of childcare, and promotes flexible working arrangements wherever possible. The private sector has been encouraged to follow suit. Additionally, the Sao Tome government committed to bi-monthly payments to low-income mothers in recognition of their disproportionate burden throughout the pandemic.
4. Deliver scaled up and **targeted assistance to feminised industries** (including tourism and trade) and **MSMEs** through targeted grants, loans, stimulus and incentives for employee retention. The Barbados Employment and Sustainable Transformation (BEST) scheme provided targeted assistance to the tourism industry to encourage job retention at 80% pay, environmentally sustainable adaptation of existing infrastructure, and digitisation of operational systems. Similarly, Jamaica's Business Employee Support and Transfer of Cash (BEST Cash) Scheme provided cash transfers to tourism-related businesses. Women predominate in the tourism industry.
5. Commit to **addressing deep-rooted gender inequalities** including the pay gap, harmful gender stereotypes, toxic masculinities, and unpaid care work burdens that are exacerbated in times of crisis.
6. Enhance **protection and support for survivors of domestic violence and other forms of gender-based violence** through toll-free hotlines, permanent shelters, counselling services, sexual and reproductive health services, and financial assistance, as well as public education about GBV and swift access to justice. Fiji has created a comprehensive GBV response including establishment of a GBV Working Group led by the Fiji Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation, a public education campaign; training of healthcare professionals and police; scaled up resources for helplines and shelters; access to psychological and referral services; classification of GBV services as essential, and access to police transportation during curfew for survivors.
7. **Include informal workers** – including domestic workers – **and the self-employed into social protection schemes**, including unemployment benefits and sick leave. As a short-term relief, the government of Togo has set up an unconditional cash transfer scheme for any adult informal worker whose income had been disrupted by COVID-19. Women are receiving higher (maximum) pay-outs than men as they are more directly involved in nurturing entire households. The majority of recipients thus far are women. While this is a commendable and gender-responsive public assistance programme, long-term inclusion into social protections is needed, both during crisis and outside of it.
8. **Provide low-interest loans for MSMEs** to assist liquidity and encourage economic diversification through entrepreneurship with particular emphasis on the green economy. Egypt has committed a financing portfolio to finance MSMEs owned by women and young graduates, expecting to support 216,000 projects over the next five years.

9. Retrain (predominantly female) retrenched tourism workers in areas related to ICT, the green economy and food security. The Barbados Ministry of Labour and Social Partnership Relations has offered entrepreneurship workshops, online Coursera re-training courses aimed at retrenched tourism workers, and free training schemes in partnership with the ILO.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

TABLE 1
COVID-19 Gender-Responsive Measures in Caribbean Countries

Country	Women's Economic Security	Unpaid Care	Violence against Women and Girls	Total
Antigua and Barbuda	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> COVID-19 Emergency Food Assistance Programme for vulnerable families including elderly, persons with disabilities and female-headed households. Relief packages for single-parent (mostly single-mothers) and no-income households. 	–	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> National GBV Hotline for 24/7 support, with WhatsApp Chat Support and virtual referral. Toll free access to domestic violence helplines through NGM partnership with telecommunications company. Online and TV Information campaign by the NGM aimed at women and the LGBTI community. Remote requests for protection orders established through Eastern Caribbean Supreme Courts. Advocacy campaign about GBV and resources available including technical guidance and social media assets provided by UN Women MCO Caribbean. 	7
The Bahamas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Emergency food assistance and COVID-19 Emergency Food Coupons to vulnerable people, especially female-headed households (public-private contributions). 	–	–	1
Barbados	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Barbados Employment and Sustainable Transformation (BEST) plan including stimulus for tourism sector employers for employee retention, environmentally sustainable adaptations and digital transformation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Health guidelines issued to protect domestic workers during COVID-19. Support and training to home care workers (PPE, prevention strategies etc.) who are primarily women. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Social services hotline expanded to provide services to victims of abuse. Virtual courts for 'urgent' cases including VAWG cases. Shelter for Abused Women and Barbados Family Planning Association classified as essential services. Information campaign to end VAWG including technical guidance and social media assets provided by UN Women MCO Caribbean and UNFPA. 	7
Dominica	–	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Unemployment grant programme for individuals with child dependents or persons under the age of 18 who have been unemployed as a result of COVID-19. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Information campaign to end VAWG including technical guidance and social media assets provided by UN Women MCO Caribbean. Information dissemination about National Psychosocial Support Hotline with access to long-term counselling and support. Online applications for protection orders facilitated. 	4

Country	Women's Economic Security	Unpaid Care	Violence against Women and Girls	Total
Grenada	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implementation of the Community Economic Infrastructure Program 2020-2022 accelerated. Designed to support public infrastructure and livelihoods through labour-intensive public works. Ten percent of workers must be women to remedy the sector's gender gap. 	–	–	1
Guyana	–	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Free child care to frontline workers providing an essential service or key public service. Pilot targeting Healthcare professionals, police officers, prison officers, fire service officers, security officers and army officers, especially women. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Two 24/7 toll-free GBV hotlines, online services, safe shelter. Online filing of urgent claims and virtual sittings of the Magistrates Courts. Information dissemination campaign on GBV and available resources. Information campaign about VAWG including technical guidance and social media assets provided by UN Women MCO Caribbean. 	5
Jamaica	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Jamaica Tourism Grant providing 1.2 billion USD in grants to business operating in tourism, or tourism-affected sectors. COVID-19 Allocation of Resources for Employees (CARE) programme including the Business Employee Support and Transfer of Cash (BEST Cash) Scheme providing CTs to tourism related businesses for employee retention, CTs to workers made redundant by COVID-19 and grants to struggling individuals and companies. Programme of Advancement Through Health and Education (PATH) payments for pregnant and lactating women expedited. Support for adolescent mothers (financial and 'dignity support'). 	–	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Survivor Helplines. Courts open during lockdown for domestic violence cases. Two centres established for counselling, referrals and follow-ups. 	7
Saint Kitts and Nevis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Care packages and meals to vulnerable groups including single mothers, sick individuals and the elderly courtesy of the SKN Labour Party. 	–	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strengthened counselling and support services for GBV survivors. Toll-free government hotline established in partnership with telecommunications company FLOW. NGM providing referral services to clients throughout lockdown and partnered with the Special Victims Unit (SVU) of the Police Force to complete applications for survivors to access the government social protection programme. 	4

Country	Women's Economic Security	Unpaid Care	Violence against Women and Girls	Total
Saint Lucia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> PPE and Hygiene Care Packages, including sanitary napkins for women, to vulnerable families. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> \$100 increases in CTs under the Child Disability Grant, the Persons Living with HIV Grant, and the Grant for Children in Foster care. 	–	2
Suriname	–	–	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reporting unit for sexual harassment in the workplace established by Ministry of Defence enabling anonymous complaints, investigations and counselling for survivors and perpetrators. Increased police surveillance and court orders allowing daily submission of protection orders. PPE for face-to-face case management. GBV/domestic violence referral pathways including WhatsApp, e-mail, telephone or in person (UNFPA, UNDP, Global Affairs Canada). Information campaign on GBV (UNFPA, UNDP, Global Affairs Canada). Psychosocial support hotline for adults and children (Social Workers' Association, Surinamese Association of Psychologists and Special Education and UNICEF). Referral pathway booklet for GBV services launched, television information campaign and awareness activities. 	7
Trinidad and Tobago	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> \$50million contribution to grant facility for Tobago hoteliers to upgrade their premises. Women dominate this sector. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pandemic Leave covering persons unable to work remotely with dependents, allowing them to stay at home without penalty. Flexi-work arrangements linked to Pandemic Leave to encourage remote and flexible working arrangements. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased government funding for GBV media campaign. Police service disseminating information on GBV. Automatic extension of some protection orders. New government shelters for victims of GBV and support for existing ones. Domestic violence Hotline. Support services and counsellors at police stations. Protocol established for virtual court hearings and online or phone applications of protection orders facilitated. 	10

Appendix B

Surveys were distributed to regional NGMs and CSOs via email.

Survey Questions

1. Was your organisation engaged in national COVID-19 relief/recovery efforts? If yes, in what capacity? (examples: expert consulting, committee participation, data collection)
2. What new challenges and/or opportunities has COVID-19 presented for your organisation in meeting its objectives? (examples: increased or new need, more/less political voice, decreased visibility of cause)
3. Have national COVID-19 containment, relief and recovery efforts been adequately gender-responsive?





**COVID-19
RESPONSE**

