

UN warns excluding women from top jobs threatens Covid-19 recovery

By Sharon Kimathi

8 Jul 2021

Global efforts to recover from the Covid-19 pandemic are under threat because women are being excluded from critical decision-making roles, the United Nations said on Thursday, 8 July.



A woman wears a protective face mask as demonstrators keep social distance by holding onto purple ribbons as they protest for women rights and against child abuse, amid the spread of the coronavirus disease (Covid-19), in Istanbul, Turkey, 20 May 2020. Reuters/Umit Bektas

Only 6% of coronavirus task forces, which are responsible for coordinating government responses to the deadly virus, have equal numbers of men and women, while 11% have no women at all, found the UN Development Programme (UNDP).

"The pivotal decisions being made today will affect the well-being of people and planet for generations to come," Achim Steiner, UNDP's administrator, said in a statement.

"Sustainable recovery is only possible when women are able to play a full role in shaping a post-Covid-19 world that works for all of us."

New data by the UNDP and the Gender Inequality Research Lab at the University of Pittsburgh found that women hold less than one in three top leadership positions in public administration globally, jeopardising a green and inclusive recovery.

While 58% of employees in health ministries are women, they only hold 34% of health policy decision-making positions, their research in 170 countries found.



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Economic and social fallout from Covid-19

The analysis comes as many countries grapple with the economic and social fallout from Covid-19, which UNDP said could push another 105 million women and girls into poverty by 2030.

UNDP highlighted an "alarming rise in violence against women and girls" and the "large loss of jobs and income, which are threatening to set back progress on gender equality".

It said that governments are more responsive and accountable and the quality of public services, particularly around health, childcare and violence against women, significantly improves when women take leadership roles in public administration.

"While the findings are disheartening, they are not surprising," Henriette Kolb, head of the gender and economic inclusion group at the World Bank Group's International Finance Corporation, told the Thomson Reuters Foundation.

"Women in both the public and private sector are severely underrepresented in leadership positions. However, if we want to create a resilient, equitable, inclusive and growing economy, we need everybody to have a seat at the leadership table."

Source: Thomson Reuters Foundation

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