



# Practical Gender Equality Actions to Improve Workplace Resilience to COVID-19 Impacts

## Tips for workplace leaders and individuals

### **You've got this.**

The future will look back at how businesses and individuals rose to meet the challenges posed by COVID-19. Become an example of how to successfully respond to a pandemic with practical gender equality strategies to strengthen your workplace and employees' resilience.

## Strategies for workplace leaders



### Work flexibility & care work

Workplace flexibility has been linked to  
**greater productivity**  
&  
**reduced stress**  
even before COVID-19.

Traditionally, women have often been expected to be glowing, smiling superwomen who can “do it all.” Even before the pandemic broke out, women globally were grappling with 3 times more care work than men. Now, already-uneven care burdens are growing more lopsided as schools and daycare shut down, family members grow sick, and household hygiene routines intensify. When all working members in a household can access flexible working arrangements, they are better able to equitably distribute household and caregiving responsibilities.

- ✓ **Remote & in-person:** Where possible, make project deadlines flexible & permit non-standard working hours to allow for shifting home responsibilities.



- ✓ **Remote:** Share resources that encourage an equitable distribution of care responsibilities.
- ✓ **Remote & in-person:** Foster a caring culture that recognizes your team's responsibilities at home.
- ✓ **Remote:** Identify opportunities to support virtual training and upskilling of staff when a reduction in regular work creates availability. Professional development can support ongoing engagement of remote employees.
- ✓ **Remote & in-person:** Review and update HR policies on flex-time, leave, and childcare, not just for this time, but to improve these practices over the long-term.

### Resources & Tools

- ✓ **Guidelines:** *Family-friendly policies and other good workplace practices in the context of COVID-19: Key steps employers can take* (UNICEF, ILO, & UN Women)
- ✓ **Guidelines:** *Childcare in the COVID-19 era: A guide for employers - Interim guidance for employers in a rapidly changing global situation* (IFC)
- ✓ **Tool:** *25 online tools for building company culture* (BlogIn)
- ✓ **Tool:** *Toolkit for creating a positive workplace culture* (Skills for Care)
- ✓ **Learning resource:** *How to create a positive workplace culture* (Forbes)

### Virtual Trainings

- ✓ *Gender 101* (University of Hongkong)
- ✓ *Basics on unconscious bias* (Grovo)
- ✓ *Sexual harassment training* (Grovo)
- ✓ *Diversity and inclusion in the workplace* (Coursera)
- ✓ *Inclusive leadership training: Becoming a successful leader* (edX)
- ✓ *Inclusive leadership training: Leading with effective communication* (edX)
- ✓ *Optimizing diversity on teams* (Coursera)



## Mental wellbeing

# 20% of remote workers globally identify **loneliness** as the biggest struggle of remote working.

Many people who have shifted to working from home due to COVID-19 may miss the social interactions at work. In fact, remote workers have traditionally struggled with loneliness and isolation. Regular video calls, chatting applications, and emails are effective communication channels that, when appropriately used, can be leveraged to organize workflows and also stay connected on a personal level.

- ✓ **Remote & in-person:** Share self-care resources and tips among your team on a wide range of topics, such as kids and COVID-19; nutrition at home; maintaining motivation in challenging times; and communication tips for families.
- ✓ **Remote & in-person:** Begin team calls & meetings with a check in on how team members are coping.
- ✓ **Remote:** Encourage teams to brainstorm creative approaches such as scheduling a virtual coffee hour or lunch, online book club, or other activities for interested parties.

### Resources & Tools

- ✓ **Learning resource:** *[Social distancing? Here's how to prioritize self-care](#) (Johns Hopkins)*
- ✓ **Learning resource:** *[A blueprint for remote working: Lessons from China](#) (McKinsey & Company)*
- ✓ **Guidelines:** *[Ergonomic tips when teleworking](#) (ILO)*
- ✓ **Guidelines:** *[How to manage the loneliness and isolation of remote workers](#) (Gallup)*
- ✓ **Guidelines:** *[Working from home with kids feels unsustainable. Here's how to ease the burden](#) (Vox)*
- ✓ **Tool:** *[Tips for parents and caregivers during COVID-19 school closures: Supporting children's wellbeing and learning](#) (Save the Children & MHPSS)*
- ✓ **Guidelines:** *[Easy, affordable and healthy eating tips during the coronavirus disease \(COVID-19\) outbreak](#) (UNICEF)*
- ✓ **Learning resource:** *[Use COVID-19 to build better family communication](#) (UNICEF)*



## Domestic violence

Worldwide,  
**30% of women**  
have experienced  
**intimate partner violence.**

During the current COVID-19 global quarantine, domestic violence rates are spiking as victims are locked in with their abusers and cut off from existing support networks. For survivors, intimate partner violence often leads to post-traumatic stress, anxiety, and sleep disorders, and also negatively impacts their ability to focus at work. In fact, it is estimated that violence against women costs the global economy \$1.5 trillion annually, given direct costs and labor productivity losses.

- ✓ **Remote & in-person:** Learn to recognize signs of violence (physical marks, uncharacteristic work habits, sudden or change or inconsistent work performance, emotional distress, change in behavior) and most importantly, respond appropriately (ask questions & do not jump to conclusions, offer help but let the survivor make decisions on actions and remain in control).
- ✓ **Remote & in-person:** Provide help for someone that discloses it to you by: keeping in regular touch to check if they are safe; discretion in communications to decrease risk of additional violence; identifying and sharing services for survivors of violence; being prepared to call emergency services if urgent help is required.
- ✓ **Remote & in-person:** Upskill your HR staff with virtual training on taking a survivor-centered approach to handling disclosure of violence, including sexual harassment, GBV, and domestic violence.
- ✓ **Remote & in-person:** Share resources with your team, such as a hotline number, contact information for local shelters or support organizations, and digital tools.
- ✓ **Remote & in-person:** Consider training male and female employees about domestic violence (recognizing what it is and impacts, how to prevent, anger management).

### Resources & Tools

- ✓ **Learning resource:** *[Resources for employers](#) (Workplaces Respond to Domestic and Sexual Violence)*
- ✓ **Learning resource:** *[Resources for coworkers/survivors](#) (Workplaces Respond to Domestic and Sexual Violence)*
- ✓ **Tool:** *[Violence against women during COVID-19](#) (WHO)*
- ✓ **Training:** *[Virtual training exercise: A supervisor responds to an employee's experience of domestic violence](#) (Workplaces Respond to Domestic and Sexual Violence)*
- ✓ **Training:** *[Virtual training exercise: A supervisor responds to an employee who experienced sexual assault](#) (Workplaces Respond to Domestic and Sexual Violence)*



- ✓ **Case study:** *Ending violence is our business: Workplace responses to intimate partner violence in Asia and the Pacific* (UN Women)
- ✓ **Training:** *Handbook: Addressing violence and harassment against women in the world of work* (UN Women)
- ✓ **Learning resource:** *Survivor-centred approaches to eradicating GBV: Centring survivor experiences, intersectionality and restoring power* (Protection Collaborative)
- ✓ **Guidelines:** *How to revamp your harassment prevention program* (SHRM)

For more information on addressing the increased risk of violence against women during COVID-19, see Equilo's brief on [Strategies for responding to violence against women](#).



## Crisis response planning

Minority women are  
**twice as likely**  
as men to be furloughed  
due to COVID-19

The changing circumstances from COVID-19 affect some companies' ability to make payroll and continue to operate efficiently, even when providing essential services. Some workers may be more financially resilient than others, and better able to cope with decreased paychecks. Some may need to take time off work due to increased care needs at home.

- ✓ **Remote & in-person:** Consult with employees about their availability to continue working. If feasible, provide preventative paid leave to those unable to work due to the impacts of COVID-19.
- ✓ **Remote & in-person:** Search for special COVID-19 government-sponsored or private loans to ease the financial burden of paid leave.
- ✓ **Remote & in-person:** Ensure women are represented in crisis task forces and response teams and all decisions related to the workplace during COVID-19.
- ✓ **Remote & in-person:** Consult women when making decisions to respond to COVID-19 and address women's specific concerns.
- ✓ **Remote & in-person:** Anticipate the different effects that crisis response strategy, decisions, and plans may have on women and men.
- ✓ **Remote & in-person:** Ensure any budget planning, cuts, or other support is approached with a gender lens (i.e., there aren't a disproportionate amount of female employees laid off).
  - Identify numbers of women and men in departments/units for which retrenchment is planned.



- Set targets to reduce inequitable gender impact (e.g., percentage of women in retrenchment plan may not exceed the overall percentage of women in the company).
- Identify opportunities to transfer women to other technical areas to still meet gender targets.
- When performance is a decision-making factor, consider long-term performance, and not performance since COVID-19 given that women may be temporarily and disproportionately burdened by care responsibilities.
- If you must furlough staff, ask if there are any initial volunteers, and then assess before planning to furlough other staff.

### Resources & Tools

- ✓ **Tool:** *Country policy responses to COVID-19* (ILO)
- ✓ **Tool:** *COVID-19 capital relief for entrepreneurs, non-profits, and businesses globally* (Duke Fuqua School of Business)
- ✓ **Guidelines:** *Building emergency planning scenarios for viral pandemics* (IRDR)
- ✓ **Guidelines:** *Guidance for action: Gender-sensitive private sector response to COVID-19 for accelerated and inclusive economic recovery* (UN Women)
- ✓ **Learning resource:** *COVID-19 and gender equality: A call to action for the private sector* (WE EMPOWER G7 Programme)
- ✓ **Tool:** *Free COVID-19 social impact assessment* (Socialsuite)
- ✓ **Tool:** *The COVID-19 response playbook: A guide for how to lead and build resilience for the next normal* (Salesforce)
- ✓ **Learning resource:** *Reimagining the post-pandemic organization* (McKinsey & Company)



## Community engagement

COVID-19 has impacted every community and every aspect of life. You may be well positioned in your community to assist those in need. Support your community in a way that will reflect your company values.

- ✓ **Remote & in-person:** Workers interacting with home-bound customers in person or over the phone can refer women to domestic violence resources.
- ✓ **Remote:** Use your platforms to combat harmful misinformation and disinformation in your communities.
- ✓ **In-person:** Partner with local food banks to provide food relief for vulnerable customers.
- ✓ **Remote & in-person:** If financially feasible, allow for customers to postpone payments or pay in installments to ease financial strain.

### Resources & Tools

- ✓ **Guidelines:** *Social stigma associated with the coronavirus disease* (UNICEF, WHO, IFRC)
- ✓ **Training:** *Handbook: Addressing violence and harassment against women in the world of work* (UN Women)
- ✓ **Learning resource:** *Energy access takes center stage in fighting COVID-19 (Coronavirus) and powering recovery in Africa* (World Bank)





## Strategies for individuals



### Mental wellbeing

Self-quarantining, managing the increased demands of work and home life, and emotionally coping with the current world reality can lead to stress, anxiety, and feeling overwhelmed.

- ✓ Stay connected with friends and family over the phone or video calls. Plan virtual social events such as group exercise, games, or after work gatherings with friends and coworkers.
- ✓ Stay physically active with daily walks when possible, or activity within the home.
- ✓ Get enough sleep and maintain a regular schedule.
- ✓ Stay mentally active – explore personal and professional development opportunities offered online. Check with local learning institutes for resources.
- ✓ Be patient with yourself.

### Resources & Tools

- ✓ **Learning resource:** *Social distancing? Here's how to prioritize self-care* (Johns Hopkins)
- ✓ **Training:** *Webinar series: Coping with coronavirus - Dealing with daily stress, anxiety, and a range of other emotions* (Harvard Health)
- ✓ **Case study:** *Virtual brown bag lunch: How do virtual teams create the 'water cooler' chat?* (Deloitte)
- ✓ **Training:** *The science of well-being* (Yale)



## Domestic violence

Quarantine measures and economic stress due to COVID-19 have caused an increase in domestic violence.

- ✓ Look up local hotlines and digital services for survivors of domestic violence.
- ✓ Maintain contact with or reach out to people in your life you trust and who support you.
- ✓ Make a safety plan in case violence against you/your children escalates, including identifying a neighbor, friend, or shelter for emergency, keep essential items available if you need to leave quickly, have a code with a neighbor or friend, and plan how you will exit the home safely and reach your destination.
- ✓ Talk to a trusted person at work. They may be able to adjust work responsibilities to help.
- ✓ If you are afraid you are hurting someone you love, try to remove yourself from the situation, count to ten and practice anything that calms you, talk to a trusted friend (colleague, religious leader, coworker), seek services if needed, reduce alcohol consumption, and demonstrate kindness and patience in words and actions.

### Resources & Tools

- ✓ **Tool:** *MyPlan App*
- ✓ **Tool:** *Pod worksheet (BATJC)*
- ✓ **Tool:** *Violence against women during COVID-19 (WHO)*
- ✓ **Tool:** *Domestic violence country context (Equilo)*



## Care work

On average,  
**85% of fathers**  
in seven countries say they would be  
“willing to do anything”  
to be involved in caring for their new child.

Impacts of COVID-19 have significantly increased care work globally, which disproportionately affects women.

- ✓ Set a schedule with your partner to trade off childcare duties and working time.
- ✓ Weigh work schedules and divide household responsibilities with your partner.
- ✓ When possible, take breaks to avoid burnout. Recognize your partner's need for breaks as well.
- ✓ Become a #HeForShe partner and father: share the load, get involved with the kids, create a safe and respectful home environment, don't be a passive by-stander (e.g., be proactive and check in with women you know), develop clear communication, and don't forget to play!

### Resources & Tools

- ✓ **Tool:** [8 tips for working from home with kids during COVID-19](#) (Yale Medicine)
- ✓ **Learning resource:** [You should've asked](#) (Emma)
- ✓ **Learning resource:** [How men can help shift gender norms during COVID-19 crisis - #HeForShe](#) (UN Women)
- ✓ **Guidelines:** [Working from home with kids feels unsustainable. Here's how to ease the burden](#) (Vox)

