

## **PRESS RELEASE**

# **Women's leadership will be critical for rethinking the future in the post-COVID-19 era**

## **#BeyondTheOutbreak**

**The COVID-19 crisis is affecting women and men differently. The twelfth thematic live learning experience provided an opportunity for local and regional women leaders** from across the world to outline their key strategies, concerns and experiences, recalling their critical role on the frontlines of the crisis.

The session highlighted some key topics identified by women leaders the world over. The increase in gender violence in situations of confinement, **the role of women in global leadership**, the need for a **new governance system that considers women as critical actors** in the rebuilding phase, and **the state of the world in the COVID-19 aftermath** were among the critical issues explored by participants.

UCLG Women leaders had agreed on a call to action called **[Women's Leadership for the PostCOVID19 Era](#) and the main components. Calling for a sustainable and gender-equal future were presented during the session.**

The session was introduced by **Åsa Regnér**, Deputy Executive Director of UN Women, who highlighted the current situation for women in the world. Regnér mentioned, in particular, that even though "*women are sought after, they are still paid less than men*". She explained the situation was particularly bad in health-care work, especially in relation to the care of older persons, for which many women are often not paid at all.

**Maimunah Mohd Sharif, UN-Habitat Executive Director** urged all spheres of government and stakeholders to put women and girls at the centre of efforts in the recovery. She argued that women and girls are more at risk in the pandemic, in particular as they will be most affected by loss of jobs, and called for local and regional leaders to take measures to curb this.

*"Women need to be at the centre of global decision-making and have a seat at the table. We need to pay special focus to older persons and women and girls living with disability, who can easily be forgotten in the recovery."*

**Thembisile Nkadimeng**, Mayor of Polokwane and UCLG Co-President, argued for the importance of women's self-organization in order to better rebuild in the aftermath. She called for national governments to act on gendered inequalities

and enhance well-being with universal healthcare and social protection. She also called for the development of an equality framework in urban planning and legislation to ensure full inclusion of women and girls in the social fabric of cities and regions.

*"As identified in our UCLG Decalogue for the Post COVID-19 era, we know well that the sacrifices that we are asking from this and future generations need to lead to more just and equality driven societies where we take care of each other."*

The high-level discussion was opened by **Ada Colau, Mayor of Barcelona**, and **UCLG Special Envoy to the United Nations**, who highlighted how the crisis has made it all the more important to have decent public healthcare systems. She, explained that, in the aftermath, it will be necessary to develop a new economy that puts people in the centre, that does not speculate with basic needs, adopts premises of the feminist, pacifist, and ecologist movements, and empowers local and regional governments to provide solutions to communities.

**Emilia Saiz, UCLG Secretary General**, moderated the discussions arguing that, looking into the future, empowering women and girls is critical and argued that a different type of partnership between spheres of government and the civil society, in particular women's groups, is needed for the aftermath of the crisis. **Emilia Saiz** also commended the clear call of the local women leaders to ensure that gender equality is at the heart of the recovery plans. Furthermore it is *"critical to commit to the global agendas in the recovery, we cannot allow priorities to shift and consider the SDGs and the New Urban Agenda as accessories,"* she stated.

**Claudia López, Mayor of Bogotá**, argued that the recovery phase needs to respond to the deep questions that were being asked before the outbreak. The values of solidarity and empathy are needed, she argued, to respond to this pandemic and those that will come. **Pilar Díaz, Mayor of Esplugues de Llobregat**, also highlighted the value of care work, and of those people - the great majority of them women- who carry out this work. Putting care in the centre of policies is integral, she argued, for a people-centred recovery.

Gender violence was a common theme in the conversation, with **Souad Abderrahim, Mayor of Tunis** highlighting how her city works in real time to protect and support women survivors of violence, even during the pandemic. The **Vice Mayor of Quito, Gissela Chalá** also called for developing political strategies to eradicate gender violence including psychological and patrimonial violence against women. The recovery, she stated, will only come if we reinvent ourselves from with a Right to the City approach.

**Carola Gunnarsson, Mayor of Sala and Vice-President of UCLG for Europe**, also argued that violence towards women and girls could become a real crisis in the coming months, and called for gender equality to be framed as a question of human rights. She also highlighted how the crisis will affect migrant and refugee families.

**Rohey Malick Lowe, Mayor of Banjul**, highlighted that incorporating a gendered planning of cities means designing for all women as in the statement of the Executive Director of UN-Habitat. She argued that, in the aftermath, women will need to be in the centre of decision-making since they have been most affected by the crisis and therefore have a critical perspective. **Fatimetou Abdel Malick, President of Nouakchott Region** echoed this sentiment by calling for balanced representation of women in decision making processes at all spheres, to protect them and respond to their needs.

**Madeleine Almelo-Gazman, Mayor of Iriga, UCLG Treasury**, said that the crisis presents an opportunity to promote gender equality in cities, in the home, and in the workplace. She also argued the only way to overcome the pandemic is by working together, and becoming better citizens to develop a sustainable world.

**Elvira Dolotkazina, Vice-Mayor of Nizhnekamsk** addressed how local and regional governments can support women's needs during the pandemic, describing specific plans from Nizhnekamsk during the outbreak to carry out non-discriminatory employment policies and service provision.

**Maria Fernanda Espinosa, President of the 73th United Nations General Assembly** called for coordinated global action based on solidarity and cooperation. Co-responsibility among spheres of Government, an inclusive multilateralism that considers local governments, and a perspective that considers the 2030 Agenda, she argued, will allow us to develop a new social contract that addresses all inequalities.

**Gabriela Cuevas, President of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU)**, argued that it is key to ensure global agreements become local solutions. She said that the impact of women leadership had been key in the pandemic, in terms of transparency, direct communication on the need to develop inter-governmental dialogues, and being sensitive to different communities.

**Paola Pabón, Prefect of the Pichincha region** focused on the need to think about food sovereignty and security in the aftermath of the pandemic, calling for the activation of the whole range of popular and solidarity-based economic activities in the aftermath, including micro-finances for women, small-scale producers and agriculture. **Fatma Şahin, Mayor of Gaziantep**, argued that food security will be a crucial issue for the future, as will be the need to guarantee healthcare for all populations.

**Hajjia Mariam, President of REFELA Ghana**, called for all spheres of government to pay attention to vulnerable communities, addressing in particular children living in the streets in order to truly leave no-one behind.

Prior to ending the session, the group reflected in a *Mentimeter* exercise on what a Generation Equality Coalition for leadership should strive for. The word cloud

resulting from the survey highlighted three key concepts: **justice, freedom, and human rights.**

The wrap-up of the session was handled by **Octavi de la Varga** Secretary General of Metropolis, and **Ana Falú**, UCLG UBUNTU advisor. The Secretary General of Metropolis argued that it is necessary for male leaders to listen to women perspectives and approaches, and to support this transformation. **Ana Falú** called for political leadership to generate new links among people and institutions. She argued that women's leadership in national states and provinces, as well as local governments, is essential to this end, and called for a roadmap to think about the post-COVID era in terms of what it means for women, and how to articulate a way forward.

At the closing, **Shipra Narang Suri**, Chief of the Urban Practices Branch of UN-Habitat, reiterated the commitment of UN-Habitat to support gender equality in local governments.

Cities were called to upload their experiences in the platform [www.citiesforglobalhealth.org](http://www.citiesforglobalhealth.org) where over 400 cases can be found. The live learning exercises will continue throughout May, with experiences on accessibility and public service delivery.

### **About Live Learning Experience Series:**

The Live Learning Series hosted by UCLG, Metropolis, and UN-Habitat, has brought together more than 2,000 participants over the course of ten sessions in which participants from local and regional governments, the UN system, and partners from civil society shared their experiences, initiatives, and actions to support their communities facing the pandemic through the provision of key basic services.

The series started late March and cities across the globe have shared their experiences, initiatives and actions in response to the pandemic. They also shared their frontline views on how cities may transform beyond the outbreak.

### **About United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG)**

UCLG is the global organization of local and regional governments and their associations that represents and defends their interests on the world stage. Representing 70 per cent of the world's population, UCLG members are present in all world regions: Africa, Asia Pacific, Europe, Eurasia, Middle East-West Asia, Latin America and North America - organised in seven continental sections, a metropolitan section and a regional forum. This network covers more than 240,000 cities, regions and metropolises and more than 175 local and regional government associations present in 140 countries. UCLG includes among its main areas of political interest local democracy, climate change and environmental protection, the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals, the role of culture in sustainability, local finance, urban development and city diplomacy for peacebuilding. Visit [www.uclg.org](http://www.uclg.org) and follow [@uclg\\_org](https://twitter.com/uclg_org) for more.

### **About UN-Habitat**

UN-Habitat is the UN agency focused on our cities, towns and communities. UN-Habitat works in over 90 countries supporting people in cities and human settlements for a better urban future.

Working with governments and local partners, its high impact projects combine world-class expertise and local knowledge to deliver timely and targeted solutions. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development includes a dedicated Goal on cities, SDG 11 – to make cities inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable. Visit [www.unhabitat.org](http://www.unhabitat.org) and follow [@unhabitat](https://twitter.com/unhabitat) for further information.

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