

DECLARATION

for International Women's Day 2021, on behalf of the Gender Equality of Committee of the International Cooperative Alliance

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Social, policy, economic and cooperative actions for an egalitarian future

The COVID-19 pandemic is transforming our realities and perspectives, bringing us into an entirely new world from the one we have known in early 2020, with both new and familiar challenges to face since then.

Due to growing inequalities that have intensified since the pandemic began, our world must think about new ideas and strategies for the formulation and creation of policies that can mitigate the impacts of the pandemic on our lives. The COVID-19 pandemic has made three things clear. Firstly, those gender disparities have become accelerated and aggravated; secondly, that women are the ones at the front line in the fight against the coronavirus; and thirdly, that women are contributing the most to overcoming the crisis, driving the economic recovery, and mitigating its associated social imbalances. Therefore, they should be at the core of the recovery plans.

For this reason, the United Nations has chosen the theme "Women in leadership: Achieving an equal future in a COVID-19 world" to celebrate the International Women's Day on 8 March. This theme, aligned with the 65th edition of the Commission on the Status of Women, evokes the efforts and contributions that women and girls are making around the world to a just recovery for the common good. Those same women and girls are helping us to rebuild an egalitarian world, where women are empowered and benefit from a fair democratic and political participation. This egalitarian world must be based on an equal decision-making power, free from violence and oppression, with equal remuneration, an equitable distribution of domestic work and equal access to ownership rights, support measures, resources and tools, health and other services.

The COVID-19 crisis has had a deep and systemic impact on employment and labour, especially women workers who have lost their jobs or whose working conditions have been compromised.



Women's lives have also been affected by the increased workload of domestic work and intensified domestic harassment and violence. In 2020, the global rate of employment for women was just 46%, whilst the rate for men remained at 69%. Many women have lost their jobs due to a variety of reasons, one of the most important being an increasing domestic workload within the household.

At the same time, the question if women are generally last to be hired but first to be fired in times of economic crisis even in the 21st century remains relevant. Cooperatives, all over the world maintain stable employment rates, design strategies and programmes for women to balance private and work life while they are strongly committed to fighting against any form of violence towards them.

Women are standing on the front line of response to the pandemic in areas such as health, social services, education, agriculture, and retailing amongst other sectors, with increasing responsibility to care for those around them. For those that still retain employment outside of the home, many are at risk of losing it, as a majority of women are working in sectors that are more at risk, while others working within the informal economy have no guarantee of job security from one day to the next.

Women during long periods of lockdowns have been more susceptible to domestic violence, mental health issues, etc. Within the majority of households, women have been the primary caretakers of the elderly and children, often neglecting their own physical and mental health. In families living in poverty with limited resources, women have often neglected their own dietary needs, resulting in poor nutrition and health notwithstanding the gendered gaps in access to digital and financial services. Today more than ever, we are witnessing a setback in the decades-long progress and sacrifices that women around the world have made for our rights. In this situation, transformative female leadership is needed, of a kind that would propose and create political, social and entrepreneurial pacts for equality and solidarity. We have to promote a global culture of inclusion in the working sphere, adopting a holistic and multistakeholder approach to generate the much-required change at the grass root level.

Studies have demonstrated that countries managing the crisis most effectively are those governed by women, standing out for good management, decision-making and communicating effectively to the public. It is pitiful that women occupy the position of Head of State in just 20 countries worldwide.

As stated in the United Nations's "COVID-19 and women's leadership: From an effective response to building back better report" women have been remaining at the front lines of the COVID-19 crisis, as health care workers, caregivers, innovators, community organizers, and as some of the most exemplary and effective national leaders in combating the pandemic. This global pandemic has showcased the centrality of their contributions and the disproportionate burdens that women carry.

Cooperatives are based on internationally agreed values and principles such as self-help, equality, and equity, voluntary and open membership as well as democratic governance and ownership. They have a proven record of advancing effectively women's economic participation as well as constituting invaluable partners to alleviate the impact of this crisis. Cooperatives increase access to employment and work, enable economic democracy and agency, and boost women's leadership.

Cooperatives around the world have played a crucial role during the pandemic, and therefore this sector is already a vital part of the solution to the crisis. In many countries, cooperatives have secured the supplies of cities in lockdown, provided protective equipment to medical personnel, saved enterprises from crises of liquidity, and supported women in access to decent work opportunities and providing for their families sustainably. Cooperatives are contributing to the reduction of gender gaps in many ways, and it is our duty to participate in the design of all necessary policies and strategies required, in order to provide women and girls with the rights and the guarantees to lead a dignified life.

On this occasion, as we commemorate the rights of women and girls, we extend an open invitation and ask all of us to work together doubling our efforts to shape a strong, just and equitable society in the post-COVID19 world. The world is crying out for change, and this is a new opportunity to rebuild and forge the best future we have ever spoken of. Let's start by actively participating on March 8 on social media with the hashtags #IWD2021 #InternationalWomensDay, #coops4women and #Coop, sharing our best strategies, programmes practices to contribute in closing the gender gaps. Our daily actions and the greater visibility of our model as a solution, make a difference.