

Forum: Social, Humanitarian and Culture Committee (GA3)

Issue: Addressing the impact of COVID-19 on gender inequality in the labor market and gender-role attitudes

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INTRODUCTION

In modern-day societies and while a capitalistic model for the economy is becoming a globalized phenomenon, a permanent occupation and a stable income is a “Get out of Jail” card for most citizens. By ensuring a permanent wage and flow of microeconomy, governments on a global level can stabilize their labor supply and demand.

While the demand for jobs is increasing and their supply provided by either the state or private employers is decreasing, the COVID-19 pandemic escalated and played a crucial role in temporarily freezing this imbalance but also harming it in the long-run. Since March 2020, the global economy has undergone a huge shift from in-person work to online forms of work, through e-commerce the global economy was able to adapt and stabilize itself. Reaching its peak in 2021, more than 60% of workplaces globally have been required to close down causing a vast economic and social crisis. Major sectors such as Art, Retail, Education and Accommodation have been economically minimized and suffer from closures, restrictions, and deterioration.

In spite of the economic harm, COVID-19 has triggered, it is pivotal to acknowledge the impact it had on societal matters.

The ongoing pandemic forced governments to declare a lockdown status in order to hinder the viruses’ transmission amongst citizens. A contextual executive body consistently made decisions for the nations until a vaccine was created and distributed.

The following observation fired to society a major controversy: 75% of the Heads of Government, thus executive body’s coordinators, are men whilst only 25% are women¹. The unemployment rate from 2020 to 2021 for women gets progressively higher compared to men, meaning that COVID-19 has had an impact on gender inequality, especially in the workforce scene.

¹“Facts and Figures: Leadership and Political Participation.” UN Women, www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/leadership-and-political-participation/facts-and-figures.

How employment has been affected worldwide

Share of global workforce living in countries with workplace restrictions



Figure 1: Graph showing workplace closures during the pandemic²

DEFINITION OF KEY-TERMS

External Shock

External Shocks are, essentially, events that have an instant impact on the economy. One relevant example is the pandemic as it has already caused a crucial financial instability and a weaker economic growth on a global level.

Labor market

The labor market, sometimes referred to as the job market, is concerned with the supply and demand of occupations in a society. In this case, labor is provided by the citizens and the demand for labor and workforce is provided by the employers. It is one of the most crucial sectors of an economy and it inherently plays a major role in the productivity and trading that occurs in the contextual country.

Gender-role attitudes

Gender-role attitudes are opinions shared by an individual holds in regard to how men and women ought to behave in the context of society or, more specifically, in the context of labor.

² "Four out of Five Jobs Affected by Virus Globally." BBC News, 7 Apr. 2020, www.bbc.com/news/business-52199888.

Gender archetypes

Gender archetypes refer to the mentality that is unconsciously derived from the experience a person has of the contextual gender.

Feminism

Feminism is the belief that all sexes are socially, economically, and politically equal, through emphasizing the oppressed women rights throughout history.

Gender equality³

“Equality between women and men (gender equality) refers to the equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities of both genders.”

Gender Pay Gap⁴

“The gender wage gap is a measure of what women are paid in comparison to men. It is commonly calculated by dividing women’s wages by men’s wages, and this ratio is often expressed as a per cent.”

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Gender archetypes in the labor market

Historically speaking, the labor market has been overwhelmed by archetypes since the beginning of human civilization. The genders have always been a primary but yet also indirect criterion for job distribution on a global scale and thus this has led to the creation of the so-called female and male labor archetype. By categorizing the supply based on gender, the demanding forces created a new term called gendered jobs and split the market into two sections: the male-dominated and the female-dominated professions.

When referring to the male-dominated occupations, one could imagine that Builders, Technicians, Scientists and Engineers are the labels put forth by the male gender. In accordance with already existing statistical analysis, STEM, public administration, manufacturing, and construction working are industries that have been long overwhelmingly occupied by men. Thus, it is understandable that the male gendered jobs are the ones that can financially survive in the long-term without the actual and physical presence of a professional.

³ "Concepts and Definitions." Welcome to the United Nations, www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi/conceptsanddefinitions.htm.

⁴ "What is the Gender Pay Gap and is It Real?: The Complete Guide to How Women Are Paid Less Than Men and Why It Can't Be Explained Away." Economic Policy Institute, www.epi.org/publication/what-is-the-gender-pay-gap-and-is-it-real/#epi-toc-6.

The other side of this intangible gender line belongs to the female gender. Cleaning, nursing, teaching and personal service working are female-dominated professions. By way of explanation, these professions require the physical presence of the individual and constant interaction with others. A characteristic example is nurses, who are exclusively working live and are physically unable to distance-work.

Taking into consideration the long-term effect that the gender labor line has had on both the society and the economy as a whole, gender archetypes play undoubtedly a crucial role in all pre-pandemic busy industries. Gendered distribution of labor is, thus, an inevitable social phenomenon that was eventually recalled when the first national lockdown was declared.

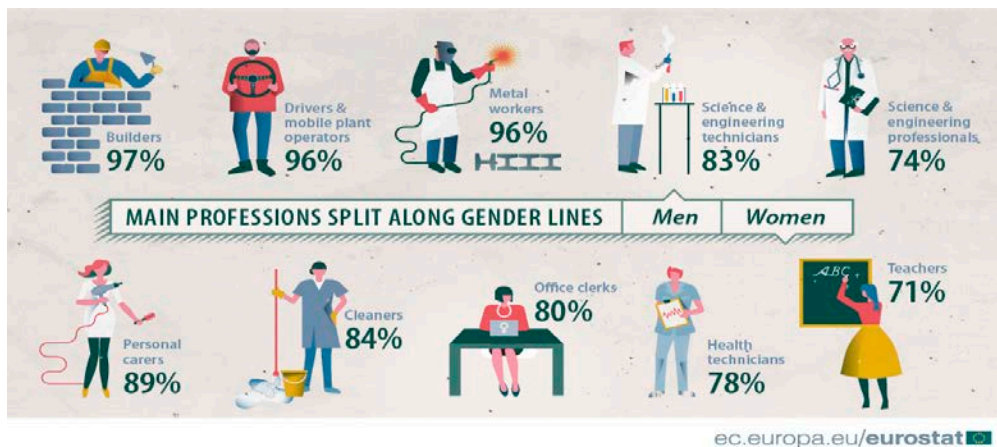


Figure 2: Statistical Analysis by Eurostat depicting jobs split between two genders⁵

Female unemployment during COVID-19

As previously mentioned, it is an undeniable fact that COVID-19 has had a major impact on the economy and the labor market. The scapegoat of the pandemic is, profoundly, the female gender, vastly overcoming the male unemployment rates in the passage of the last year. Explicitly depicting parallel lines, the rates of women's unemployment is consistently higher than the men's one.

⁵ "Jobs Still Split Along Gender Lines." European Commission | Choose Your Language | Choisir Une Langue | Wählen Sie Eine Sprache, 7 Mar. 2018, ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/-/EDN-20180307-1.

Gender inequality has obtained a physical foundation proving that the aforementioned archetypes have not only been applied during the pandemic but also have harmed the stereotypically pink bubble of financial status.

Internationally, women are currently prohibited from entering both the labor market and workforce. In conjunction with the inability to entertain a stable income and the amount of unprecedented job losses, women are overrepresented in sectors that require physical presence for their functioning, with a prime example being the sectors of hospitality and healthcare.

Gendered jobs such as, health care workers, cleaners and teachers have been entirely outplaced due to the pandemic. The accurately proportional relationship between job losses and gender inequality has ultimately been proven by the fact that women are the ones financially oppressed while the male professional sector has seen a calmer rate of change in unemployment.

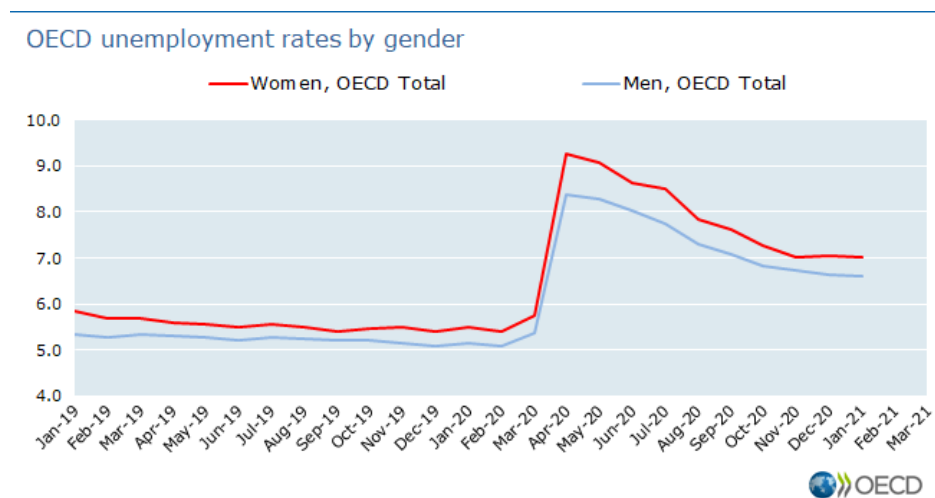


Figure 3: Linear depiction of the OECD unemployment rates by gender⁶

Regarding one of the reasons behind the 9.2 percent peaking female unemployment, is the over delegation in endangered areas of the labor market and the profound gender archetypes. It is quite reasonable and self-explanatory that the intangible increase in the so-called gender inequality spectrum observed has now become the norm in the labor market, in addition to the targeting of women.

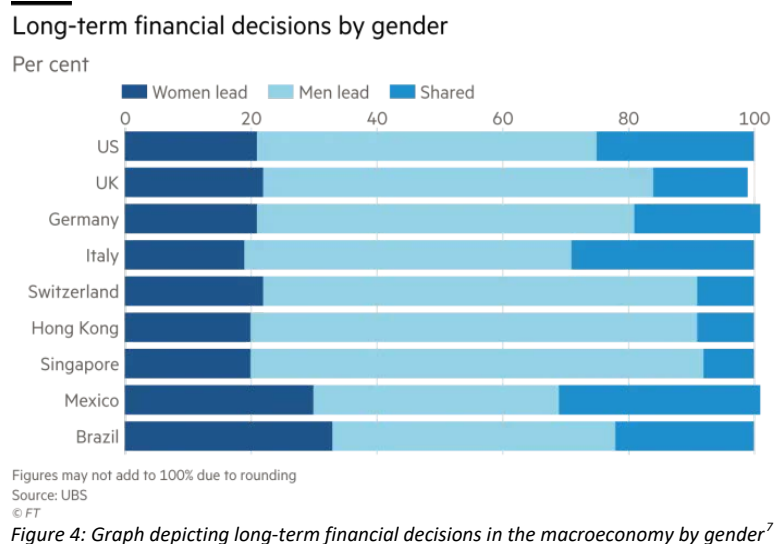
⁶ "Unemployment Rates, OECD - Updated: March 2021 - OECD." OECD.org - OECD, 2021, www.oecd.org/newsroom/unemployment-rates-oecd-update-march-2021.htm.

Alternation in attitudes towards genders

As COVID-19 has irreversibly damaged the financial industry, society has also undergone a major shift in the current behaviors and attitudes towards genders. Although alternations in gender-role attitudes were not expected during the state of the pandemic, a 180-degree turn was taken, hence driving mankind back to misogynistic stereotypes.

Firstly, traditionally speaking, there has been an ideology governing society long before the 21st century, which was simply put “women-at-home”. Women were the ones that stayed at home, took care of the household’s essentials and the children. As history went on, that ideology ceased to exist, beginning from the first waves of feminism. Female empowerment was vastly supported since then and has become one of the most critical factors of gender equality. In accordance with the economic damage women have experienced this past year, it is safe to say that the aforementioned “women-at-home” ideology came rapidly back from the historic grave. While women lost their stable income and job, they were forced mainly through national lockdowns to return to a lastingly dead stereotype. Therefore, this severe alternation in gender-role attitudes has already and inevitably caused a deterioration in gender equality.

Corresponding with existing studies by Permanent UN Missions, men are the prevalent gender in the political scene, while occupying most of the Head of State’s positions globally. When discussing current affairs, environmental and economic programs for internal development and programs fighting against COVID-19, the male gender is the one who, essentially, signs the documents. Women play a contradicting role, occupying less than 30 leading political positions on an international level. They are formally and legally not allowed to pass enhancing protocols, development programs and solutions in regard to the pandemic. In pure essence, men are statistically and legally more trusted, supported and worth relying on, since they are the ones who take actions and give commands. Hence, one of the alternations caused by COVID-19 in attitudes towards genders is the clear enhanced trust towards men and distrust towards women.



Deterioration of this imbalance (Pay Gap)

The gender pay gap is a relevant term since the codification of modern economics. It is essentially the proportional difference between male and female wages which is explicitly represented by percentages. It can also be characterized as a gender inequality indication in the financial industry since it depicts how much more money a gender earns over the other.

A question worth raising in the labor market's scenario is the following: Does the pandemic have any impact on the gender pay gap? The short answer is that COVID-19 has not only impacted but also infuriated this gap. Women are self-explanatorily and disproportionately affected by wage losses caused by the virus, as most of them are workers on businesses that face closure.

The, not so necessarily, long answer is that COVID-19 has made permanent damage on the pay gap by making industries governed by men, profit whilst hospitality and especially, healthcare have been exacerbated by current circumstances. The noticeable corruption on this societal matter has a direct result on how "gendered" jobs will be affected in the near future. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, the gap was widening with a minimal linear change in the female average earnings and vast exponential change in the male average earnings.

⁷ "Financial Industry Fails to Enthuse Women in Decisions." Financial Times, 11 Mar. 2019, www.ft.com/content/0f58def8-7ac6-3102-9be6-54f2e86771ce.

The climax of the gap is currently being detected. As it is understood, the pandemic has caused permanent damage to the gender pay gap, which is one of the necessary traces to calculate gender inequality.



Figure 5: Linear graph depicting the global gender income gap⁸

MAJOR COUNTRIES AND ORGANIZATIONS INVOLVED

Iceland

Iceland has been for over a decade a country in which the gender pay gap was minimal and even unremarkable. Gender equality is a present element of Icelandic society, and it has remained that way throughout the pandemic. The country's significance on the global society has been more than apparent: According to the World Economic Forum's 'Global Gender Gap Report 2021', Iceland is one of the countries that managed to ensure a stabilized gender inequality index before the situation became uncontrollable. Since the country already had a diverse labor market, it did not create much controversy and, thus, could be characterized as a quintessential example of how a country ought to function socially and, especially, maintain gender equality.

Equal Pay Certification

An example of legislation that critically contributed to the above pandemic progress is an Icelandic economic policy named "Equal Pay Certification". Enterprises on

⁸ What the Pay Gap Between Men and Women Really Looks Like." World Economic Forum, www.weforum.org/agenda/2017/11/pay-equality-men-women-gender-gap-report-2017/.

a national level ought to provide the government with concrete proof that they pay men and women equally when it comes to the same leadership and employee positions. By introducing this policy in 2018 and applying it in 2020, Iceland is noticeably moving towards the termination of the local gender pay gap. Certainly, throughout the pandemic, this socioeconomic legislation addressed that, since gender inequality during a state of crisis is indeed a crucial issue, the government needs to maintain the balance so as to ensure social stability.

Republic of Namibia

Although vast in size and less economically developed, Namibia handled the pandemic in such a way that gender inequality would not be one of the major problems the government had to face. Firstly, it is already known that Namibia is one of the most socially and economically supportive countries towards women when it comes to the labor market. In 2021 and while the pandemic was at its peak, the Namibian government was praised globally for its effective measures to contain COVID-19 so that the state of emergency the country was in 2020 would soon be terminated. Moreover, in regard to gender inequality, the Global Gender Gap Report of 2021 explicitly states that the Republic of Namibia holds a high position in regard to the gender equality index (0.8 out of 1). This, essentially, proves that Namibia managed to maintain a social balance in the workforce scene during an external economic shock and, as it initially restricted the spread of COVID-19, ensured social stability.

Lastly, as an LEDC country in Africa with a decent gender inequality index, Namibia provides concrete evidence that the economy is not the only sector that plays a major role in how to control gender inequality. The society and economy must be peacefully interconnected expressing no discrimination towards citizens, especially in a state of crisis.

United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women)

The United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, or simply put “UN Women”, is a United Nations agency, created in July 2010, committed to promoting gender equality among all member states and financially and socially empowering the female gender. The organization was created to serve the needs of women across the globe and essentially balance gender inequality in sectors like leadership, security, and economic autonomy. UN Women also played an important role in managing gender inequality during a state of crisis, meaning the pandemic, by spreading and raising awareness, but also acting against threats towards the socioeconomic balance.

International Labor Organization (ILO)

The International Labor Organization (ILO) is a United Nations body, under the guidance and control of international law, whilst being tasked with promoting socially and economically accepted standards. It is the oldest UN Body, being created in 1919, and its major assignment is to ensure stable norms for the international workforce. It is also responsible for ensuring the safety and transparency of the global community and managing to stabilize the sustainable factor in all businesses.

In the passage of the last year, the ILO hosted multiple summits and conferences discussing the COVID-19 impact on the working industry and the profound challenges it elicited. More specifically, within the 109th International Labor Conference (ILC), the UN Body discussed the challenges imposed by the pandemic and centered the summit around how humans have been economically affected during this period.

Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD)

The Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD) is an intergovernmental organization that deals with economic issues affecting the global community. Its fundamental role is to stimulate international trade and economic flourishing. What shall be kept in mind is that the organization itself does not have the ability to enforce its decisions. The inference one gets is that OECD is an influential force in the financial scene and has a major impact on how countries perceive crises and combat them. In regard to the pandemic and the gender wage gap, OECD has already run campaigns, such as the OECD Recommendation on Gender Equality in Public Life, on how to ensure economic stability throughout an external shock combined with an assuring program on gender equality. The campaigns' purpose is not only to ensure inclusivity but also to raise awareness on how the workforce has shifted throughout the years.

European Union (EU)

The European Union (EU) is a socio-economic and political union that consists of countries that exclusively belong in the European region. Its purpose is to promote trade, transparency, and financial support among citizens of the contextual Union Member. Although it has executive powers, the EU is obliged to follow a set of Treaties. With reference to the pandemic, the EU has already initiated vaccination plans for all member states and, in the economic sector, Eurostat (an EU statistics organ) has been constantly observing the trends noticeable, in both the gender inequality index and the financial gap, ultimately providing advantageous information to the global community.

TIMELINE OF EVENTS

DATE	DESCRIPTION OF EVENT
11 April 1919	Founding of the International Labor Organization (ILO)
25 June 1958	The ILO Convention concerning Discrimination in Respect of Employment and Occupation (C111) was signed
18 December 1979	The UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women was signed
13 December 2002	The Implementation of the 1st United Nations Decade for the Eradication of Poverty was signed
2 July 2010	Founding of United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women)
2015	The United Nations General Assembly adopted the 17 Sustainable Development Goals for 2030
8 March 2016	Official launch of the OECD Recommendation on Gender Equality in Public Life
February 2021	Official report in regard to the Gender Pay Gap Statistics by Eurostat
15-26 March 2021	The sixty-fifth session of the Commission on the Status of Women regarding the impact of COVID-19 in gender equality
7-19 June 2021	The 109 th International Labor Conference on the effects COVID-19 had on the labor market

RELEVANT UN RESOLUTIONS, TREATIES AND EVENTS

UN Secretary General's Address to the 65th Commission on the Status of Women

Antonio Guterres, the current United Nations' Secretary General, made an address to the 65th Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) talking about the significance of women's participation in the decision-making of the public life. He emphasized the importance of female empowerment especially during a state of crisis in order to achieve gender equality. The fact that one of the primary UN Organs, namely the Secretary General, acknowledged such phenomenon and highlighted it during one of his addresses reveals the fact that this particular topic needs immediate intervention and effective solutions.

United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (Goal 5-Gender Equality)

The UN Sustainable Development Goals are milestones the UN has assigned to all member-states in 2015 that ought to be achieved until 2030. Goal number 5 being Gender Equality, is relevant to the current issue of gender inequality during the pandemic. One of its main focuses is to eliminate the gender pay gap and further develop and ensure financial equity among the gender spectrum.

United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (Article 11)

The UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women was a Treaty signed among all Member States on 18 December 1979 that focused on female empowerment and gender equality, mainly in the labor market.

More specifically, Article 11 explicitly mentions the implementation of measures to eliminate employment discrimination towards women and aims to equate the gender pay gap. Such measures include sustained labor and payment during and after maternity leave and protective legislation relating to women whose work may be physically harmful to them.

The International Labor Organization Convention No. 111 (C111), Discrimination (Employment and Occupation)

The ILO Convention No. 111 against Discrimination was a Treaty signed amongst all member states on 25 June 1958. Its main concerns were, firstly, the definition of the term "discrimination". Discrimination towards another person is defined as prejudiced distinction due to biological characteristics which immediately results in social and economic harm of the individual. Secondly, it introduced explicit measures in order to stop the unjustifiable bias

against the female gender in the labor market. Specifically, the convention aims to repeal existing legislations that do not go in accordance with the current law principles and to increase representation of minorities to the decision-making for the labor market and the economy.

Resolution on the Implementation of the 1st United Nations Decade for the Eradication of Poverty (57th Session of the UN General Assembly)

The resolution on the implementation of the 1st UN Decade for the eradication of poverty is an attempt to stabilize the global economy from major external shocks. More specifically, articles 4 and 25 make a clear reference to gender equality through good governance, which under all circumstances is relevant to how the gender pay gap has been affected during the pandemic.

PREVIOUS ATTEMPTS TO SOLVE THE ISSUE

Actions taken by UN Women against this phenomenon

The UN in collaboration with its affiliated body, UN Women, in the 2021 CSW acknowledge the dimensions this pandemic has, which range from a social level to an economic one. UN Women has already attempted advocating for medical and financial support of countries, who have a weak social system as means of raise awareness on the social impact of the pandemic had and secondly as means of balancing the gender inequality index in the aforementioned countries. Cooperating with Governments internationally, UN Women have achieved an awareness campaign as well as intervened to systems that are incapable to support themselves in order to assist women in the labor market.

Sustainable Development Goal 5: Gender Equality

As previously mentioned, the UN has imposed a set of goals, namely the Sustainable Development Goals, in order to solve most problems, the global community currently faces. The Gender Equality goal represents an umbrella term for all the social, financial, and political subsections it contains. Mainly focused on the concentration on the financial aspect of Goal 5. The Gender Pay Gap is a vast component that the goal demands to be stabilized. Undoubtedly, the pandemic has made this goal unachievable and governments, neither want or are enabled to equate the gap and solve gender inequality in the labor market as a whole, on the other hand the SDGs wish to do so, mainly due to the financial footprint COVID-19 has had.

Recommendation of the OECD on Gender Equality in Education, Employment and Entrepreneurship

The Recommendation on Gender Equality in Education, Employment and Entrepreneurship is a long-standing legal promotion of the OECD. More specifically, the OECD has had dedicated a strong focus on gender equality and has long prioritized this constant challenge in each government's agenda. By implementing measures to ensure equal pay, to advertise entrepreneurial representation of women and to reduce the gap, all signatory states have to initially go through extensive consultation in order for the Recommendation to be adopted. Then, they all have to be present in conferences organized by OECD in order to reevaluate the Gender Recommendation policies and achieve the goal OECD has put forward.

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

It is self-explanatory that this problem has already taken vast dimensions. The number of people affected by gender inequality, especially during the pandemic, grows exponentially. Solutions in regard to the aforementioned problem are constantly being suggested and as seen, there have been attempts to solve the issue. Taking into consideration the recency of both the pandemic and the social impact it has had; solutions are still proposed in hopes of the problem to be solved in the near future.

First and foremost, one main aspect of the solutions is undoubtedly the international awareness of how critical this problem is and how it will affect the following generations. By drawing the attention of the public and by firing social mobilization of citizens, the community as a whole will have a holistic idea of the extent this issue has, and further acknowledge measures that have to be taken in order to combat it.

What governments and citizens have to comprehend is the idea that the private sector of the economy, meaning individually owned enterprises, have minimal to no engagement in regard to solving the issue collectively. While these companies may not have come across discrimination allegations and may not be part of the issue, they still ought to be a present and a fully contributing member to the wave of solutions that has to be presented. Furthermore, by providing their assistance, governments, being sectionally relieved, would be able to provide economic stimulus packages to women who are currently suffering from either negative attitudes or workplace closures.

Moreover, on a political level, it is a fact that the already existing and aforementioned conventions have not been signed nor ratified by all member states of the United Nations. The promotion and proposition for ratification is a keyway to legally and stably ensuring that the needed measures that exist within these conventions are actually implemented. This means

that a common legislation and approach towards the issue of gender-role attitudes and gender inequality in the labor market will definitely guarantee the demanded economic balance and growth while simultaneously assisting the world out of this external shock.

Last but not least, a way to prevent the already and mentally adopted gender archetypes is through education. During the early education, a human must receive, gender archetypes and stereotypical attitudes towards males and females should not be passed on from adults to the next generations. By establishing a safe and politically correct way to transfer knowledge, the gender archetypes will undoubtedly cease to exist in due time. Thus, if a currently similar situation ever occurs in the future, the global community would not have adopted a conservative mentality and the balance in our economy and society would have been maintained.

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