

PINK TALK:

The influence of COVID-19 on women's lives / A influência do COVID-19 nas vidas das mulheres

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I'd like to thank (Malgorzata) and Young Educators for inviting me and organizing this great talk. I am here in representation of the Portuguese Platform for Women's Rights, the biggest umbrella-organization of women's rights NGOs in Portugal with 29 member organizations as of today. We are also the National Coordination of the European Women's Lobby in our country and our goal is to foster cooperation, reflection and action in the promotion and realization of women's rights and equality between women and men through research, lobbying, awareness-raising and training.

In my intervention, I will focus on how covid-19 has aggravated and exposed the pervasive inequalities that affect women and girls in all dimensions of their lives and in every society. It is now clear that these issues can no longer be ignored and that we must put them at the centre of our recovery plans and future society models.

The covid-19 pandemic is a public health crisis that has led to a severe social and economic crisis in every country of the world. In Europe, this was no different. As had previously happened, particularly with the last 10 consecutive years of austerity, this pandemic has disproportionately affected and continues to affect women and girls¹. There are several reasons behind this.

Firstly, inequality in the labor market.

When speaking about the gender pay gap and inequality in the labor market, it is often the case that one merely refers to equal pay for equal work. In fact, the problem goes much deeper and has a systemic nature. In spite of being inscribed in international conventions and namely in the EU treaties, "equal pay for work of equal

¹ See the European Women's Lobby policy brief: Women Must Not Pay the Price for Covid-19! - https://womenlobby.org/IMG/pdf/ewl_policy_brief_on_covid-19_impact_on_women_and_girls-2.pdf

value” is still far from reality. The average gender pay gap is 23% at a global scale², 14.1% in Europe and it has only changed minimally over the last decade according to the European Commission³.

Gender stereotypes and a constant overlook of how inequality between women in men is at the root of our economic systems, have fed this.

Sexual segregation in the labor market means that women are still overrepresented in fields that are undervalued and underpaid. Sectors such as care (including hospitals, nurseries and personal assistance) as well as retail, supermarkets, food distribution services, cleaning, hospitality and education, all have a majority of women employees. This pandemic has shown how this work is absolutely crucial to the proper functioning of societies. Women have been the main protagonists in our fight against covid-19. Without them and their jobs, we wouldn't be able to make it. However, we are still short of recognizing this. These sectors have structurally low pay and low social protection jobs, entailing high levels of part-time work and poor working conditions.

Due to their precarious and client-facing nature, women are losing their jobs at a faster rate than men. In Portugal, they were 57% of those without a job in August 2020. Between March and April, 90% of lost jobs were women's⁴.

Because women are protecting and helping others (78% of health workers are women⁵), they are also more infected by COVID-19 than men⁶.

Inequality in the labor market is closely connected to inequality in the family and at home. They go hand in hand. Women are asked to perform their duties, oftentimes working extra and deregulated hours, at the same time as they are burdened by family and home workload. Because of traditional gender roles, which are now being reinforced, women are the main carers of children, older people, and other

² According to the UN - <https://www.un.org/en/observances/equal-pay-day>

³ According to the European Commission -

https://ec.europa.eu/info/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/gender-equality/equal-pay/gender-pay-gap-situation-eu_en

⁴

<https://www.tsf.pt/portugal/economia/mulheres-ocupavam-90-dos-empregos-perdidos-em-marco-e-abril-12311285.html>

⁵ According to the European Commission -

<https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/-/DDN-20200409-2>

⁶

<https://expresso.pt/coronavirus/2020-12-29-Covid-19.-Numero-de-mulheres-infetadas-supera-em-23-o-dos-homens>

dependents. With schools and nurseries closed and poor teleworking legislation and scrutiny, women's mental health, leisure time, professional lives and prospects took the toll. This situation translates into more inequality in the future to come as women are trapped in a cycle where the labor market punishes them for being overloaded with poorly paid as well as unpaid work.

In Portugal, when schools were closed (middle March to June), due to women's lower incomes and likely gender stereotypes, many families decided that women would stay home. Women were 81% of the beneficiaries from an exceptional family support measure to workers⁷. Women are at greater risk of poverty.

Reconciliation between work, family, and private life is becoming impossible and the Superwoman myth, as well as our allegedly caring and motherly natures, are used against us.

Particular groups of women have also been significantly targeted by the crisis and the lack of gender perspective in the plans designed to solve it.

Women in poverty and women with low digital access and literacy were and are being further excluded. Asylum seekers, migrant women and women in prostitution are also at greater social and economic risk and are being subject to more violence than before.

This is another great concern for women's organizations: violence against women and girls. The pandemic and the subsequent measures to tackle it including confinement and lockdowns have exacerbated women's vulnerabilities and exposure to male violence.

Women are stuck at home with abusive partners, faced with reduced chances to safely seek help. At the same time, frontline services are not fully-fledged working and are underfunded.

Reports from multiple countries prove how violence against women and girls has risen. In France, the Ministry of Interior indicated an increase of reports between 32% and 36% in the Paris region⁸.

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<https://www.publico.pt/2020/10/04/sociedade/noticia/cinco-pedidos-apoio-excepcional-familia-quatro-sao-mulheres-1933828>

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https://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2020/03/27/confinement-un-dispositif-d-alerte-dans-les-pharmacies-pour-les-femmes-violentees_6034583_3224.html#xtor=AL-32280270



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DAS MULHERES



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And in Portugal, 70% of pre-existing intimate violence cases have been aggravated during the pandemic⁹.

Support lines are receiving 5x more calls than before. In Portugal, the national Domestic Violence support line registered an increase of 180% of incoming calls during lockdown¹⁰. These were the calls that actually reached services. Shelters in Italy reported a 50% drop in reports due the severity of the lockdown making it harder for women to seek help¹¹.

In Portugal as we are headed towards a new confinement, it is paramount that frontline line services are more funded and keep working, considering that they are essential in the protection and safety of women and girls against male violence.

In looking ahead, the EU and its Member States must rethink care as a public investment rather than as a matter of public spending, putting it at the centre of our economies and societies. They must implement gender budgeting practices and transition to a feminist economic model where women and men are equal both formally and materially.

Thank you!

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<https://www.publico.pt/2020/06/16/sociedade/noticia/covid19-pandemia-agudizou-situacoes-violencia-domestic-a-ja-existentes-1920817>

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https://www.rtp.pt/noticias/pais/cerca-de-uma-dezena-de-detidos-em-lisboa-e-setubal-por-violencia-domestica_n1237614

¹¹ See the European Women's Lobby policy brief: Women Must Not Pay the Price for Covid-19! - https://womenlobby.org/IMG/pdf/ewl_policy_brief_on_covid-19_impact_on_women_and_girls-2.pdf