



COVID-19
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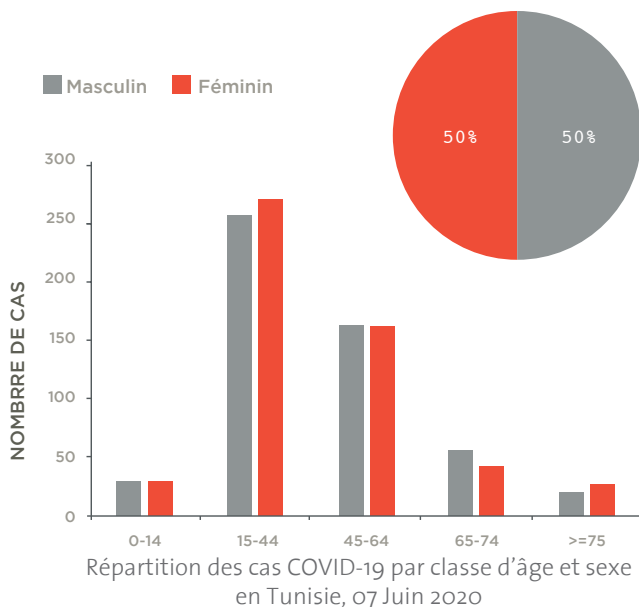
Policy Brief (Mai –Juin 2020)

Portrait of a female medical staff, May 20, 2020, Tunisia. Photo credits: UN Women / Mohamed Krit

TUNISIAN WOMEN IN THE FACE OF COVID-19: DURING AND AFTER CONFINEMENT



According to data by the National Observatory for New and Emerging Diseases (ONMNE) Tunisia has achieved its first objective in the fight against COVID-19 and avoided having large numbers of patients overwhelm its health structures. Indeed, with 1162 confirmed cases, 50 deaths and only 89 active cases (data updates of 25/06/2020)¹, the management of pandemic has been successful, without neglecting the possibility of a second rebound.



While, the sex disaggregation of COVID-19 cases shows no significant difference between men and women, age-disaggregated data shows a slight over-representation of women aged between 15 and 64 years old².

Tunisia is among the few countries to have sex-disaggregated data on COVID-19 cases. However, sex-disaggregated data is only available for confirmed cases and deaths. Absence of such data limits the possibilities for a more detailed analysis of women's access to care facilities, preventive measures and places of protection.

¹ <https://covid-19.tn/fr/tableau-de-bord/>
² <http://www.onmne.tn/fr/images/COVID-19-dernier-bulletin.pdf>

Data	Disaggregated by gender	
	Yes	No
Number of tests		
Confirmed cases		
Average age		
Hospitalized cases		
Recovered cases		
Isolated cases		
Quarantined cases		

According to the AB SURVEY COVID-19 study on citizens' attitudes and behaviour during the pandemic, it was found that «Tunisian women are more eager to comply with prevention and security measures than men. According to the same source, women are also more involved in national efforts to reduce the risk of infection. The same study concluded that the age group 35-45 is the most aware of the gravity of the virus, making it the most compliant with quarantine, prevention and security procedures»³.

Women Healthcare Professionals during the crisis of COVID-19



A female medical staff member preparing the distribution of the protective mask - Tunis

The role of women in managing the health crisis has been

fundamental in both the public and private spheres. The team of the National Observatory for New and Emerging Diseases and all the staff responsible for managing and supervising field activities, analysing data and preparing the daily bulletin is almost entirely made up of women. However, women's representation in the scientific committee is less significant (6/20) although the main specialities represented in the committee are dominated by women, including epidemiology, virology, immunology, infectious diseases, I.C.U, pneumology and psychiatry.

Women have also been remarkable through their role in ad-hoc committees for the management of the pandemic in hospital facilities. Testimonies collected at hospitals show that this is a very interesting theme that could enrich the reflection on a new form of governance for hospitals or «l'hôpital autrement» (hospitals differently.). Some initiatives deserve to be documented, such as those of the Mongi Slim Hospital in La Marsa and the Abderrahmen Mami Hospital in Ariana and those of some regional hospitals.

Despite their considerable efforts and contributions, female health workers have not been able to benefit from the deconfinement exemptions as outlined in article 10 of the decree law of 03 May 2020.

In fact, pregnant health professionals were obliged to continue working in COVID-19 negative areas. Moreover, working and transportation conditions did not take their situation into account.

It should also be noted that women health professionals did not enjoy any supporting measures for their childcare, neither during the confinement period nor during the first period of the targeted confinement when the nurseries and kindergartens were reopened.

It should be noted that 141 health professionals contracted COVID-19, i.e. 13 per cent of the overall number of cases. (10 imported and 131 indigenous). This is a relatively high rate, and sex-disaggregated data for infected health workers is not available.

Women in the food industry: a significant role but little recognition

Even more invisible were the female agricultural workers who played a fundamental role in guaranteeing Tunisia's food security during the COVID-19 crisis. Rural women account for 4 per cent of landowners, 58 per cent of the agricultural workforce, 80 per cent of the forestry workforce and 15 per cent of the country's workforce⁴. They conti-

³ <http://www.webdo.tn/2020/05/07/etude-face-au-coronavirus-les-femmes-plus-conscientes-que-les-hommes/>

⁴ <https://www.leconomistmaghrebin.com/2019/03/04/femmes-milieu-rural/g>

nued to work even during quarantine and curfew. This has allowed Tunisians to have access to a diversity of quality food products. Despite their vital contribution to Tunisia's food security, these labourers continued to suffer the same discriminatory working conditions and the same risks during transport.



ONU Femmes/Mohamed Kritt

A factory worker during the breaking of the fast sits at a table with a note that says «please don't change places» on April 14, 2020 in Manouba - Tunisia

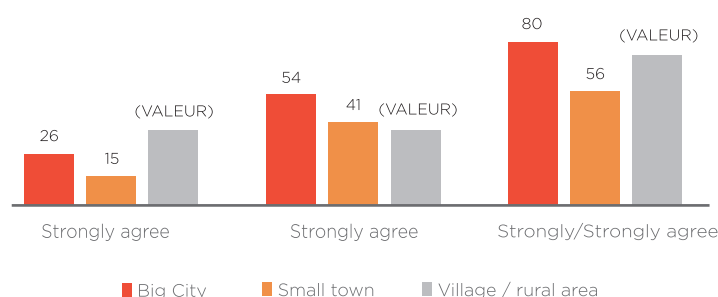
Digitalisation of work

The COVID-19 crisis has seen the significant expansion of digitalization and online services: Teleworking, distance learning, robots, drones and e-commerce have been among the weapons used to counter the pandemic. «Telework affected one in ten of the employees who were able to continue working during the lockdown. This proportion increases to one in three for the wealthiest groups.» according to the INS survey⁵. The participation of women in work digitalization requires further study.

Unequal sharing of family burdens

Another important issues that COVID-19 brought to the fore is the division of household chores within the family. A study conducted by The UN Women Regional Office for the Arab States shows that men devoted more time than usual to household chores during the COVID-19 crisis.

Among married women, percentage who agree with the statement «since the spread of COVID19, my spouse helps me more with the household work and caring for family»



After a general confinement between 18 March and 4 May, Tunisia set up a progressive targeted deconfinement over three stages⁶ : 4-24 May, 24 May-4 June and 4-14 June 2020.

As the Secretary General of the United Nations has said: «We are not equals in the face of crisis.» This health crisis has made inequalities more visible and often more dramatic in terms of job losses, lack of vital resources, living conditions, housing, exposure to diseases, management of domestic life, marital relationships and in many other areas.

Both during and after containment, the impact of the COVID-19 continued to hit women hard, highlighting existing inequalities and discrimination and exposing the state of vulnerability of a large section of the female population.

Women's access to justice

After the suspension of work in all courts on 16 March⁷, a recovery plan was announced in the Ministerial Communiqué on 3 May detailing⁸ three steps for a gradual resumption of courts' work:

The 1st stage: 4-24 May, the 2nd stage: 25 May - 4 June and the 3rd stage: 5 June the resumption of work in all

⁵ Assessment of the socio-economic impact of COVID-19 on Tunisian households: Analysis of the data of the 1st wave (April 29, 2020 - May 8, 2020). 28 May 2020

⁶ http://www.ort.gov.tn/WD12oAWP/WD12oAwp.exe/CTX_36452-5-OEloQXedYS/RechercheJORT/SYNC_-49067511

⁷ Ministry of Justice communiqué of 15 March 2020.

⁸ Communiqué in accordance with Government Decree No. 2020-208 of 2 May 2020 on the establishment of targeted containment requirements, which provides that the Ministry of Justice shall establish the stages, conditions and areas relating to the gradual resumption of work in courts». <https://www.facebook.com/ministere.justice.tunisie/photos/a.3364863583577639/3364863663577631/?type=3> (in arabic).

courts.

In view of the increase in gender-based violence during confinement, the Ministry of Justice announced the resumption of work on all cases relating to violence against women and children as of 4 May, as well as cases relating to alimony obligations. However, in the memorandum of the Superior Council of the Magistracy (CSM) of 8 May 2020⁹, another plan was announced for family law judges to resume issuing protection orders for women survivors of violence as of 14 May.

● This divergence in positions may threaten the legal security of survivors as well as of women maintenance claimants.

A plenary session to hear the Minister of Justice was held on 19 May on the functioning of the justice services during the period of targeted confinement.

During this session, the Minister affirmed that all decisions are taken after consultation with the various bodies and that these differences are positive signs and «normal» during the democratic transition¹⁰ and the new institutional landscape.

● Cases related to violence against women referred to the Public Prosecutor's Office:

The work of the Public Prosecutors has been continuous throughout the different phases of confinement. The Minister of Justice has announced the different categories of cases relating to these different periods¹¹ through the minutes submitted to the prosecutors:

4263 Confinement-related records of proceedings			
Offences in relation to failure to comply with quarantine	Offences relating to failure to observe curfew	Economic offences	Offences relating to violence against women and children
1438	2552	149	124
33,5%	60%	3,5%	3 %

- The relatively low rate of cases brought before the public prosecutor may appear to contradict the high rate of gender-based violence. This difference may be explained by the fact that prosecutors during this period admitted only very serious cases of physical and sexual violence, but also by a disruption in the penal chain due to quarantine (starting with the reporting of the violence and the filing of the complaints).
- This rate has probably increased with the resumption of the work in courts.

Targeted Quarantine and the Dependent Care Issue (CARE)

The Government's targeted quarantine provisions have brought the issue of care and assistance for dependants

● children, the elderly, the sick and those with special needs - back to the forefront. Such care is generally provided by women. During the COVID-19 crisis, this problem was exacerbated with the closure of nurseries, kindergartens and special education centres. The interruption of services provided by domestic helpers and has only aggravated the situation.

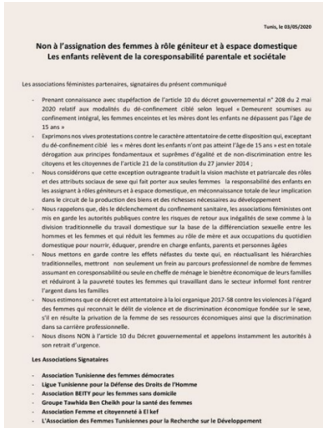
The publication of Decree-Law No. 2020-208 of 2 May 2020, which established the provisions of targeted health quarantine, provoked a great deal of controversy, particularly Article 10 which required mothers of children under the age of 15 to be in total quarantine.

Consequently, childcare tasks were regarded as an exclusively maternal responsibility which could lead mothers to stop working because of unequal and discriminatory gender division of labour.

⁹ <https://www.facebook.com/photo?fbid=996856440729905&set=a.579942079088012> (en arabe).

¹⁰ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wxHQj3Wfc2E&t=232525>

¹¹ See hearing before the Assembly of People's Representatives on May 19th.



Following a strong reaction from civil society¹², the media and social networks, a rapid change was made in the text and a new decree-law was adopted on 3 May 2020 specifying that it is children under the age of 15 and people over the age of 65 who are affected by the mandatory quarantine¹³.

Although sharing of domestic chores and carework between men and women was a source of conflict in many families, the COVID-19 crisis was also an opportunity to reaffirm the role of fathers and the responsibility of both parents. The question is; what impact does quarantine have on the social construction of masculinity and on task sharing in households?

Health: Women's access to care and the situation of women health workers

Access to care during deconfinement

Currently, we do not have statistics to measure the magnitude of the impact of COVID-19 on the availability and accessibility of services other than those related to pandemic itself. Because of its importance and to learn lessons for the future, this aspect of the pandemic management needs to be documented.

For now, we only have testimonies from managers of several hospital services who have expressed fear of seeing serious complications in their patients who are monitored for risky pregnancies or for a chronic disease (cardiovascular disease, high blood pressure, diabetes) or for cancer and who were unable to consult with doctors during the period of confinement. Even the usually overcrowded hospital emergency rooms, which remained open during the pandemic, were deserted by consultants. Health professionals and civil society organizations^{15 16} have sounded the alarm on the slowdown, or even cessation, of frontline services in several regions.

Violence against women during COVID-19 crisis

Helplines and shelters for survivors of violence have reported an increase in calls for help and requests for emergency shelter.

Between 23 March and 31 May, 9800 calls were recorded on the MFFES toll-free numbers, nine times higher than usual.

Of these 9,800 calls, 2,700 were violence cases. Many of

The resumption of kindergartens and day-care facilities took place on 24 May while the resumption of special-education centres for autistic and disabled children took place on 18 May.

The late reopening of nurseries and kindergartens faced significant difficulties. Parents no longer bring their children to these facilities, which are mostly private and run by women.

In general, nurseries and kindergartens where 90 per cent of the employees are women, are experiencing great difficulties to resume their activities. Some of them had to close permanently.

Faced with these difficulties, the Ministry of Women, Family, Children and Seniors and the Tunisian Solidarity Bank (BTS) have adopted a programme to support nurseries, kindergartens and day-care centres during the COVID-19 pandemic¹⁴.

The COVID-19 crisis has highlighted the problems of social care for all care actions. There is little recognition of the services provided by women in this field, and care institutions are not sufficiently valued and supported (nurseries and kindergartens, special education centres and old people's homes). Employees in this sector (personal assistants and domestic workers) do not benefit from any legal and social recognition.

¹² <https://www.facebook.com/femmesdemocrates/photos/a.247294818675110/372287629116928/?type=3&theater>

¹³ http://www.iort.gov.tn/WD120AWP/WD120AWP.exe/CTX_29472-89-SNwQbJZxN/PageDernierParu/SYNC_79450730

¹⁴ <https://lapresse.tn/5865/lancement-dun-nouveau-programme-de-soutien-aux-creches-jardins-denfants-et-garderies-scolaires/Dn>

¹⁵ Call : Contribution of the first public line to the continuity of services and the fight against the Covid-19 epidemic, the contribution of the first health line signed by several CSOs and personalities, April 2, 2020

¹⁶ Habiba Ben Romdhane. What if our health care system was able to quickly turn the tide of the Covid-19 epidemic?, Leaders, March 28th 2020

the other calls were received from women with pending court cases and/or in need of financial and material assistance.

With respect to violence, below is breakdown of its categories based on the statements of Ms. Benzarti, who is responsible for combating gender-based violence at the Ministry ¹⁷:



- 90% of the calls were about verbal abuse.
- 80% emotional abuse.
- 76% physical violence.
- 37% economic violence.
- 17% sexual violence.

In 22 per cent of the cases, it was violence against children.

Economic violence for instance has seen an upsurge during the COVID-19 crisis, with 37 per cent of the number of calls compared to only 7.1 per cent in the national survey on gender-based violence in Tunisia of 2010 ¹⁸.

Economic violence is defined by Law 58-2017 as «any act or abstention likely to exploit or deprive women of access to economic resources, such as depriving them of the contribution of funds, compensation, control of wages or income and prohibition of work, or forcing them to work».

This form of violence needs to be better explored and monitored post COVID-19.

In spite of the increase in these calls, the Minister of Interior announced a decrease in the number of complaints filed with their Specialized Units during the month of April 2020 ¹⁹ with :

Month/year	Number of complaints	
April 2020	1268	62% decrease between 2019 and 2020
April 2019	3297	

Similarly, statistics from the Ministry of Justice have shown a significant decrease in complaints of offences relating to violence against women and children. In this regard, the Minister of Justice reported 124 cases to the public prosecutor between the beginning of confinement and 19 May 2020.

The discrepancy between the increase in the number of calls and the decrease of complaints registered by the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Interior can be explained by the following:

plained by the following:

- Women's difficulties in accessing police or national guard stations due to quarantine measures, lack of transportation, curfews and especially fear of contracting the coronavirus;
- The reorganization of the work of the various stakeholders: limitation of working hours, reduction of staff and lack of means of protection;
- There are major coordination difficulties between the various sectors, particularly the Ministries of Interior, Justice, Health and Social Affairs.

It is at the level of coordination that the various stakeholders encountered major difficulties in caring for women survivors of violence during this period. This problem, which existed before the outbreak, was exacerbated during the confinement phase. Protocols and mini-guides for the multi-sectoral care of women victims of violence have been partially useful in times of the pandemic.

A survey conducted by UN Women, Regional Office for Arab States, which aimed to document the impact of COVID19 on men's and women's attitudes and practices on gender equality and violence against women (VAW) has yielded valuable insights.

This study was conducted online among 1508 Tunisians aged 18 and above, including 502 women. For the data analysis, the results were disaggregated by gender, age and level of education. 52 per cent of respondents reported witnessing and/or knowing a woman who had experienced intimate partner violence, 32 per cent of violence perpetrated by a family member during the quarantine period, and 35 per cent of cyber-harassment.

According to the respondents, only 26 per cent of women victims of violence have sought help and/or filed a complaint: 22 per cent sought help from the police, 16 per cent from friends and family, 10 per cent from courts, 8 per cent from shelters and 8 per cent from NGOs. More than 50 per cent believed that women were at higher risk of experiencing violence during quarantine.

Although this is a perception survey and does not allow for the estimation of prevalence, it is the attitude of the interviewees that is interesting to consider.

Indeed, 75 per cent of respondents felt that protecting

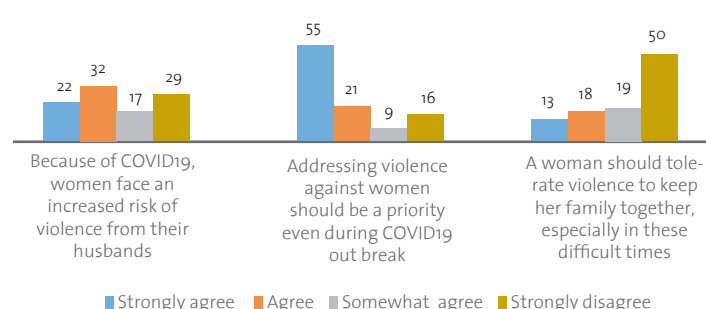
¹⁷ <https://news.gnet.tn/Les+Tunisiennes+faces+aux+violences+%3A+les+formes%2C+et+les+raisons%2C+se-lon+une+experte+>

¹⁸ <http://www.medicities.org/documents/10192/54940/Enqu%C3%AAt+ Nationale+ Violence+ envers+ les+ femmes+ Tunisie+2010.pdf>

¹⁹ https://www.facebook.com/watch/live/?v=586276448657810&ref=watch_permalink
²⁰ (<http://reports.weforum.org/global-gender-gap-report-2020/dataexplorer>)

women from violence should be a priority even during this time of crisis; 69 per cent disagreed with the idea that a woman must tolerate violence to keep the family together, especially in difficult times. 40 per cent of men thought that women should tolerate such violence compared to 24 per cent for women.

Agreement on statements related to perceptions on violence against women during COVID19 outbreak



Most important in terms of actions is the positive attitude of respondents; 60 per cent of whom said that they were willing to provide information about gender-based violence and 70 per cent said they were willing to engage in actions to prevent this type of violence in their community. Women and youth were more likely to report their readiness to do so.

Gender inequality, poverty and vulnerability

As the ILO announced in April 2020: **«No matter where in the world or in which sector, the crisis is having a dramatic impact on the global workforce».**

In Tunisia, the economic impact of COVID-19 has not yet been measured, particularly on women. The consequences for women's employment are likely to be considerable, as many are likely to lose their jobs and their only source of income.

Table1: Evolution of the gender gap index

	2006		2020	
Index global	90	0,629	124	0,644
Economic participation	97	0,480	142	0,434
Education	76	0,959	106	0,970
Health	98	0,966	107	0,971
Politics	53	0,110	67	0,201
Number of countries	144		153	

Tunisia 2016-2020

The COVID-19 crisis is taking place in a context of worsening inequalities between men and women. The bitter observation noted by the World Economic Forum report is unequivocal. Tunisia has recorded a decline in all the areas analysed in this report, including education, health, economics and politics. In terms of economic participation, Tunisia is in the very last group.

It should also be recalled that employment rate of Tunisian women is 26.3 per cent compared to 68.7 per cent for men. In 2016, women unemployment rate was 23.5 per cent compared 12.4 per cent for men. The unemployment rate for female tertiary graduates rises to 40.8 per cent compared to 21.2 per cent for men.

Important note: There is very limited sex-disaggregated data on poverty and vulnerability and it does not take into account the status of women.

The pandemic will lead to a recession of up to -6 per cent of GDP according to the statements of the President of the Government to the Assembly of People's Representatives²¹. Several sectors will be affected with a high level of women representation. These sectors include tourism, textile, clothing and footwear industries, mechanical and electrical industries and, indirectly, many small related trades, particularly craftwork.

The INS study ²² «Monitoring the socio-economic impact of COVID-19 on Tunisian households: Analysis of data from the 1st wave (April 29th, 2020 - May 8th, 2020)» carried out in partnership with the World Bank finds that :

²¹ <https://news.gnet.tn/tunisie-fakhfakh-devoile-le-plan-de-sauvetage-et-de-retablissement-de-la-confiance/>
²² Follow-up of the socio-economic impact of COVID-19 on Tunisian households. 1st wave data analysis (April 29th, 2020 - May 8th, 2020). May 2020.

- More than a third of the poorest households reduced the quantity or quality of food consumed during total quarantine;
 - Two thirds of the respondents who were working before quarantine had not yet returned to work;
 - 60 per cent of employees on sick leave declared that they no longer received any pay. This proportion rises to almost 80 per cent for the poorest.
- Note that these results have not been disaggregated by gender .

The study «Microeconomic impact of COVID-19 in Tunisia : Vulnerability analysis of households and micro-enterprises»²³ by the Ministry of Development, Investment and International Cooperation in partnership with UNDP predicts a significant impact on women's poverty rates.

«It is women agricultural and non-agricultural workers as well as unemployed women who suffer the most negative impacts of the crisis. Such a shock would not only run the risk of wiping out all the progress made over the last ten years in the fight against poverty, but also risks reinforcing the «feminization» of poverty. »²³

The Beity association's report «COVID-19, revealing and aggravating factor in intersectional inequalities towards women»²⁴ provides a profile of the ninety-nine (99) people who resorted to the association between 02 April 2020 and 25 May 2020.

The requests focused on:

financial and in-kind assistance	47,5 %
legal guidance due to domestic and intra-family violence	20,2%
Social monitoring	14,1%
Accommodation	13,1%
Care and monitoring of physical and moral health	5%

90.58 per cent of the beneficiaries of the Beity association are out of work, unemployed and without income and 52.05 per cent have no social security cover.

Beity's team concludes:
 “ Our report addresses the inter-sectional and exponential inequalities that COVID-19 has exposed and exacerbated with respect to large segments of the people who have been left behind, including socio-economically vulnerable women, their children and families.”

According to a note presented by Enda Tamweel²⁵ which finances nearly 400,000 micro-entrepreneur clients, i.e. one Tunisian household out of seven, and affecting the lives of about one and a half million Tunisians, at the end of April, 4 per cent of clients stated that they had permanently closed their projects. 70 per cent of activities and projects are temporarily closed. The handicraft sector was the most affected with more than 90 per cent in permanent or temporary cessation. In addition, one out of every two projects in activity sees its turnover shrink by 60 per cent. According to the census, the crisis has further worsened the divide between the populations. The poorest have been hit twice as hard. Many no longer had enough to meet their basic needs.

Faced with this social and economic crisis, the Tunisian State has set up a major social assistance scheme. «They have already resulted in the release of 650 million dinars, of which 400 million dinars were earmarked as an exceptional contribution to the financing of the technical unemployment to which thousands of enterprises would be forced to resort and 250 million dinars in social assistance for the benefit of nearly one million low-income families who would be particularly affected by quarantine.»²⁶

Social assistance did not incorporate a gender perspective, as many women whose husbands were absent could not benefit from exceptional state assistance because they were not the heads of the family.

Thus, and by way of example, 623,000 low-income families (families with an AMGII low-cost care card) received a monetary allowance of 200 dinars. For 86.5 per cent of the households covered by AMGII, the primary beneficiary of the households is male²⁷.

To address poverty and vulnerability, several political actors such as the General Union of Tunisian Workers (UGTT) insist on the importance of tax justice. The current tax policy does not take into account inequalities, particularly with regard to indirect taxes «which weigh disproportionately on all Tunisians regardless of their income. For example, in 2018, indirect taxes (VAT, consump-

²³ «Microeconomic impact of covid-19 in Tunisia : Analysis in terms of vulnerability of households and micro enterprises » Ministry of Development, Investment and International Cooperation in partnership with UNDP, June 2020

²⁴ Rapport d'urgence beity-covid-19 .mars-avril-mai 2020. The covid-19: revealing and aggravating factor in intersectional inequalities towards women

²⁵ What strategies to absorb the impacts of COVID-19 on the most vulnerable populations, contribution by Enda Tamweel in the Ibn Khaldun Development Forum, 19 May 2020.

²⁶ <https://www.webmanagercenter.com/2020/05/27/450883/crise-economique-lenjeu-social-et-les-recommandations-proposeses-2eme-partie/>

²⁷ According to the report of the Performance Evaluation Survey of Social Assistance Programs in Tunisia, Center for Research and Social Studies African Development Bank, May 2017.

tion and customs duties and other taxes) accounted for almost two-thirds of the contributions collected.»²⁸ The same inequalities affect direct taxes: employees are taxed much more than the self-employed and many companies benefit from non-productive tax incentives. In addition to fiscal inequalities, Tunisia suffers from significant tax evasion. « Tunisia has to face a tax evasion of 1.5 billion dinars per year, which represents about 25 per cent of the budget reserved for development in 2019.»²⁹

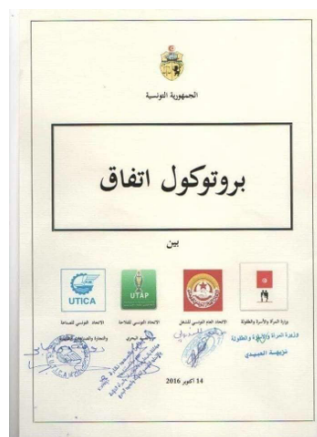
Further studies are needed to analyse the impact of these fiscal inequalities on women's impoverishment. It is fair to assume that current fiscal policy increases the vulnerability and impoverishment of women.

Post COVID-19, and in order to curb the economic crisis, a tax reform seems unavoidable. Oxfam in its report entitled «Fiscal justice in Tunisia, a vaccine against austerity» considers that fiscal justice is a substitute for austerity and one of the unavoidable remedies against inequalities in Tunisia.³⁰

Women vulnerability in times of COVID-19

● Female farm workers: The invisible taskforce in times of COVID-19

In Tunisia 1,786,261 women live in rural areas, i.e. 32 per cent of all Tunisian women and 50.4 per cent of the rural population according to the latest MFFES data. Rural women account for 4 per cent of landowners, 58 per cent of the agricultural workforce, 80 per cent of the forestry workforce and 15 per cent of the permanent workforce. They represent the majority of workers on Tunisian land.



It is within this framework that the UN SG in October 2019 in a statement on the International Day of Rural Women, confirmed: *“ They cultivate the land, provide food, water and fuel and support entire families, but do not have equal access to land, credit, machinery, markets and responsibilities.”*³²

Rural women are generally vulnerable and do not benefit from decent work conditions; only 10 per cent have social security coverage in Tunisia. They are the most affected

by poverty and rarely receive the benefits of development. All the studies have confirmed that this category of workers continues to be victims of economic and sometimes institutional violence despite the improvement of the legal framework. The wage gap between women and men is estimated at -35.5 per cent for the informal sector. Unlike men's wages, women's wages have always been lower than the guaranteed interprofessional minimum wage (SMIG). In the private and formal sector, the average wage gap between women and men is estimated at -25.4 per cent³³.

Accidents on public roads during the transportation of female farm workers to fields and farms are a real tragedy that has been going on for several years. Without road safety and decent transportation conditions, women continue to be victims of often serious accidents.

In October 2016, the Ministry of Women, Family, Children and Seniors (MFFES), the Tunisian General Labor Union (UGTT), the Tunisian Union of Agriculture and Fisheries (UTAP) and the Tunisian Union of Industry, Commerce and Handicrafts (UTICA) signed a protocol to regulate the transport of agricultural workers. Accidents have not stopped and there have been difficulties in implementing the protocol. It was in April 2019, following the tragic accident in the town of Sebaila in Sidi Bouzid that left 13 dead and 20 injured, that Law No. 51 of 2019 on the creation of a category of «transport of agricultural workers» was adopted.

Since the beginning of the Pandemic, Tunisia has recorded at least four serious accidents, the victims of which were female workers in the agricultural sector. For example, on 8 May, 2020, seven female workers were injured in the town of Regueb.³⁴ On 31 May 2020 eleven women were injured. On 9 June 2020 another eleven women were victims of a road accident and some of them were seriously injured³⁵. On 16 June, one person died and 14 female farm workers were injured.

As a sign of protest, Tunisian associations (Aswat Nissa and the FTDES) issued a statement on 17 June 2020 calling for the implementation of Law No. 51 one year after its adoption.

Domestic workers

It is commonly accepted in Tunisia that domestic workers (often called «cleaning women» or «maids») live in a very precarious conditions, not only because of the lack of legal organisation of the sector and the absence of social

28 <https://www.oxfam.org/fr/publications/la-justice-fiscale-en-tunisie-un-vaccin-contre-lausterite>
29 <https://www.webmanagercenter.com/2019/02/22/431400/evasion-fiscale-en-tunisie-estimee-a-15-milliard-de-dinars-par-an-expert/>

30 <https://www.oxfam.org/fr/publications/la-justice-fiscale-en-tunisie-un-vaccin-contre-lausterite>

31 <https://www.leconomistmaghreb.com/2019/03/04/femmes-milieu-rural/g>

32 <https://unicatun.org.tn/2019/10/14/message-du-secretaire-general-de-lonu-antonio-guterres-a-loccasion-de-la-journee-internationale-de-la-femme-rurale-15-octobre-2019/#more-14786>

33 <http://www.onagri.nat.tn/uploads/Etudes/securite%20alimentaire.pdf>

34 <https://www.tunisienumerique.com/tunisie-sept-ouvrieres-agricoles-blesees-dans-un-accident-de-la-route-au-regueb/>

35 <https://directinfo.webmanagercenter.com/2020/06/09/tunisie-onze-femmes-travaillant-dans-le-secteur-agricole-victime-dun-accident/>

protection measures, but also because of social stigmatisation.

Law 25 of 1 July 1965 amended by the law 32-2005 of 4 April, 2005, defines the legal status of the domestic worker «as a domestic worker any employee attached to the service of the house, whatever the mode and the frequency of the remuneration, and occupied to the works of the house in a usual way by one or several employers not pursuing by means of these works of lucrative purposes». Legislation has not evolved and Tunisia has not yet adopted the Convention on Domestic Workers.

There is no exhaustive census of women domestic workers and their professional status is not legally recognized: they do not have an employment contract, their working hours are not regulated and, above all, they do not systematically have social security coverage.

Some studies have focused on domestic work in Tunisia: ILO study³⁶ AFTURD study³⁷ and ATFD study³⁸. During the COVID-19 crisis and in particular during quarantine, domestic workers had to stop working (apart from those living with their employers), resulting in a loss of income that increased their vulnerability.

«The Minister of Women, Family and the Elderly, Asma Shiri, announced on 8 May 2020 that cleaning women will soon benefit from credits granted by the BTS and the Tunisian professional association of micro-finance institutions. This initiative is also a means of identifying cleaning women in Tunisia and building a database of their contact details. This mechanism will indeed facilitate administrative and legal procedures to support these women in the future.»³⁹



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Special situation of women prisoners

The Ministry of Justice has affirmed the absence of cases of COVID-19 in all prisons and detention centres in Tunisia thanks to the preventive measures undertaken⁴¹. The National Authority for the Prevention of Torture (INPT)⁴² published on 15 May 2020 its report on the April visits⁴³.



A number of data relating to the particular situation of women inmates emerged which revealed shortcomings relating to the isolation of women inmates, lack of information and the psychological stress they are subjected to.

Data from the Mannouba Women's Prison:

Nearly 23 per cent of the detainees at Mannouba were released following the two presidential pardons in March⁴⁴. Consequently, the prison population in the Mannouba women's prison has declined from 422 to 328.

- Prisoners expressed a great deal of fear and concern about the lack of information and insufficient psychological support, particularly for foreign national prisoners (who make up 9 per cent of all prisoners).
- The inmates also complained of total isolation from the outside world (lawyers and families), as well as the lack of hygiene products.
- The Ministry of Justice has announced the introduction of pay phones to enable detainees to communicate with the outside world. According to the Ministry, as of 15 May, the prison coverage rate had reached 80 per cent.
- Civil society action:

³⁶ ILO Study on child domestic workers in Tunisia, 2016

³⁷ The Afturd study on domestic work (2008-2010)

³⁸ ATFD report being published : Domestic workers in the Greater Tunis region: working conditions, reality of violations and bets on decent work. Dr Zouhair Ben Janet May 2020

³⁹ <https://tn24.tn/fr/amp/article/de-nouveaux-credits-destines-aux-femmes-de-menage-258910>

⁴⁰ <https://www.inpt.gov.tn/fr/amp/article/de-nouveaux-credits-destines-aux-femmes-de-menage-258910>

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² The National Authority for the Prevention of Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment

(INPT) was established by Organization Act No. 2013-43; it was set up following the election in March 2016 of its 16 members. Its main mission is the monitoring of places of detention and deprivation of liberty, from the point of view of the prevention of torture and degrading or inhuman treatment of detainees. The INPT is the National Mechanism for the Prevention of Torture (NPM) in Tunisia, in accordance with the requirements for ratification of the Optional Protocol to the United Nations Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment.

⁴³ <https://www.docdroid.net/CJEsVrO/rapportvisitescovid-19-inpt-avril2020-pdf> (in arabic)

⁴⁴ On 31 March, the President of the Republic announced a presidential pardon for 1,420 charged persons in addition to a list of 1,856 charged persons announced on 20 March. A third presidential pardon was announced on 22 May in favour of 643

As part of its mobilisation against discrimination against women and girls, BEITY launched, in May, a campaign against the double punishment of women ex-prisoners.

« Women ex-prisoners face a social stigma that makes their reintegration almost impossible. Yet they have already paid the price. It's up to us to make room for them. »

Discover their first video.:

- <https://www.facebook.com/AssociationBeity/videos/705550116909819/>

Data from the Reception and Orientation Centre of El Ouardia :

The situation at the El Ouardia centre reserved for the detention of foreigners seems alarming, as revealed in the INPT report but also in the Communiqué of the civil society⁴⁵

- The number of residents increased during the quarantine and there were a lot of violations. They are mainly related to the lack of information as to the reason for detention as well as the very difficult living conditions and insufficient nutrition and hygiene. The INPT noted a state of general depression among women requiring psychological follow-up not provided by the center.

- It is recommended to address the situation in the centres where foreigners are detained and to ensure legal information and living conditions in accordance with international standards and human dignity.

- Victims of human trafficking

Between 1 March and 4 June, 50 reports were received by the National Body to combat human trafficking⁴⁶ including 31 reports concerning women (all of Ivorian nationality), potential victims of slavery and economic exploitation⁴⁷.

Although individual interviews were suspended during the quarantine, the Forum continued to receive reports via a hotline and to coordinate actions for the medical assistance and accommodation of potential victims. Direct assistance (distribution of food and hygiene kits) was provided to vulnerable migrants in partnership with IOM Tunisia.



Raoudha Laabidi, President of The national body to combat human trafficking (INLTP)

Recommendations

Now that the pandemic seems to be coming to an end, at least for the first wave, it is time to take stock of the health, economic and social aspects of this unprecedented crisis,⁴⁸ to develop an exit strategy and to take advantage of this exceptional period to upgrade the mechanisms and structures to place the citizen at the centre of the system.

The resilience of women and men will depend on the ability of the response to take into account their specificities and the availability of quality data on which it is based⁴⁹.

In order to address the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is important to adopt a comprehensive policy based on gender equality and non-discrimination.

- Mainstream gender into all studies and research on the impact of COVID-19 and address the lack of sex disaggregation of data in almost all areas;

- Adopt a gender approach in government post-COVID-19 strategies;

- Support the work of the Peer Council for Equality and Equivalence of Opportunities whose main mission is to

detaiuees.

⁴⁵<https://ftdes.net/centre-el-ouardia/> ; The opacity that surrounds this centre and the lack of information provided to the detainees on their legal situation has always made us fear that we are facing cases of systematic arbitrary detention, contrary to the Tunisian constitution and its international commitments. »

⁴⁶ The National body to combat human trafficking (INLTP) (INLTP) was established under Organization Act No. 2016-61 of August

3rd, 2016.

⁴⁷ Data collected following an interview with Ms. Amina Boukamcha, in charge of the victims' file at the INLTP on June 5th, 2020.

⁴⁸ World Bank Group. Gender Dimension of the Covid-19 Pandemic, Policy Note, 16 April, 2020

⁴⁹ Global Health 5050 Sex, gender and COVID-19 2020<http://globalhealth5050.org/covid19> (2020)

integrate the gender approach into development policies and plans in Tunisia (planning, programming, evaluation and budgeting);

• Apply gender budgeting and adopt new gender-sensitive strategies in:

- economic empowerment of women in vulnerable situations;
- the agricultural sector to ensure the availability of necessary resources to improve the situation of women in this sector;
- fiscal stimulus packages to mitigate the impact of the crisis and ensure economic recovery;
- measures to promote tax justice;
- the design of digitization plans to take into account the specificities of women as designers and as beneficiaries.
- Adopt the necessary legislative and social measures, including the Convention on Domestic Workers, to ensure that persons working in this sector (domestic workers and personal assistants) are recognised and protected;
- Accelerate and strengthen the implementation of the Ahmini programme ;
- Put in place the necessary measures to ensure the implementation of Law 51, which requires the efforts of several sectors;
- Encourage women to organise themselves within the framework of the new law on the social and solidarity economy in cooperatives, mutuels and GDAs (Agricultural Development Groups) that can guarantee decent working conditions for them;
- Promote women's access to wealth and land in order to combat their impoverishment.
- Strengthen efforts to combat violence against women and the implement of Law 58-2017 by:
- Establishing the national observatory for the prevention of violence against women in accordance with article 40 of Act No. 58-2017;
- Implementing and updating of protocols and guides for intersectoral care of women victims of violence,;

● Establishing regional coordination mechanisms to improve support for women victims of violence;

● Organizing new public awareness campaigns on violence against women;

● Conducting a new general population survey on violence against women to provide an in-depth analysis of different types of violence, including economic violence.

● Provide universal access to quality care for women and take into account the specific needs of female health professionals.

● Strengthen the presence of women in decision-making positions:

● Support the implementation of the government decree on the consideration of the gender approach in the appointment to senior government positions;

● Include gender experts on health crisis management committees;

● Ensure the effective equitable participation of women in decision-making on planning interventions and managing long-term consequences at all levels: economic, social and budgetary.

● Support HAICA in affirming the need to respect gender equality in crisis communication and to demand or require the media to refrain from disseminating stereotypes about the social roles of women and men.