



Sustainable Responses for a Post COVID-19 Economic Recovery

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This virtual meeting on Sustainable responses for a post COVID-19 economic recovery gathered parliamentarians and parliamentary staff from the Americas and the Caribbean to engage with experts and discuss legislative and public policy responses that promote sustainable and inclusive economic recovery from COVID-19, while considering the gendered impacts of the pandemic and promoting the achievement of the 2030 Agenda.

 Access the recording of the session [here](#)

THEME

Economic Recovery, Gender Equality, Climate Change

LOCATION

Virtual Meeting

DATE

June 11, 2020

PARTICIPANTS

More than 45 parliamentarians and parliamentary staff from 13 countries



This activity was aligned with SDG 5

Summary

The activity was inaugurated by Member of the National Assembly **Elizabeth Cabezas** (Ecuador), President of ParlAmericas. The Honourable **Alicia Williams-Grant** (Antigua and Barbuda), President of the Senate, moderated the meeting, which featured presentations from: **Ambassador Irwin LaRocque**, Secretary General of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM); **Diane Quarless**, Director of the Economic Commission for the Latin American and Caribbean (ECLAC) Subregional Headquarters for the Caribbean; **Monika Queisser**, Head of Social Policy Division of the Organization for the Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD); and **Therese Turner-Jones**, General Manager of the Country Department Caribbean Group of the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB).

The dialogue was enriched through a series of interventions by parliamentarians, allowing for a sharing of good practices and further deliberation on the presentations. The webinar concluded with remarks from Senator **Saphire Longmore** (Jamaica), ParlAmericas Board Member.

The purpose of this meeting is to convene around a question that must be at the centre of our legislative agenda: how can governments in the hemisphere respond to the crisis with effective economic recovery measures that are gender-sensitive and sustainable, while fostering inclusivity and climate change resilience, two objectives that are crucial for our countries.

Although this pandemic constitutes a tragedy, we can choose to remember it as that, or we can see it as a great opportunity that allows us to think about the future. We can legislate to improve these structures that currently make us so vulnerable and above all, we can think about entering the future with a country with better foundations and a better society, because the world will not be the same after this COVID-19 pandemic.



Member of the National Assembly
Elizabeth Cabezas (Ecuador),
President of ParlAmericas

The Honourable **Alicia Williams-Grant** (Antigua and Barbuda),
President of the Senate



[Compendium of Legislative and Executive Actions from the Americas and the Caribbean in Response to COVID-19.](#)

This publication by ParlAmericas and the National Assembly of Ecuador provides an overview of legislation and decrees adopted by governments in the hemisphere in response to the COVID-19 pandemic until the end of April. These include key words that classify the measures thematically.

Panellists

Ambassador **Irwin LaRocque** emphasized the need for preparedness and long-term thinking in COVID-19 responses, considering the effects of the hurricane season and incorporating environmental resilience as a key factor. Ambassador LaRocque mentioned the difficulty that Caribbean countries face to access concessionary financing, calling international institutions to take into account not only GDP per capita, but also the fragility of the economies, exposure to environmental hazards, and debt to GDP ratio in their assessments.

Dianne Quarless ([presentation](#)) provided an economic overview, putting into perspective the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. The heavy indebtedness of Caribbean states gives governments very narrow fiscal space to respond to the crisis, exacerbated by a difficulty in accessing Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), Official Development Assistance (ODA), and concessionary lending. Ms. Quarless pointed out that a radical decline in tourism, which is the lifeblood for many Caribbean countries, will result in estimated annual losses of between US\$22B and US\$28B in 2020. In this context, Ms. Quarless called for governments to respond with evidence-based, data driven financial relief programs that address the heightened inequalities produced by the crisis.

Parliamentary involvement in SDG implementation is of critical importance, by strengthening national development strategies and infrastructure. We cannot afford to have short-term development focus in our countries, it needs to be long term in a way that transcends the party in power.

All of this is taking place within the context of the start of the hurricane season. Climate change has not gone away because of COVID... you need to take into account the fragility of our economies, the fragility of our environment, and allow us to have access to concessionary financing.

Diane Quarless, Director of the Economic Commission for the Latin American and Caribbean (ECLAC). Subregional Headquarters for the Caribbean



Ambassador **Irwin LaRocque**, Secretary General of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM)

Panellists

Monika Queisser ([presentation](#)) gave a global overview of the economic impact of COVID-19, based on the [OECD Economic Output Report](#), highlighting that world GDP is expected to decrease by 12.5% in comparison to last year. Ms. Queisser presented gender-based analyses that show how COVID-19 has affected women more acutely, including: the overrepresentation of women in essential service workers (90% of them are women among OECD countries), often with precarious job security; the fragility of women's jobs in this current crisis, with data showing that men's jobs are recovering more quickly; and the dramatic increase in instances of domestic violence, where parliamentarians have a large role to play in prevention and support efforts. She called on governments to consider gender impact assessments and gender-responsive budgeting in their responses to the crisis, and reminded legislators of the need of implementing gender-sensitive policies like parental leave, which were a pressing priority pre COVID-19 and remain ever more relevant now.

Therese Turner-Jones presented local data by the Inter-American Development Bank that confirms the gendered impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic in the Caribbean region. The data, which covered areas like nutrition, sexual harassment, household care and cultural expectations, showed how gender-equality priorities, which were pressing before the COVID-19 pandemic, have become even more urgent, as the crisis exacerbates these inequalities. Ms. Turner-Jones talked about the importance of incorporating women's voices in decision-making, and the need to consider the impact this crisis has on the mental health of the population.

These are all areas that need to be addressed even without the COVID-19 crisis, but that are particularly relevant in our responses to the pandemic: family care needs, better childcare, better elderly care, and especially more parental and paternity leave policies.



Monika Queisser, Head of Social Policy Division of the Organization for the Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)

We surveyed over 12,500 people in the Caribbean, and what we found is that about 47 percent of women lost their jobs during the pandemic, while over 40 percent of men did; 22 percent of women went hungry while 15 percent of men did; and 61 percent of households identified women as been primarily in charge of cleaning. Considering that the pandemic is disproportionately affecting women, and that governments are taking actions to address the pandemic, from the development of vaccines to social protection programs we need women's voices to be heard and represented.



Therese Turner-Jones, General Manager of the Country Department Caribbean Group of the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB)

Discussion

A discussion period followed the panellists' presentations, in which participants shared economic recovery measures implemented in their countries and raised questions to the expert panellists. During this portion of the meeting, participants and experts discussed how to measure the efficiency of public responses to the crisis, the difficulty in accessing concessionary financing rather than loans to reduce the level of debt, and the importance of investing in environmental resilience.

We have put a number of measures in place, a lot of them with a gender focus. For example, we had to close our tourism sector very early. The vast majority of employees in the tourism and informal sector are women. When the government introduced 3-month income support in the tourism sector, and support for informal sector workers, we are primarily benefiting women.



Senator **Chester Humphrey** (Grenada),
President of the Senate and Vice President
of the Parliamentary Network for Gender
Equality for the Caribbean

All the recovery plans seem to be looking at the hard figures of GDP and building environmental resilience, and I am wondering where the care economy comes in. When looking at the impact on women, the care economy has a significant role. In charting a new way forward, how do we develop a plan and policies to input the care economy into this new economic order?



The Honourable **Bridgid Annisette-George**
(Trinidad and Tobago), Speaker of the
House of Representatives and
ParlAmericas Board Member

Conclusion

To conclude the meeting, the floor was given to Senator **Longmore** (Jamaica), ParlAmericas Board Member, who reiterated the importance of strengthening data collection in the region, addressing the issue of domestic violence, and introducing stronger parental leave policies, among other good practices discussed. Senator Saphire thanked participants and panelists for their enriching contributions and welcomed the proposal of Ambassador LaRocque to hold a future dialogue with top advisors from CARICOM, in partnership with the International Secretariat of ParlAmericas.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS

- The most significant economic impact in the region is caused by loss of revenue due to tourism, which is the largest sector of most Caribbean economies.
- Caribbean countries are heavily indebted and need access to concessionary financing rather than loans, but opportunities are limited due to official development aid being awarded based on the criteria of GDP per capita.
- Long-term planning and investing on environmental resilience are key, especially considering the impact of hurricane season in the Caribbean region.
- Local data from Caribbean countries confirms the gendered impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic in areas like unpaid care work, job losses, nutrition, sexual harassment, and household work.
- Women are more acutely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and should be actively engaged in public responses, which should incorporate gender-based analyses.
- Introducing stronger parental leave policies is key to alleviate the unequal burden of childcare on women, especially during this crisis.

As we continue to plan and implement economic recovery measures in our countries, let's remember the importance of incorporating the principles of sustainability and gender equality discussed today. Let us also remember the importance of continued dialogue in the region. Conversations like these allow for the exchange of strategies and best practices and offer a venue to address pressing questions and challenges that we face as a region.



Senator **Saphire Longmore** (Jamaica),
ParlAmericas Board Member

[Policy Guide: Parental Leave](#)

This publication by ParlAmericas provides guidelines for strengthening the legal frameworks surrounding parental leave, including maternity, paternity and shared parental leave. The policy guide presents international instruments, key concepts, data, regional good practices and national frameworks for the Americas and the Caribbean.

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