

# GENDER EQUAL HEALTH AND CARE WORKFORCE INITIATIVE (GEHCWI)

PRESENTING THE INITIATIVE



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# Context

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The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the critical importance of global health security and the contribution made by health and care workers. As such, the World Health Assembly designated 2021 as the **International Year of Health and Care Workers**. It is estimated that among the 135 million health and care workers around the world, almost 70% are women. The pandemic has exposed deep inequalities – including gender inequalities – that undermine health system performance and global health security.

The health and wellbeing of millions will be affected in the long term by the pandemic and the economic repercussions are severe for societies and individuals, deepening existing inequalities between and within countries.

The pandemic struck when the world is facing a significant shortage of health and care workers, it is estimated that an additional 18 million are needed to achieve universal health coverage (UHC), primarily in low- and middle-income countries. Tragically, COVID-19 is causing health and care worker deaths, infection, exhaustion, mental trauma and there are early reports of women leaving the profession due to the additional burden of paid and unpaid work.

There is a critical and urgent need to address gender inequalities affecting health and care workers in order to protect the health and care workforce and build more resilient health systems and ensure global health security.

**“Delivered by women, led by men: a gender and equity analysis of the global health and social workforce”**

In November 2017, the World Health Organization (WHO), under the umbrella of the Global Health Workforce Network, established the Gender Equity Hub (GEH). The GEH, co-chaired by WHO and Women in Global Health, brings together key stakeholders to strengthen gender-transformative policy guidance and implementation capacity for overcoming gender biases and inequalities in the global health and care workforce. GEH supports implementation of the Global Strategy on Human Resources for Health: Workforce 2030, and the Working for Health five-year action plan (2017–2021) of WHO,

the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

In 2019, the GEH published ‘Delivered by women, led by men: a gender and equity analysis of the global health and social workforce’, a report based on review of over 170 studies on gender and equity in the global health workforce. The findings highlighted key gender and equity issues across four themes: gender parity in leadership, occupational segregation; decent work free from bias, discrimination and harassment, including sexual harassment; and the gender pay gap.

The following key messages emerged from this review:

- In general, **women deliver global health, but men lead it**. Health systems will be stronger when the women who deliver them have an equal say in developing national health plans, policies and systems.
- Workplace **gender biases, discrimination and inequities are systemic**, and gender disparities are widening. Many countries still lack appropriate legislation on issues that underpin gender equality and dignity at work, such as sex discrimination, sexual harassment, equal pay and social protection
- Women in global health are **underpaid and often unpaid**. It is estimated that women in health contribute 5% to global gross domestic product (GDP) (US\$ 3 trillion), out of which almost 50% is unrecognized and unpaid. Women in health and care roles also tend to earn less than men, even for work of equal value.
- Workplace **violence and sexual harassment in the health and social sector are widespread** and often hidden by underreporting. Violence and harassment harm women, limit their ability to do their job, and cause attrition, low morale and ill-health.
- **Occupational segregation by gender runs deep** and is universal. Women are highly represented in nursing, whereas men are more highly represented in surgery (horizontal segregation). Wider societal gender norms and stereotypes reinforce this. Occupational segregation by gender drives the gender pay gap and leads to loss of talent (for example, with few men entering nursing).

# Presenting the GEHCWI

The Government of France, the World Health Organization and Women in Global Health are partnering in 2021 - the International Year of Health and Care Workers - on **the Gender Equal Health and Care Workforce Initiative (GEHCWI)**. This Initiative aims to increase visibility, dialogue, and commitment to action on gender equity in the health and care workforce alongside the UN Women Generation Equality Campaign to accelerate gender equality and mark the 25th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. The Initiative aims to inspire action in the health and care sectors on safe and decent work for women, ending informal work, which is often unpaid and under paid, equal




opportunities in health and care occupations, an end to violence and harassment and equal participation of men and women in the sector in leadership and decision making. Gender equity in the health and care sector builds a strong foundation for health systems, universal health coverage (UHC) and global health security.

**The Gender Equal Health and Care Workforce Initiative (GEHCWI)** will convene the international community to implement existing global commitments and agree on practical steps to achieve gender equity in the health and care workforce.

## The Initiative aims to drive action in the health and care sector under four pillars:

1. Increasing the proportion of women in health and care leadership roles;
2. Recognizing the value of unpaid health and care work and the importance of equal pay in the health and social care sectors;
3. Protecting women in health and care against sexual harassment and violence at work;
4. Ensuring safe and decent working conditions for all health workers, everywhere.

## Together these changes will support achieving the 'TRIPLE GENDER DIVIDEND':

-  **Health dividend:** equal opportunities and decent work will attract and retain female health workers, helping to fill the 18 million global health worker gap.
-  **Gender equality dividend:** investing in women to enter leadership and formal sector jobs in health will increase gender equality as women gain more income and decision-making power.
-  **Economic dividend:** new jobs created in health will fuel economic growth and strengthen health systems and outcomes, all contributing to UHC and the SDGs by the 2030 end date.

# How will the GEHCWI achieve change?

1

Engaging Governments to deliver on commitments made in this area, including in the Beijing Platform for Action; the Sustainable Development Goals; the Political Declaration on Universal Health Coverage and the Working for Health Five Year Action Plan 2017 – 2021.

2

Inviting Governments, international organizations, foundations, NGOs and other significant global health organizations to share their commitments under one or more of the four GEHCWI pillars to reduce gender inequity in the health and care workforce.

3

Raising the commitments from the June 2021 GEHCWI High Level Meeting at global political fora, including the G7, the United Nations General Assembly and the G20.

## Key Milestones

The Initiative was launched formally at a **Roundtable hosted by France with WHO and WGH on 25 February 2021**.

Commitments from international organizations, foundations, NGOs and other key stakeholders will be gathered in the lead up to a **GEHCWI High Level Meeting 30 June – 2 July 2021**

hosted by France as a special initiative at the Generation Equality Forum in Paris.

Commitments from that meeting will be presented at the **United Nations General Assembly in September 2021** and at other high-level political fora to increase momentum and build support.

## How to engage with GEHCWI

There are many ways in which your country, organization and constituency can engage in the GEHCWI:

**1. Join the initiative and make a commitment.** Announce a commitment that will make a significant and lasting difference in one or more of the four GEHCWI pillars. Please send an email at [GEHCWI.DGM-DDD-HUMA@diplomatie.gouv.fr](mailto:GEHCWI.DGM-DDD-HUMA@diplomatie.gouv.fr) to express your interest in joining the initiative with the following information: name of the organisation / administration for state actors and name of your country. Further information will be provided as well as a template and recommendations for announcing your commitments.

**2. Join us on social media, follow #GenderEqualHCW.** Follow the key events and discussions, amplifying and adding to the conversation.

**3. Make the GEHCWI dialogue local.** Raise the Initiative and its core messages in your local context. The four pillars of the GEHCWI embody global challenges and barriers to sustainable and gender equal health and social care. These barriers, however, are manifested differently across localities, cultures and settings. Solutions will also vary with the local context. We invite you to take the GEHCWI local by organizing a dialogue to explore how these gender equity issues are manifested and resolved in your setting. Sharing this with us on the GEHCWI website will enable us to better illustrate local challenges and solutions.



# About us: GEHCWI partners

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## Government of France:

Gender equality is a priority for the French government. The French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs (MEAE) spearheads this commitment through its feminist foreign policy. France advocates for gender equality in international forums and wants this goal to be central in all areas, from reducing wider inequality to sustainable development, peace and security, defense, promotion of fundamental rights, climate and economic issues. At national level, France has also committed to ensuring that 50% of its official development assistance is attributed – through the Agence Française de Développement – to projects with gender equality as a significant or main objective.



## Women in Global Health:

Women in Global Health (WGH) is a global movement with a widespread network of women and allies working to challenge power and privilege for gender equity in health. WGH, a US 501(c)(3) not for profit organization launched in 2015, has grown to include over 50,000 supporters in 90 countries, with 25 official national and regional chapters and a strong presence in low- and middle-income countries. The global team and its network of chapters drive change by mobilizing a diverse group of emerging women health leaders, advocating that global health leaders commit to gender transformative change in their own institutions, and by holding those leaders accountable. WGH co-chairs with WHO, the Gender Equity Hub (GEH) of the Global Health Workforce Network.



## World Health Organization:

The World Health Organization (WHO) committed to mainstreaming gender equality across all three programmatic levels of the Organization in its 13th General Programme of Work, consistent with its mission to serve the vulnerable and leave no one behind. Within the area of health workforce, gender equity came out as a key area in the 2016 UN High Level Commission on Health Employment and Economic Growth. It is a core component of the Working for Health five-year action plan (2017–2021) of WHO, the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). In November 2017, under the umbrella of the Global Health Workforce Network, the Gender Equity Hub (GEH) was established, which is co-chaired by WHO and Women in Global Health. The GEH brings together key stakeholders to strengthen gender-transformative policy guidance and implementation capacity for overcoming gender biases and inequalities in the global health and social workforce.



Source: UN Women