June, 2020

**"The Day After the Coronavirus" – As Seen Through a Social and Gender Equality Lens**

The global coronavirus pandemic has created a deep social and economic crisis that affects the entire population. However, the coronavirus crisis (like other crises before it) has had a unique and more severe effect on women. The crisis has increased the inequality between men and women in society and has exposed women, more than ever, to the threat of poverty and a loss of financial and social safety nets.

It is very important that Tel Aviv-Yafo address this matter for a number of key reasons:

1. Tel Aviv-Yafo is a beacon of social equality and is the leading advocate of liberal values in Israel.
2. Because the city's diverse fabric includes residents from both the strongest and weakest population groups, it is necessary to devote special attention to social and gender equality.
3. The city is home to an especially large number of women and 23% of all families living in the city are single-parent families headed by a woman (twice the national average).

This document outlines the general-national implications for women and underscores what makes Tel Aviv-Yafo unique in this regard. Specific recommendations for the work teams are also specified, as defined by the Mayor.

**General-national implications**

**Employment-related and economic implications** – the unemployment rate among women is substantially higher than among men. The number of women who have been furloughed or fired since the start of the coronavirus crisis is about 28% higher than the number of men who lost their jobs (women make up 56% and men 44% of those who were fired in Israel[[1]](#footnote-1)). "This data, which reflects the breakdown of new applicants at the unemployment agencies in March and April, are in line with a global trend: the United Nations recently reported that the economic impacts of the outbreak of the virus have been felt much more among women than men. That is because in normal times women earn less, save less and work in less stable jobs." (*Haaretz*, May 1, 2020).

**The gender gap in the caregiving burden** – in most families in Israel, the mothers are typically the primary caregivers. During the present crisis, the bulk of the burden of running the household and taking care of the children as well as elderly parents fell on the shoulders of the women in the family. That burden is likely to have an adverse effect on women's prospects of rejoining the workforce once the crisis is over. Women are also likely to find it more difficult to work from home or, alternatively, to do overtime after they go back to work.

**Growing gender and sexual violence** – according to a document released on April 26, 2020 by the Authority for the Advancement of the Status of Women at the Ministry for Social Equality, "since the outbreak of the pandemic, violence against women has spiked throughout the country. The police reported an increase of 16% in domestic violence complaints in March 2020 compared to the corresponding month of the previous year. Social services agencies reported a sharp increase in cases during the same period. The hotlines of the rape crisis centers have not stopped ringing. Battered women's shelters are nearing full occupancy. The longer families are compelled to spend time together at home – the greater the danger to women."[[2]](#footnote-2) Data specific to Tel Aviv-Yafo will be presented separately.

**What makes Tel Aviv-Yafo distinctive**

The Tel Aviv-Yafo Municipality is a beacon of democratic values, equality and liberty. During this type of period in particular, the Municipality can spearhead important initiatives to advance women's rights, especially when this issue is pushed to the sidelines of the national agenda. Because gender equality is a critical component of social-economic resilience, it must be used as a primary tool to cope with the current crisis so we can emerge from it stronger and more resilient.

Tel Aviv-Yafo is home to diverse population groups by any standard – socioeconomic, gender, cultural, national and others. It includes many groups of disadvantaged women who are now facing multiple hardships: women who live in poverty, women who are uneducated, women who are victims of violence, and women who are new immigrants, Arabs, senior citizens, asylum seekers or migrant workers.

In Tel Aviv-Yafo, the coronavirus crisis has affected women from all social classes and from all sectors. The crisis has also had a devastating effect on lower-class and middle-class women who until now have never faced severe financial hardship and could find themselves on a slippery financial slope and in need of assistance from public agencies. Special attention should be devoted to uneducated young women (aged 18 to 35) and single-parent families.

Alongside the problems and challenges that are specific to women, in these times one can also identify the special strengths that women have in the city's social and economic fabric, which need to be enhanced through municipal platforms. If we take proper action – we will manage to reduce their vulnerability in the long term. The assumption is that by reinforcing the existing strengths of women in the population, the weaker women are also empowered.

Based on the data that has been published, there is a genuine concern that the coronavirus crisis will lead to greater social and gender disparities in Israeli society, in general, and in Tel Aviv-Yafo, in particular. Consequently, the work plans designed to deal with the crisis and the "day after" must include broad and in-depth treatment of its gender-related aspects.

**The recommendations of the Resilience and Social Equality Authority are as follows:**

General recommendations

1. The absence of women in decision-making circles has been particularly salient during the present crisis (the team of experts that has advised the National Security Council on ways to fight the coronavirus crisis, which is comprised of 31 members, includes only two women, both of whom are research assistants). That being the case, the Tel Aviv-Yafo Municipality should make a special effort to ensure significant or equal representation of women in policymaking positions.
2. Gender-related information and data should be gathered in order to examine to what degree women in the city are vulnerable, including female workers at City Hall, and to appraise the effectiveness of the steps that will be taken to mitigate that vulnerability. Accordingly, an online municipal survey should be conducted among women living in the city to assess the impact that the crisis has had on them, which can provide a reliable picture of the situation and start an animated dialog with them.
3. Greater use of the gender budgeting tool: gender budgeting is a strategy for advancing the status of women and reducing gender inequality in society. Public expenditures on services and programs provided by the Municipality should be examined through a gender lens. By doing so, it will be possible to ascertain that the needs of both women and men are being met in the best and most equitable manner. Because women are likely to be more adversely affected by the coronavirus crisis, it is necessary to ensure that the steps taken by the Municipality to assist residents will pay special attention to the unique needs of women.
4. Civil society organizations that operate alongside the Municipality and at times complement its services have been highly important in extending assistance to the city's residents during the coronavirus crisis (organizations that help people living in poverty, the elderly, the homeless and women working in prostitution; rape crisis centers; organizations that work with at-risk youth, and others). It is advisable to make greater use of the public participation tool, including involving and consulting with civil society organizations, and especially women's organizations, and synchronize their operations with those of the Municipality.
5. There is a growing need today to incorporate the social and gender equality lens in the work plans of City Hall departments. In this time of crisis, we are discovering just how vulnerable disadvantaged groups in society are and that each one of them needs assistance and support from the authorities: people living in poverty, at-risk youth, migrants, single moms and others.

Recommendations for the different work teams

**Intraorganizational team:**

1. As an employer, the Tel Aviv-Yafo Municipality should institute family-friendly policies, including enabling employees to work from home (even if only part of the time) and work flexible hours. It should offer employees recreational options and/or childcare arrangements so they can go back to work in an optimal manner.
2. Employment diversity at City Hall also in times of crisis. If the Municipality will be compelled to make cuts and intraorganizational changes, employment diversity should be one of the considerations and ensure the inclusion of different population groups: women, Arabs, ultra-Orthodox Jews, older adults, persons with disabilities, etc.
3. Research studies have shown that, on average, women have less access and exposure to digital platforms and less experience working with them, which could put them at a disadvantage in the current period (both in terms of remote working and use of new work methods). It is therefore advisable to assess the digital skills of female employees at the Municipality and develop trainings dealing with digital platforms for employees of both sexes who require them.

**Business and economic development team:**

1. Developing financial tools (for example, a local currency) that can be used to support businesses and incentivize purchasing from them.
2. Exploring the possibility of creating incentives for civil society organizations and businesses that will encourage them to hire women and diverse population groups (for example, creating a special badge for this purpose).
3. Because women are currently the primary caregivers of their children and parents, it is advisable to develop trainings on financial management in times of crisis that are tailored to women owners of small businesses.

**Social services team:**

1. Due to the financial hardships faced by many families and problems paying the rent, ways that the Municipality can help disadvantaged groups should be explored so they can continue living in the city. Supplementary assistance should be designed, while defining clear entitlement criteria for help with childcare/education/keeping the children occupied so the families can cut their expenses and go to work. Special emphasis should be placed on single moms and women from disadvantaged groups (Arab women, ultra-Orthodox women, women who are migrant workers and undocumented), because they have been most severely affected.
2. Developing special programs that support employment centers, with a focus on unemployed women and Arab women. The intention is to reintegrate them into the job market, offer them courses and vocational trainings on digital literacy and media and other skills, and establish mentoring and support networks for women who are business owners.

**Community team:**

1. The supply or subsidization of technological infrastructures should be considered, including access to computers and the Internet in disadvantaged parts of the city.
2. Developing platforms for boosting women's strength in the city: community forums for women, opening a municipal women's hub and encouraging female entrepreneurship in the community.

**Public space team:**

1. The current instructions are to avoid gatherings in closed spaces as much as possible. Consequently, one can assume that many recreational activities will move to the public space. Urban planning must, therefore, address gender aspects and take into account the unique needs of women in the public space. For example, women's safety in the public space must be ensured by strictly enforcing the laws against harassment and violence towards women, by improving street lighting, and by taking other measures.
2. Use of the 106 Hotline application for requesting help or for reporting purposes should be explored, achieved by adding a special anti-violence icon.

**Transportation and mobility team:**

1. According to Ministry of Transportation data, the majority of public transport users are women. However, the infrastructure, schedules and design of the space are not suited to women, and especially working women. Public transportation is essential to organizing one's time, and certainly when it comes to work schedules. Consequently, steps should be taken to better adapt public transportation to women, including bus lines that take gender needs into account. In particular, bus schedules and frequencies should be revised in the morning and early afternoon hours when children go to and come back from school. Furthermore, thought should be devoted to lighting and shade at bus stops and to increasing women's sense of security at bus stops and while traveling on the bus.
2. Women make less use of two-wheel modes of transport that could help them get around the city in a more efficient and sustainable manner. According to research that was commissioned by the Municipality, the main reasons for that are a lack of a sense of security on the road, vehicles that are not tailored to their needs, and psychological barriers. It is therefore advisable to launch a campaign that specifically targets women and their needs in order to increase their use of bicycles and other sustainable modes of transport.

1. Based on a report published by the Research and Planning Administration at the National Insurance Institute on April 21, 2020 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. For more about how crises affect gender equality, it is worth reading the new report released by the Israel Women's Network entitled "Women in the Shadow of the Coronavirus: The impact of Crises on Gender Equality," April 2020, <https://iwn.org.il/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Women-And-COVID-19-The-Impact-of-Crises-on-Gender-Equality_English-Summary-final.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)