



Achievements of the Gender Equal Health and Workforce Initiative

At the Women, Health and Gender Equality

UNGA 76 Side Event

23 September 2021

A little over six months ago Women in Global Health was delighted to launch the [Gender Equal Health and Workforce Initiative](#) with [France](#) and [WHO](#) – and the Initiative has made remarkable progress in just a short time in three areas:

One, we have convened the global health community around the issue of gender equity in the health workforce - at our launch event in February and in a dedicated event at the Generation Equality Forum in Paris in July. At the Forum we went beyond the global health audience and reached the gender community, positioning these as key issues in economic justice and rights for women. The health and care sectors, with 135 million workers, is one of the biggest economic sectors globally and a major economic sector for women's employment. The Initiative is grounded both in 2021 as the Year of Health and Care Workers and also the year of the UN Generation Equality Campaign to mark the Beijing Women's Conference and accelerate gender equality.

Two, we gained political momentum in May this year when the Initiative was recognised by member states in two resolutions at the World Health Assembly.

Three, by June we had received around 30 expressions of support and commitments under the Initiative from governments, international organisations and global NGOs. Since June we have been in discussion with another 30 governments who have shown interest in joining the Initiative, in addition to the 8 governments who are already on board. And we continue to engage international organisations and NGOs to build a community that will drive political change at global level and drive practical change at country level that will end the gender inequities in leadership, pay, safe and decent work and protection for the women who are the majority of the world's health and care workers.

Our Initiative is resonating with policy makers who have seen the gender inequities in the health and care workforce exposed by the pandemic and understand how these weaken health systems and undermine global health security. Without women – as 70% of the health workforce - there are no health systems. Without women the mass vaccination campaigns that we see as our best way out of this pandemic – will be impossible. We now need both vaccine equity and gender equity for the women who will vaccinate the world.

Nothing that we are raising in the Gender Equal and Health Care Initiative is new – COVID-19 did not create women's marginalisation in health leadership or the fact that women health workers earn less than their male colleagues and sometimes earn nothing at all. COVID-19 worsened but did not create the violence and harassment experienced routinely by women health workers.



The pandemic has, however, had one major impact. Health workers all over the world are exhausted and they are angry. After 18 months on the frontlines of the pandemic, women health workers especially are burnout and traumatised, having faced huge patient surges at work and increased unpaid work at home. The predicted global 18 million health worker shortage at the beginning of the pandemic was an urgent global problem – but now it is critical. Health workers have died and continue to die from the virus and large numbers will be left with long COVID and mental trauma. Reports suggest that women health workers all over the world plan to leave the health profession. This is a catastrophe. We cannot afford to lose even one trained health worker – and that is why we urge you all to join us in this Initiative. Globally, we need a new social contract for women in the health and care sector that gives women the equal, safe and decent work they need to stay in the profession and continue to deliver health for us all. And those gender equal conditions will attract women into an expanding health and care profession, filling vacant jobs and enabling achievement of global goals such as universal health coverage. The Gender Equal Health and Care workforce Initiative is not promoting a marginal women's issue, gender equity in the health and care workforce is central to strong health systems, strong societies and global health security.

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