

Concept Note and Agenda
Updated 1 December 2020

WOMENpreneurs: from Startups to Stars

A Gender Lens in the Face of this Crisis

The severe socio-economic and health impact of COVID-19 globally has placed strong pressures on various aspects of development, including employment. The pandemic has not been gender neutral. It has particularly exacerbated gender disparities and their implications for women at work, especially for mothers, senior women leaders, and migrant women across the continents. In addition to being laid off or furloughed at higher rates than their male counterparts during the pandemic, women are de-emphasizing their careers or leaving the workforce altogether at alarming rates. This is prefaced by the reality that 510 million women globally – representing 40% of all employed women - work in hard-hit sectors, compared to 36.6% of all employed men.¹

The crisis has revealed the vulnerabilities of conventional styles of leadership. It also brought to light an indisputable fact: that the leadership of women is essential to effectively and sustainably address challenges, in order to adapt to the new realities. Women's proven leadership in business has emerged as a "*silver lining*" in the pandemic period, focusing on solutions-oriented initiatives, resilience, and risk-taking. From the CEOs of Fortune 500 companies to the founders of local start-ups, women leaders are adopting and adapting technologies and risk management skills to respond to the pandemic head-on and to continue to support livelihoods in a sustainable manner.

The International Organisation of Employers (IOE), Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (KAS)² and the UN Global Compact (UNGC) are co-organising a joint digital conference on how to make the COVID-19 recovery process a "reboot" for female entrepreneur- and leadership. The event will bring together the voices of multi-generational leaders from the private and public sectors through dialogue, in order to share, discuss and establish a footprint for collaboration around three key areas:

- A) Women leading in solidarity for sustainable livelihood and shaping leadership;
- B) Obstacles and opportunities to breaking through the corporate glass ceiling; and
- C) *WOMENpreneurs*-challenging the orthodoxies.

This virtual gathering of leaders from different regions, business sectors and generations, will create the open space to present their experience and the challenges they are encountering on the road to success. The event links to the priorities of the "[Women Rise for All](#)" initiative by the UN, which recognizes female leadership in the fight to save lives and protect livelihoods in the wake of COVID-19. While this exceptional

¹ <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2020/09/gender-equality-in-the-wake-of-covid-19>

² IOE and KAS have embarked on a collaboration that brings together under the UN Reform, UN Resident Coordinators and employers federations on the ground to implement systemic changes on issues such as social protection, gender equality, digitalization, and informality as we try to #BuildBackBetter.

group will spotlight the progress made and the challenges that remain in breaking through glass ceilings, young entrepreneurs will be sharing their expertise on how they have used their digital skills and innovation to launch start-ups and transform their businesses. With a view to future action, the event will also explore the key role that mentorship plays in fostering female leadership and entrepreneurship.

Background on organisers

The **International Organisation of Employers (IOE)** has championed entrepreneurship and innovation, which is the foundation for employment creation, shared growth, and sustainable development. The work of IOE is principled on action and clear values, uniting the employer and business community worldwide. As the trusted voice of business in global policymaking, its mandate includes advocating in the international arena for sustainable economic and social policies that promote free enterprise, thriving businesses and a fair society that works for everyone. While IOE has planned to celebrate its centennial earlier this year, with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, it has faced the situation head-on through embarking on dialogues to bring together key stakeholders to take collaborative action to overcome and #buildbackbetter.

Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS) is one of Germany's six political foundations and rooted in Christian-democratic values. Many of the over 100 country offices and programs carry out activities in support of women leadership, particularly the engagement of women in politics. #Buildbackbetter in the sense of empowering more women necessitates a multi-stakeholder approach. It asks for strengthened partnerships and exchange with UN institutions and agencies, governments as well as with actors from civil society and the private sector. KAS provides and facilitates platforms for dialogue. KAS has always been a strong advocate for the concept of a social market economy where government, employer and employee representatives are consulting closely, seek consensus and provide systems of social protection. For KAS IOE is a natural partner in order to engage the private sector in the implementation of the Agenda 2030.

A special initiative of the UN Secretary-General, the **United Nations Global Compact (UNGC)** is the largest corporate sustainability initiative in the world and a call to companies everywhere to align their operations and strategies with ten universal principles in the areas of human rights, labour, environment and anti-corruption. The Ten Principles are notably anchored in business support and respect for human rights, including women's rights, and in the face of the pandemic, UNGC has launched a special appeal — #UnitingBusiness to respond to COVID-19 — calling on all companies to take collective action and facilitate a fast recovery through the implementation of the Principles. To #buildbackbetter and ensure a gender lens in business COVID response, UNGC encourages companies to sign on the Women's Empowerment Principles, a roadmap for companies to advance gender equality in the workplace, marketplace and community, and it has also launched Target Gender Equality, an accelerator programme to support companies in setting concrete targets on women's representation and leadership in business.



This event is in partnership with IOE's work
with the European Union