



BEYOND COVID-19:

A FEMINIST PLAN FOR SUSTAINABILITY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

KEY MESSAGES



As the world reckons with the fallout of COVID-19, growing inequality and accelerating climate disasters, the need for a shared plan to recover and transform economies and societies has never been clearer.

- UN Women's new flagship report "Beyond COVID-19: A Feminist Plan for Sustainability and Social Justice" provides a roadmap for addressing these challenges while recovering the ground that has been lost on gender equality and women's rights.
- Drawing on the latest available data and the contributions of over 100 experts from academia, civil society and the UN system, it provides a vision and concrete pathways for putting gender equality, environmental sustainability and social justice at the centre of economic recovery and transformation.

The pandemic has drawn attention to a trio of interlocking crises that systematically undermine gender equality and threaten the survival of people and the planet: jobs, care and climate.

A jobs and livelihoods crisis has pushed large swathes of people behind and increased their vulnerability to shocks. In many countries, fragile progress on women's employment has been all but wiped out by the pandemic, and lack of access to social protection has left them with little to fall back on.

- Globally, between 2019 and 2020, women lost 54 million jobs. By the end of 2021, men's jobs will have recovered, but there will still be 13 million fewer women in employment.
- Countries have boosted social protection, but women are not benefitting equally. Across 45 countries, only 17 per cent of women reported receiving cash relief in response to COVID-19 (compared to 27 per cent of men).

A global care crisis has left millions of children and care-dependent adults without the support they need while imposing harsh choices and enormous costs on women and girls.

- Globally, even before the crisis, women did three times as much unpaid care and domestic work as men.
- Countries in sub-Saharan Africa rely on over 900,000 community health workers to support their fragile health systems: Over two thirds of these workers are women; 86 per cent are unpaid.

The accelerating environmental crisis is taking a disproportionate toll on the poorest countries and the most marginalized women and girls who have contributed least to the problem.

- Women's greater dependence on and unequal access to natural resources, public services and infrastructure mean they are disproportionately impacted by environmental degradation and climate change.
- Insecure land rights make women especially vulnerable to land-grabbing for large-scale environmental projects. Forty per cent of countries have at least one restriction to women's rights to property.

- Every year, 3.8 million people, most of them women and children, are killed by air pollution caused by the use of unclean energy for cooking and heating in households.

These crises are deeply rooted in an economic system that fails to value, protect, nourish and invest in what is essential.

It has also led to an extreme concentration of wealth and power among the few while causing a deep sense of insecurity among the many, fuelling widespread disenchantment with mainstream politics and rising nationalism, often combined with a backlash on gender equality.



The world is at a crossroads, facing the choice between doubling down on the mistakes of the past or seizing the opportunity to do things differently. Three sets of policies can be the foundation of the change we urgently need.

First: Let's prioritize jobs. Women's access to decent work, social protection and food security needs to be ensured as part of a people-centred economy that addresses inequalities between and within countries.

- Gender-just green transitions must be harnessed to create decent jobs for women in care, energy, transport, agriculture and waste and water management.
- Universal, gender-responsive social protection systems need to be strengthened to provide a bulwark against economic and environmental shocks and address the specific risks and challenges faced by women and girls.
- Triggered by the pandemic, countries such as **Brazil, Chile, South Africa** and **Togo** made efforts to close gaping holes in social protection systems, experimenting with cash transfers for informal workers and strengthening access to unemployment insurance for domestic workers.
- Fairer global trade agreements and national policies that prioritize women-led cooperatives

and community agriculture are needed to build sustainable local food systems.

- **Kenya** and **Senegal** have spearheaded public procurement programmes that connect women small-scale producers to a predictable source of income and offer support to their livelihoods in times of crisis, as well as ensuring fresh and nutritious food for schools and hospitals.

Second: Let's prioritize care. Public investments in the care economy should be a key pillar of economic recovery. Affordable quality care services are not only critical to support women's (re)entry into the labour force and the well-being of children and older persons, but can also drive a job-rich recovery.

- Across the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries, public investments in care services could create 40-60 per cent more jobs than the same investments in construction.
- **Canada** and the **United States** have recognized this potential and are planning

massive investments in child and elder care infrastructure as part of their recovery strategies.

Argentina and **Mexico**, too, are taking steps to create integrated national care systems.

- In **Ethiopia** and **Pakistan**, women community health workers have organized to demand pay and conditions commensurate with the critical roles they play in their countries' health systems.

Third: Let's tackle climate change. Rapid and radical action is needed to green our economies and harness this transformation to promote gender equality.

- Transitioning away from fossil fuel economies will result in a loss of 6 million jobs but could create 24 million new ones. Currently women make up 32 per cent of employment in the renewable energy sector but are only one in 10 managers. Reskilling and retraining women to ensure they get a fair share of these opportunities is critical.
- Developed countries need to urgently step up their climate finance commitments to

support gender-just transitions in the poorest countries, contributing to the diversification of women's livelihoods impacted by environmental degradation. Only 21 per cent of finance went to the least developed countries in 2017-2018; and in 2018, just 15.7 per cent of Global Environment Facility projects were gender-responsive.

- Women leaders in local communities are spearheading innovative approaches to promote gender-just transitions in key sectors, e.g., in sustainable energy in **Nigeria, South Africa, Uganda** and **United Republic of Tanzania**; and in agroecology in **Brazil, Cuba** and **Nicaragua**, protecting local ecosystems based on Indigenous knowledge. Governments must support their efforts so that these models can go to scale.

To finance these policies, we need transformative macroeconomic policies—including debt relief, progressive taxes and, especially for low-income countries, global cooperation—to ensure that resources flow to where they are needed the most and where they can make the biggest difference.



To transition to a more sustainable and just economy, we need to change not only what we do, but also how we do it.

- Despite mobility restrictions imposed by governments during the pandemic, 5,012 women's protests took place globally between March and December 2020: from protests demanding food aid and support for online schooling in **Kazakhstan** to calls for improving livelihoods and working conditions for domestic workers in the **Republic of Korea**.

An inclusive, rights-based feminist politics could reinvigorate democratic processes and form the basis for a new social contract that delivers sustainability and social justice for all.

Breaking with the vicious cycle of economic insecurity, environmental destruction and exclusionary politics requires **a shift in power relations that reconnects governments** with the constituencies they are meant to serve.

Instead of amplifying the voices of the few, **historically excluded groups need to be brought into decision-making spaces** and gender parity must become a reality.

- Only 24 per cent of seats on COVID-19 policy taskforces worldwide are held by women, limiting the effectiveness of crisis planning and response. This under-representation mirrors other decision-making spaces: Women hold only a quarter of parliamentary seats and 33 per cent of climate decision-making roles under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) process.

To ensure effective gender mainstreaming, we must **promote feminist leadership** across institutional spaces: from executives, legislatures and state bureaucracies to civil society and the private sector.

- Feminists in politics, policymaking and civil society in contexts as diverse as **Argentina, India** and the **United States** have influenced decision-making during the pandemic, with wide-ranging benefits for women and gender equality.
- Despite their critical roles, women's organizations are woefully under-funded. In 2018–2019, they received only around 1 per cent of all OECD-Development Co-operation Directorate (DAC) development aid allocated to gender equality, amounting to a tiny fraction of total aid.

More and better data are needed to ensure the accountability of governments for making progress on gender equality:

- Only 68 countries report sex-disaggregated data on informal employment.
 - Only 97 countries report sex-disaggregated data on access to old-age pensions.
 - Only 92 countries have carried out time-use surveys and even fewer have these data for multiple years, making it impossible to measure changes in women's unpaid care work.
 - Beyond the OECD, data on coverage of childcare services range from scarce to non-existent.
- Six out of 17 SDGs, all of which relate to the environment (water and sanitation, sustainable consumption, energy, oceans and terrestrial ecosystems), lack gender-specific indicators.

In his Common Agenda report, **the UN Secretary-General calls for a new social contract.**

By implementing transformative policies on jobs, care and the climate and building a new feminist politics, we can ensure this new social contract is:

- **Feminist**, aimed at shifting gender power relations and tackling multiple forms of discrimination.
- Based on **social justice**, addressing pervasive inequalities and rebalancing economies towards the rights and needs of the majority.
- **Eco-social**, recognizing that humans are not disconnected from nature but part of the Earth's ecosystem that needs to be preserved and regenerated.
- **Global**, based on solidarity and the common good, acknowledging the world's interdependence and that no one is safe until everyone is safe.

