

CARE-BASED POLICIES TO CONFRONT COVID-19

FEMINIST POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS TO ADDRESS THE PANDEMIC

As COVID-19 ravages communities across the United States and throughout the globe, this crisis has made it clear just how deeply connected we all are, and how much we need policies that protect people's health and well-being. The pandemic has also laid bare how the architecture of the US's political and economic systems – fueled by the pursuit of profit, an ever-expanding military footprint and continued extractivism – not only fails to secure our collective human security, but threatens our very lives and livelihoods.

This moment calls upon us to leverage what we know about social change and recognize that emergency responses to this crisis are seeding the future right now. Feminist, progressive policy must work to meet critical needs in communities by putting the health of people and the planet over profit, steering us towards a just transition to sustainable economies and embracing connection and cooperation as we protect each other and rebuild from disaster. This becomes all the more crucial as we brace for the suffering from the ruin of the global economy, the power-grabs and militarized responses by authoritarians, and the efforts of xenophobes and fundamentalists to impose their reactionary narratives on the crisis.

A progressive, feminist response to the pandemic must be rooted in an ethic of care, advancing the following policies:

Revalue care work in our economy

As the pandemic reveals, we must make visible the care work for which women and girls are typically responsible around the world: care for the sick, elderly and children. Women, especially women of color and immigrant women, comprise the majority of nurses, teachers, child care workers and domestic workers. This work grows exponentially in a time of crisis and puts women and girls at added risk of exposure to the virus. Yet, while caregiving is so essential to our society and economy, it has for far too long been underpaid, undervalued and invisibilized. Now is the moment to push for the progressive policies we deserved all along and need so much now: universal health care, child care, parental leave, paid sick and family medical leave, a living wage and a universal basic income, regardless of immigration status. The US must also stop pressuring other countries to cut social spending.

Policy to learn from: Spain is implementing a basic income for low-income families during this crisis, with hopes of making it a permanent policy.

Ensure protections for survivors of domestic and gender-based violence

During this public health crisis, quarantine and lockdown measures, coupled with the stressors of unemployment and illness, are triggering increases in domestic violence around the world. During the lockdown, reports of domestic violence have spiked in the US and increased by 30% in France, while women's groups report an increase in cases of 60% in Lebanon. The crisis is compounded in countries already battered by US-supported war and neoliberal economic policies that have weakened governance and health systems.

The US must increase funding and support for grassroots organizations in the US and globally that serve as a vital lifeline for women, girls and LGBTQIA+ people by running hotlines, offering shelter and providing psychosocial support online.

Policy to learn from: France is relocating survivors into hotels where they can stay safe and creating a support network at pharmacies and shops where they can discreetly seek help.

Pass a Feminist Green New Deal

The Trump administration is capitalizing on this moment of disruption to roll back auto fuel-efficiency rules and stop enforcing environmental regulations. We need something radically different: a feminist Green New Deal. Such a policy would build on the proposed Green New Deal, which aims to transform our extractive economy to one grounded in

sustainability, justice and equity. A feminist approach calls for a down payment on a care economy, intersectional policy that addresses how people are impacted differently based on systemic exclusion and exploitation, and ensures that as our economy is stimulated by well-paid green jobs, women and frontline communities benefit.

A feminist Green New Deal must be guided by Indigenous women, who have long called for an end to deforestation and the commodification of life-sustaining resources like water. It must repair harm to and uplift the climate solutions of women and girls in the Global South, rural and Indigenous women, and Black women at the frontlines of environmental violence.

A feminist Green New Deal is vital to restoring the balance between people and the planet, thus preventing future pandemics and paving the way to a just recovery from the current crisis.

Advance a coordinated global response

This virus is a global problem and requires a global response. Rather than treating pandemic response as a zero-sum game, scapegoating China at the UN Security Council or cutting aid to the World Health Organization (WHO) to deflect from the failures of the US response, the US must cooperate with the global community by engaging multilateral channels and using joint strategies – such as collaborating in the production and global distribution of a vaccine and necessary equipment and medical supplies.

Policy to learn from: Spain required private hospitals and corporations to contribute resources to confront COVID-19. Venezuela created a nationwide survey to find sick people and provided them with home visits from healthcare workers.

Promote global justice through increased humanitarian aid, funding for global health and a global stimulus, and Global South debt cancellation

Across the Global South, women and families with limited access to health care, clean water and government services are particularly vulnerable. Refugees and migrants living in crowded and unsafe camps, poor families in urban slums and settlements and communities in the midst of war zones are disproportionately at risk of being impacted by COVID-19.

A US foreign policy response guided by care and collective responsibility must center these communities' needs. Already, grassroots women's groups, including in Yemen, are mobilizing to save lives. Rather than cutting off funding for health care and humanitarian response to Yemen, as the Trump administration recently did, we must boost support for grassroots women-led organizations providing aid and awareness.

Funding is also needed for global health services, including through the WHO, to ensure Global South countries have the resources they need – like ventilators, hospital beds, masks for healthcare workers and sanitation supplies. But instead of responding to the critical need, the White House is on the offensive, halting aid to the WHO.

Further, global justice calls for us to cancel Global South countries' debt and reject neoliberal responses to the crisis – like the IMF and World Bank conditional loans and structural adjustment policies we know all too well have decimated health systems and impoverished targeted countries. Instead, we need a global stimulus package for countries and grassroots community-based responses.

Policy to learn from: Cuba has acted in international solidarity, sending health care workers to build hospitals in Italy.

Lift economic sanctions

Over the years, the US has slapped increasingly devastating economic sanctions on countries it seeks to punish – including Iran, North Korea, Cuba, and Venezuela. By attacking economies and impeding access to life-saving medicine, medical equipment and humanitarian aid, economic sanctions impoverish and kill people. Further, women and girls – who often shoulder the burdens of procuring food, water and fuel for the household – are disproportionately impacted by economic sanctions, which also worsen maternal mortality and women's reproductive health. Sanctions have already killed thousands in Iran, where the disease has spread rapidly and communities lack access to necessary medical equipment. The US must lift broad-based and sectoral economic sanctions and instead provide support to communities experiencing health and economic impacts.

Advance peacebuilding and reject militarized responses to the pandemic

We must reject militarized responses to this crisis. The Trump administration and its right-wing counterparts globally are already exploiting this crisis to militarize borders, expand the security state, heighten surveillance, increase policing and crack down on activism and organizing. Further, we must not use the pandemic as a pretext to increase the Pentagon budget. Instead, we must divest from the Pentagon and reinvest those funds in public benefits and care for communities at risk. Calculations show that just the funds currently proposed for “nuclear arms modernization” – which the military seeks to use for new missiles, bombers and nuclear warheads – could

instead fund 300,000 intensive care unit hospital beds, 35,000 ventilators and the salaries of 75,000 doctors. Our budget is ultimately an expression of our values, and the Trump administration's call for an increase in military spending is a clear reflection of their priorities: war, violence and profits over human well-being.

We should also recognize that US war and militarism – such as ongoing US military support for the Saudi coalition's war and blockade in Yemen – has exacerbated humanitarian crises and decimated countries' health systems, weakening their ability to respond to COVID-19.

To pursue foreign policy rooted in care, we must repair past harm and advance peace by closing US military bases around the world, endorsing the UN's call for a [global ceasefire](#), permanently [ending support for the Saudi coalition in Yemen](#), [repealing the 2001 and 2002 Authorizations for Use of Military Force](#) and ramping up diplomacy and humanitarian aid.

Protect the rights of immigrants and refugees

Since the virus has taken hold, there has been an explosion of racism and xenophobia against the Asian-American community, including hate crimes and discrimination. We need to investigate these incidents and offer restorative justice and support for those impacted. Further, Trump has seized on this crisis to [shut down the border](#), turn away asylum-seekers – including survivors of gender-based violence, and [block immigration](#), justified by xenophobic narratives.

We must push against hateful ideologies that exclude immigrants from stimulus benefits or paid sick leave, and end ICE raids and deportations – which put immigrants at increased risk of contracting the virus, rip people apart from their families and make immigrants afraid to seek medical care.

Finally, people should be released from immigration detention centers, where the virus can spread amid conditions of overcrowding and poor sanitation.

Policy to learn from: Portugal has temporarily [granted all asylum seekers and migrants full citizenship rights](#), giving them access to the health system and public benefits as the pandemic rages.

Guarantee reproductive rights

In recent stimulus negotiations, [anti-abortion policymakers have exploited the pandemic](#) to insert provisions that limit abortion access. [States have moved to restrict abortion care](#), propagating the false narrative that reproductive health services divert medical resources from the pandemic. Any policy response must center reproductive rights. This requires repealing the global gag rule, which blocks access to essential health services for women and girls, LGBTQIA+ people and sex workers.

Prioritize disability justice and center the expertise of people with disabilities

While public health alerts warn us of the disproportionate danger that COVID-19 poses to people with respiratory conditions and other chronic illnesses, we need to uplift the expertise of people with disabilities, who have vital knowledge to share that can strengthen resilience for everyone.

As we develop policy, [we must center disability justice and the rights and leadership of people with disabilities](#). We must also provide social protection – such as rent and food subsidies, ensure that health communication and education is accessible, make available free mental health and counseling services and provide personal protective equipment for people with disabilities and caregivers.

