



Socialist International Women

Council Meeting
Virtual - 30 April 2021

How to reinvent our future after COVID-19

DECLARATION

The Socialist International Women stands in firm solidarity with all women and girls worldwide during this unprecedented period of global crisis. The COVID-19 pandemic continues to have a devastating impact on millions of lives and livelihoods leaving no region or individual entirely unaffected. It is clear that the acutely painful and damaging effects on economies, communities and individuals will have long-lasting repercussions, which may take many years to fully mitigate and recover from. This catastrophe has particularly highlighted the gross inequalities experienced by women and girls. As a direct result, sadly, women and girls have been suffering more severely than men for a number of reasons, which could and should be immediately addressed. At their worst these include a total loss of income, often without appropriate social protection, producing acute levels of poverty; vastly increased levels of un-paid carer duties, without access to appropriate support; significantly increased levels of domestic violence within 'stay at home' and curfew regimes with reduced levels of funding for refuge and recuperation support and an increased risk of infection for the women working within paid medical and non-medical carer roles, who make up 70 per cent of the global workforce in these sectors.

We all have a humanitarian duty to ensure that the immense sacrifices and personal efforts of women during this pandemic do not leave them impoverished and acutely vulnerable. There are multiple socio-economic benefits to meaningfully embracing and incorporating gender equality within our societies, including an estimated US\$13 trillion increase in global GDP by 2030 if we take action now on making gender equality a reality across all aspects of our global society¹. The wellbeing of women and girls is essential to creating sustainable, peaceful communities and is therefore critically important for our entire global family. It is vital that this fact is consistently presented within all political and social narratives and the continuing fight for the full realisation of women's rights.

The Socialist International Women asserts that at this unique time it is critical that gender equality and the rights and needs of women and girls are both prioritised and strongly influence the COVID-19 recovery efforts of our governments and communities. It is imperative that we do not lose previously won gains and that we strongly challenge attempts to lower the priority of women's issues within the wider context of COVID-19 recovery initiatives. Standing together in solidarity we have an opportunity to radically re-set the rules of 'ordinary business' for the future, to create the gender sensitive and inclusive policies, legislation and funding allocations necessary to elevate women and girls to their rightful gender equal place within societies, businesses and governance.

Increasing the political participation and influence of women has always been a primary goal within the overall vision of the Socialist International Women. At this immensely turbulent time it is vital that women are fully engaged, active participants in all decision-making conversations around the current and future funding and implementation of all civic and social protection mechanisms, including social care, healthcare

and the financial support of women both at home and in their working lives. One vital aspect to support change is encouraging the collection of sex-disaggregated data to ensure that needs and inequalities do not remain hidden within a sea of data, or are entirely missed. The existence of hard data evidence can be immensely powerful when pushing for change. Another essential element at grassroots level is providing tangible, practical support to women to enable them to join critical decision-making conversations. It is also vital that women are empowered to vote and openly advocate on issues to contribute their unique perspectives and knowledge. The collective power of women's voices can and must be harnessed to force the political imperative to act swiftly on gender equality issues and implement concrete changes.

There are many ways in which women can be supported and given the knowledge, time and personal and financial freedom to engage politically. Possible options include encouraging businesses to provide working parents with childcare options, flexible working arrangements and adequately paid maternity and paternity leave; increasing free childcare resources, and support for un-paid home carers; providing favourable state financial support for female entrepreneurs and women-owned micro-businesses; providing low cost or free access for women to essential ICT services such as mobile phones and computers, and ensuring all women and girls have access to good quality education and training. In addition, wider civic society must be re-aligned to fully integrate the gender equality narrative and re-shape ingrained attitudes and behaviours which exclude and denigrate women and girls. This aspect could be realised in part with revised legislation and policies to address issues such as blatant misogyny in broadcast and social media and systemic gender inequalities, such as gender restrictive approaches to education, social protection, healthcare, property rights, social benefits, pay and pension practices.

Women themselves are acutely aware of the inequalities which restrict and impoverish them. They are therefore uniquely placed to highlight these issues and recommend the most useful solutions which facilitate real change and are genuinely fit for purpose. However, it is only once women are routinely included in elite level conversations within governments, businesses and wider civic society that these invaluable perspectives will automatically become part of a global gender equality narrative. Socialist International Women recommits to continuing the fight for gender equal political participation for women and creating gender equal socially democratic societies which honour and respect all citizens.

In our current global emergency there is an urgent need for rapid progress to address both the immediate issues of women arising directly from the COVID-19 pandemic and the future needs of women and girls as we emerge into recovery. It is critical to maintain momentum by continuously advocating for and encouraging the essential changes needed for the creation and maintenance of gender equal societies for the benefit of our entire global family.

To this end, Socialist International Women calls urgently on all of its members, SI and affiliated groups to:

- *Initiate* policies and practices within local and national political entities which strongly encourage and support women in engaging in decision-making processes at all levels during the COVID-19 pandemic and into the future, particularly at elite levels, to ensure that women are empowered to comment on and influence decisions directly affecting their wellbeing, rights and freedoms.
- *Challenge* accepted norms in political and civic spheres which exclude or denigrate women and girls and advocate for essential changes in legislation, policies and funding which promote and integrate gender equality within all civic and corporate environments.

- *Insist* on the allocation of financial resources at government level for gender specific resources which support the protection and overall wellbeing of women and girls, including aspects such as childcare provision for working parents and support for victims of gender based violence, and strongly challenge any erosion or reversal of such funding.
 - *Promote* the principles of gender equality and the invaluable contributions of women and girls within both civic and political spheres to encourage a consistent gender equality narrative across all civic and political dialogues, including within educational and business environments.
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1. <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/future-of-work/covid-19-and-gender-equality-countering-the-regressive-effects#>