



From Crisis to a New Social Compact:

An inclusive, intersectional feminist approach is the only way out of the COVID crisis

As the world roils with the human and economic devastation wrought by the coronavirus pandemic, one thing is clear: this is no time for business as usual. Without bold action, the crisis will compound global injustices and inequalities, further marginalizing women, people of color, migrants, informal economy workers, and other exploited groups. If we attempt to defeat a worldwide pandemic by erecting barriers and walls rather than elevating the universality of human rights and needs, we are doomed to fail and risk entrenchment of authoritarian and corporate power structures that threaten the political and economic rights of all working families.

There is an alternative. It is possible to emerge from this crisis stronger, more just and more equal. To steer toward that brighter future, world leaders need to think big – and they need to listen to women. Given their many roles as providers, care givers, home keepers, and essential workers in both the formal and informal economy, women, including LGBTQI women, have a multilayered understanding of the impact of the crisis on family, community and work realities that clarifies the breadth and scale of response that is needed.

Migrant women, in particular, straddle worlds but are too often exempt from even the most basic rights, protections and benefits. As a result, they face elevated risks and consequences of virus exposure and many related concerns that include increased issues with mental health, domestic violence and gender-based violence and harassment at work. Toxic symptoms of existing power relations are worsened by household confinement, social distancing and lockdown protocols that cut off access to vital community spaces of support and respite -- making the enclosure mandates a time of great vigilance for women activists, migrants and intersectional feminists. Many migrant women are further constrained by the lack of documentation that hampers their ability to generate income, limits their access to social protections, and even restricts their freedom of movement, particularly in the context of increased militarization of our societies.

Despite these stark realities, migrant women are leading with resilience to engage in mutual aid and front-line emergency responses, creating models of solidarity that hold important lessons for societies more broadly. **We call on governments not only to protect and sustain all women in migration -- in countries of origin, transit, destination and return -- but also to engage them as vital change agents.**

The crisis exposes systemic problems that migrant women have long understood – informality in our economy, weak health care systems, lack of a social safety net, structural

racism, gender discrimination and inhumane migration regimes. Indeed, globalisation and harsh market orthodoxy have generated the precarity, low wages and unprotected working conditions that are key drivers forcing women to migrate across borders and regions as a means of survival.

Current government responses to the pandemic also reveal the systemic undervaluing of work that is disproportionately performed by migrant women and now understood to be essential for our survival, including health care, education, housekeeping, food services, farm work, cleaning, child care, and caring for the elderly or differently abled. Given the critical nature of this work, states must ensure much more robust labour and health protections for those who perform it.

Now is the time to address these core failures, not merely restore flawed systems. **The Women in Migration Network (WIMN), is demanding an inclusive, transformational agenda that restructures our healthcare, economic and migration systems to be gender responsive, put people first and value all people equally.**

A neoliberal, market-driven response to the crisis will widen already obscene inequalities and escalate forced labor and other efforts to quash the collective power and rights of workers - - betrayals that migrant women experience most acutely.

Further concentrating wealth and power in the hands of the privileged few will also put our core democratic institutions at risk. In the face of these threats, **WIMN joins the global labor movement and advocates for migrant rights, intersectional feminism and climate justice in calling for a new social compact.** We need permanent solutions that provide support and services to all, regardless of status, and that will close the gaps in protections that continue to exclude millions of migrants, and undocumented migrants in particular.

As the crisis exposes the rot in our tax systems and budgetary prioritization, our societies must completely reassess how we generate and allocate precious state resources. Never has the need to increase funding to public healthcare systems in both developed and developing countries been more clear. It is a disgrace that healthcare workers, many of them migrant women workers, do not have sufficient personal protective equipment to use in the epidemic, exposing this primarily female workforce to an entirely avoidable risk. Meanwhile, untold millions are spent to detain migrant families, who should be released under any circumstance, but most certainly in the midst of this crisis.

Austerity is not the answer, nor is continued exclusion, criminalization, detention and deportation of migrants. Border closures, securitization, and barring of asylum and refugee access have disparate impacts on migrating women and their families. During times of perceived threat, states often exhibit inherent biases to maintain privilege for masculinised and militarised interests. As levels of fear rise around the world, so too does xenophobic rhetoric, policy and action. These dangerous forces must be tackled head on.

We call on states to make regularization of migrants a core component of crisis response, and applaud those that are implementing inclusive, rights-based and gender-responsive approaches. WIMN is committed to sharing these best practices and other international frameworks and models that can inform strategic local and national advocacy. To do so, we must also address data and information gaps that increase the vulnerability of migrants amidst the pandemic.

Furthermore, we urge governments to implement fiscal stimulus plans that acknowledge the urgency of the ongoing climate crisis and help to build a more regenerative economy by creating quality green jobs and supporting green infrastructure such as public transportation and renewable energy. Fossil fuel pollution, climate-related disasters and crop-losses drive increasing levels of human displacement and migration, and the communities most impacted by these realities must not be left behind in coronavirus response.

The choices made by our governments will have a profound long-term impact on workers, on migrants and on women, and we must fiercely resist rising authoritarianism and unfettered capitalism. **WIMN will continue to inform and educate our networks to ensure that migrant women are safe, know their rights, and are prepared to advocate for fair treatment and progressive structural reforms -- including durable social protections in countries of origin, transit and destination; robust labor protection frameworks; gender-sensitive, rights-based immigration systems; emergency responses that contribute to regenerative, sustainable economies, clear checks on corporate power; and stronger democratic institutions.**

Migrant women have a critical role to play in helping our societies weather this crisis, strengthen recovery, and prepare for the next global challenge. It is time for policy makers to broaden their understanding of essential work, and actively engage with us as key stakeholders.