The COVID-19 pandemic knows no borders. It further knows no gender, class, or race. This virus does not discriminate, but our societies do. Around the world we have built systems and structures that privilege the few and disadvantage the many. When a crisis as unprecedented as the current pandemic hits, inequalities are exacerbated. This holds particularly true for gender equality which, despite encouraging steps forward, no country is on track to achieve by 2030. This not only fails politically marginalised groups, in particular women, girls and gender-nonconforming people but also greatly hinders the international community’s commitment to foster peace and security. Amidst a concerning global rollback on the limited gains of gender equality, governments and foreign ministries must apply a feminist perspective to their COVID-19 response to prevent a set-back, to safeguard existing progress, and advance more quickly towards their goals.

The full policy brief:

Explains why COVID-19 is a feminist issue.

Women, girls and gender-nonconforming people are differentially and disproportionately impacted by the pandemic, particularly in sectors where resources and services for those who require them are already scarce. Rates of gender-based violence (GBV) are on the rise, including alarmingly high increases in intimate partner violence. The gendered division of labour sees women overrepresented (and often severely underpaid) in the global health workforce. Moreover, women continue to carry out most of the unpaid care work in the home, which may include care for the sick and for children who are unable to access regular education. Humanitarian assistance needs are increasing in the face of the pandemic and marginalised groups – including women, girls and gender-nonconforming people – continue to experience these crises more profoundly. The trend in the diversion of resources towards militarised national security objectives sees fewer resources available for human security (including health and economic security) and a critical under-resourcing of gendered services such as access to sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR). Women and girls continue to be underrepresented and silenced in decision-making, which is a driver of ongoing gender-blind policymaking that affects everyone’s lives and underserves the majority of people. Finally, the pandemic is being used by authoritarian leaders to augment their power and restrict civil liberties. Feminist civil society is particularly targeted in these restrictions, and the rights of women, girls and gender-nonconforming people are often the first to be adversely affected when states limit civil liberties.
Outlines the responses to the pandemic of 4 countries that have adopted a Feminist Foreign Policy – Sweden, Mexico, Canada and France.

The examples included in this brief illustrate how governments can implement inclusive, gender-responsive emergency policy responses to mitigate the unique and disproportionate effect of the pandemic on already marginalised groups. It includes examples of consultation, policymaking, norm-setting, and resourcing in the following areas:

- SRHR and GBV
- Feminist humanitarian assistance
- Long-term, sustainable and inclusive approaches to development policy
- Strengthening institutional capacities from a gender perspective
- Supporting feminist civil society
- Leadership in communication and rhetoric, particularly on the international stage

Identifies concrete policy recommendations for a feminist response to COVID-19.

It outlines practical steps towards meaningful change on the issues listed above to ensure decision-making is in line with international commitments to gender equality, conflict prevention and the pursuit of international peace.

The recommendations are divided into short- and medium-term timeframes for immediate implementation to mitigate the crisis’ most urgent impact on existing inequalities, also including long-term recommendations that aim at building more resilient societies and institutions.

Advocates for a comprehensive feminist approach towards foreign policy, beyond the immediate emergency response.

Governments should contribute to building resilient and just societies and structures to prevent crises like COVID-19 from exacerbating existing inequalities. This means nothing less than addressing the root causes of injustice, including patriarchy, racism, militarism, unilateralism, and the current economic practices of neoliberalism and capitalism. The following issues should be promoted:

- Sustainable peace
- Accountability to international commitments on peace and gender equality
- Meaningful multilateral cooperation towards peace, disarmament and demilitarisation
- Feminist economic reform

Ultimately, a feminist response to COVID-19 endeavours not only to minimise the harmful effects of oppressive structures but to catalyse action that will build more equal societies in general. By taking advantage of this opportunity to inspire change, states can initiate a process of international recovery that tackles the root causes of long-standing inequalities, both between people and between nations, and hence ensure that there will be greater resilience in the context of future crises.

Click here to read the full policy brief. It’s not to miss!

By Josephine Rowle

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