

DAWN TALKS ON COVID-19

*Development Alternatives
with Women for a New Era*



***The Pandemic as a Portal:
Policy Transformations
Disputing the New Normal***

Executive Summary

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Executive Summary

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The extended version of this analytical framework is available for download [here](#).

¹- The pandemic as a portal: policy transformations disputing the new normal

Executive Summary

The global economic and health crisis resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic has acted as a catalyst exacerbating inequalities within and between countries in the global South and the global North. It has also accelerated political and policy changes. DAWN's Policy Transformations Project examines policy shifts that have taken place during this short but intense period, which may be central to a new normal that is emerging.

The project closely examines policy changes that have taken place during the period of exceptionality produced by the pandemic, exploring how they project into the future in the following four policy areas: (a) macroeconomics; (b) labour policies and workers' rights; (c) migration and human mobilities; and (d) care and social protection. The analytical framework for this work develops an intersectional feminist understanding, and fosters collective analysis and advocacy that is attentive to what is common globally and regionally, and what is particular. While climate change, biopolitical control, and digitalisation in all spheres of life are an unavoidable backdrop to this work, we do not focus directly on them.

As working hypotheses, we expect to see policy transformations that may fall into one or a combination of the following types: (a) stagnation and path dependence; (b) increased capture of policy processes by private for-profit corporations; (c) greater biopolitical control deepening ongoing authoritarian trends; and (d) progressive, feminist and democratic approaches. There might be gradations and nuances in the way these tendencies are reflected in the policies that have emerged during COVID-19. It is also possible that countries advancing progressive agendas in some policy areas may act regressively in others.

What policy changes?

The pandemic has generated multidimensional effects in governance systems and levels of government.

Macroeconomics

The severity of the economic shock experienced globally points to an urgent need to reset the system. However, the pandemic may deepen already sharp global inequalities, or it may lead to new and transformative political economies. The conditions under which countries are braving the storm are radically unequal, and this is worsened by deep-seated gender and racialised inequalities at the level of households, communities, and nation states. To illustrate, richer countries have significantly more fiscal space, assigning 20.3 per cent of GDP to wage subsidies and liquidity support to corporations, whilst emerging markets had considerably less policy room, assigning only six per cent of their GDP to job retention schemes and wage subsidies and other measures. Meanwhile, low-income countries only managed to assign 1.8 per cent of GDP using budgetary sources, of which 0.3 per cent was directed to the health sector (IMF, 2020a, p. 26).

The contrasting fiscal space is marked by unsustainable levels of external debt that many countries have found themselves in from the start of the crisis. Closer examination of the terms of financing of the current national emergency policies, requires also that global governance structures be brought into account, recognising existing power inequalities that reduce the policy space left to governments in the global South. Such an examination should also look into what policies and communities are being financed, as well as what issues and policies are being defunded in the current macroeconomic crisis.

Labour Policies and Workers' Rights

The pandemic has served as an alibi for the intensification of the already-ongoing regression of labour standards in many countries across the world. These changes are taking place through legislative and administrative channels, altering laws and regulations, weakening existing protection mechanisms for formal and informal workers. They are also taking place through an upsurge of abusive labour practices and further 'precarisation' of labour conditions.

Those in the informal sector are experiencing the worst effects of the crisis (WB, 2020a). During the first month of the pandemic, informal workers experienced income drops of sixty per cent globally, and eighty-two per cent in Asia and Latin America (ILO, 2020b). The pandemic has exacerbated already existing intersectional inequalities and has dramatically reduced employment and income gains made by women over the past ten years (CEPAL/ECLAC, 2021).

In this context it is necessary to address questions about the role of the public sector in mitigating and containing the macroeconomic and social effects of the multidimensional crisis unleashed by the pandemic. How does labour regulation fare among government responses to the crisis? Has weakening labour regulation and workers' rights become part of the assumed "costs" of the pandemic in the name of avoiding unemployment or protecting capital?

Migration and Human Mobilities

Together with refugees and asylum seekers, internal and international migrants constitute among the most precarious sectors of informal work. In their case labour precarity is compounded by precarity of status. Furthermore, border closures, alongside strict lockdowns further increased the challenges faced by them, thus highlighting the biopolitical turn of the pandemic. Deportations continued to take place

in the US, Mexico and other places, sometimes in violation of the right to seek asylum (Riggirozzi, Grugel and Cintra, 2020). In other contexts, migrants have not been officially deported but their living conditions have forced them to embark on return trajectories.

Restrictions to human mobility have been one of the most severe policy consequences of the pandemic. Even in cases where regulations appear to have been made temporarily flexible in order to keep their national agricultural production afloat, labour migration schemes are on their way to becoming more stringent and temporary. Exclusionary practices are part of policy changes that are taking place in the name, or in some cases despite, the COVID-19 pandemic. Analyses on this policy area are likely to shed light on many interlinkages with issues of labour rights and access to care and social protection, as well as with issues pertaining to digital justice and biopolitical control.

Care and Social Protection

The pandemic shed light on the deep-seated inequalities of the existing social organization of care and social protection. This inequality is manifested in the distribution of care responsibilities and care labour among families, communities, government and the private sector, as well as among women and men. Increased demand for paid and unpaid care labour has, paradoxically, not improved workers' bargaining conditions but instead seem to be worsening the exploitation and precarity of women and girls who do most of the care work.

In addition, with the sharp increase of unemployment levels and significant decline in household income, millions of families have had to rely on social security and social protection systems, mostly in the form of cash transfers (CTs) and food programs. Furthermore, the pandemic has exposed the limitations of existing social insurance. At the same time, the pandemic has made clear what feminists from the global South have said for decades: social protection is also about

infrastructure and the conditions of living. This has become evident during the pandemic which has highlighted the need for access to clean water and housing in order to be able to control the spread of the virus. The pandemic has also created fertile ground for the development of integrated care and social protection systems, and more progressive policies that take care provision beyond family and private provision. This could create positive externalities, facilitating job creation and women's economic autonomy.

The questions and reflections posed by this analytical framework are intended to be illustrative rather than exhaustive. What is critical to the analysis is that it applies a feminist intersectional and interlinkages approach; focuses on policy changes taking place during the exceptional context of the pandemic; ties back to one or more of the selected policy areas. Most importantly, analyses should help us reflect about the effects of the policy and political transformations that we are witnessing, linking them to overarching trends such as climate change and environmental degradation, biopolitical control and the growing prominence of the digital sphere in power relations and global inequalities.

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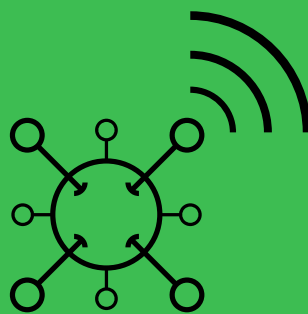
MARÍA GRACIELA CUERVO

María Graciela is DAWN's general Co-Coordinator and a member of its Executive Committee. In 2011 she participated in the DAWN Training Institute for young feminists and since then has engaged with the organisation in advocacy, social mobilization, and alumnae networking. A lawyer by training, she has focused her work on human rights, women's rights, labour rights, and the right to education. Before joining DAWN, María Graciela was the Programme Officer of the International Council for Adult Education, a global network that advocates for youth and adult learning. She has worked as a Researcher and Project Coordinator at CIPAF, one of the Dominican Republic's oldest feminist organisations, and served as the International Relations Director of the Dominican Ministry of Labour.



MASAYA LLAVANERAS BLANCO

Masaya Llaneras Blanco (Venezuela) is a Feminist Political Economist. She obtained her PhD in Global Governance in Wilfrid Laurier University-Balsillie School of International Affairs, in Canada, and her Masters in Women Studies at the Universidad Central de Venezuela. She was the national coordinator of the Gender-Budgets Project in Venezuela between 2006-2008, as well as she had a leading role in the country's time use research as thematic coordinator and researcher until 2012. Masaya is an Assistant Professor of Development Studies in Huron University College in London, Canada. She is also an associate with the International Migration Research Centre, (IMRC in Canada) and the Caribbean Observatory of Migration and Development (OBMICA) in the Dominican Republic. She collaborates closely with the Association of Home Workers in the Dominican Republic and with Feminist movements in Venezuela. Most recently her research and advocacy centres around issues of care, human mobility and the rights of people on the move in the Global South, with a particular focus on the COVID-19 pandemic. Masaya has collaborated with DAWN's PEG work in different capacities since 2010 and joined its Executive Committee in 2020.



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