



SOLIDAR and SOLIDAR Foundation

Recognising and enhancing the value of solidarity

Along with social injustice, the coronavirus outbreak has unveiled how solidarity is what ultimately bonds communities together; a force that has always been there, unrecognised and undervalued.

Progressive civil society organisations like [SOLIDAR's](#) members work closely with the communities they support on a daily basis, and the social distancing imposed to prevent a further spread of COVID-19 has severely affected their possibility to work. However, it has also revealed their excellent potential for social innovation. Thanks to their community-based knowledge and expertise, our members reacted promptly to the crisis, transforming and adapting their regular activities to physical distancing in an impressive way, so as to put in motion material and immaterial solidarity actions by directly supporting their communities. They did so by organising volunteers and activists in their local communities to provide assistance to the hardest hit, including workers, and the most vulnerable, such as migrants, refugees and asylum-seeking women and girls. They also provided lifelong learning activities in innovative ways and helped overcome the sense of isolation by organising cultural and entertainment activities for people of all ages and with different interests.

It is these principles of solidarity that the EU Recovery Plan should aspire to fulfill to build sustainable societies, based on an inclusive, diverse, socio-environmental and feminist economy for communities to thrive. Learning the lesson from the health crisis must include recognising and building upon the flourishing social innovation that lies in our communities, when they are driven by organised solidarity, in addition to guaranteeing access to universal social protection schemes and public support systems.

Everything we do during and after the COVID-19 crisis should aim to build economies and societies that are more equitable, inclusive and sustainable. This must include gender-sensitive and life-giving economic and social policies which place women's economic empowerment at the heart of the pandemic response and recovery plans. This is necessary to have a fighting chance to achieve the UN Sustainable Development Goals 2030. In this sense, feminist economy will find hubs in progressive civil society, thanks to their mobilising efforts and work to embrace and support diversity, putting solidarity and cooperation first where competition would otherwise prevail, and promoting citizenship education, including in its global aspects, among communities left behind due to the injustice stemming from privileges. They do so by pursuing social progress and social justice at large.

Nonetheless, the paradigm shift that we must accomplish requires all social and economic actors to sustain it. **Achieving a feminist economy will require a re-formulation of the entire market.** In this sense, progressive civil society, trade unions and popular movements are key to promoting citizens' and workers' participation in decision-making processes and thus communities' support for bold policies for change. In addition to that and according to *Policy Brief: The Impact of COVID-19 on Women* (UN, 2020)¹: "Women will be the hardest hit by this pandemic but they will also be the backbone of recovery in communities. Every policy response that recognizes this will be the more impactful for it". This paper also states that in order to achieve this, we should "ensure women's equal representation in all COVID-19

¹ UNSDG | *Policy Brief: The Impact of COVID-19 on Women* available at: <https://unsdg.un.org/resources/policy-brief-impact-covid-19-women>

SOLIDAR and SOLIDAR Foundation

response planning and decision-making, drive transformative change for equality by addressing the care economy, paid and unpaid and target women and girls in all efforts to address the socio-economic impact of COVID-19”.

The public sector must lead by directing public investment towards sustainable development. And the business sector must be encouraged and regulated to participate in the effort too. Corporate social responsibility (CSR) has in too many cases become a way for the biggest companies to greenwash their image and provide a means for marketing rather than a structural positive contribution to society.

The basic principle behind shifting towards a sustainable economy is to respect boundaries, and maintain the economic development model within two thresholds. At the bottom, we must build our economic development model upon social, citizenship and human rights as well as individual liberties. Ensuring the collective well-being is the minimum common denominator and the basis for a sustainable, feminist economy. On top, the ceiling must consist of the planet’s boundaries. For the economy to be just, this balance should be sought in every place, at every time. Social justice and climate justice are intertwined and mutually reinforcing. The relative power of each country in global relations cannot be an excuse to bypass any of the thresholds set above, nor for the most powerful countries to use the weaker ones as a rug under which they hide their dirt, be it for social or environmental dumping.

A feminist economy is therefore led by a circular model, in which every social actor interplays its role with the others. For the business sector to adapt, public policies are needed to harvest the great potential contribution of the profit sector to the paradigm shift, starting with policies boosting the change from a linear, polluting, economic model to a circular one. Tax evasion and tax havens must be abolished, for wealth to be made available to pursue the policies that benefit the many. But no such change can be achieved without democratic support. For this reason, public policies need to make sure that the transition is truly just and offers promising and realistic compensatory schemes as well as opportunities for a shift towards cooperative business models. **Democracy at work is an agent for all workers’ empowerment, including that of women.**

Benefit corporations¹ should also have their status recognised in all countries, so that this emerging model of private business can help counterbalance the share of corporates solely focused on profits and enlarge the group of companies pursuing social inclusion and a sustainable development model. Their work across EU Member State borders should be facilitated and these types of social economy actors should have access to the same funding opportunities as more traditional businesses, not least in the EU recovery package.

As employers, social economy actors can play an important role in providing high-quality jobs, especially because they are often active in sectors that employ a large share of women. Providing fair wages, good work-life balance and secure jobs in for example the social services sector will not only benefit the millions of women that work in this sector, but also improve the outcomes of the sector as a whole. In addition, promoting the social economy can also benefit the social inclusion of marginalised groups, including migrants, disabled people and Roma, who are employed in this sector.

Setting fair and decent wages, including minimum wages, in all EU Member States will significantly improve the financial status and independence of women who are overrepresented in low-paid jobs.



SOLIDAR and SOLIDAR Foundation

Solidarity is the most powerful driver for social well-being and a key element for the economy to shift from a patriarchal system of exploitation to a feminist one of sustainability.

ⁱ The Benefit Corporation (BC) is a new legal business entity that is obligated to pursue public benefit in addition to the responsibility to return profits to shareholders. It is legally a for-profit, socially obligated, corporate form of business, with all the traditional corporate characteristics combined with societal responsibilities.

Hiller, J.S. The Benefit Corporation and Corporate Social Responsibility. *J Bus Ethics* 118, 287–301 (2013). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-012-1580-3>