

Gender Equality to fight the Economic Crisis

www.feministnewdeal.com
www.feminismoantelacrisis.com

The individuals and organisations signed below, supporting this manifesto, express our concerns

The current economic crisis evidences the failure of a model of non-sustainable economic growth, and at the same time provides an opportunity to reverse such a model. To achieve this, the contribution of all individuals is required, along with equitable planning, use, and distribution of resources. However, governments and international bodies are reacting in a way that conforms to an image of society which is no longer current, and which inhibits an appropriate response to the global emergency which we are facing.

In Europe, contrary to what some press headlines would suggest, the level of female unemployment continues to exceed that of male unemployment. Furthermore, women continue to be by far the majority in the most vulnerable categories of employment (temporary, part-time, underemployment); and unemployment (long-term, without previous employment, without unemployment benefits). Women's incomes and pensions are much lower, and in some cases non-existent, in spite of the fact that overall women work more hours. Women's poverty levels are much higher. In short, the situation of women is dramatic, given that as the effects of the economic crisis spread across all sectors, women are in the worst positions, and suffer its effects the most.

The media continually present statistics about the number of households in which all the economically active adults are unemployed; suggesting the idea of men as male heads of those families, with dependent women and children. This presentation masks the reality of the situation. The reality is that, in addition to men, there are as many women in all household types who wish to access employment and who are extremely well prepared to take it up.

Public services have been seriously affected by budget cuts in education, health, social services, and in the promotion of gender equality. At the same time, families are finding their economic resources increasingly reduced. All these factors specifically impact on women in two principal ways: as the majority of the population requiring assistance, and as those who struggle to make up the difference in resources now missing from the family budget.

The employment support measures are focused on the construction and car manufacturing industries, to supplement unemployment benefits to individuals affected by the downturn and to

those who are already beneficiaries of unemployment allowances. However, there are no plans directed to areas of employment or unemployment among whom the most vulnerable workers are predominantly women.

In summary, resources available for situations which affect women are decreasing and where special measures are being made available, it has been to limit the impact of consequences which largely affect male employment. Although the rhetoric of combating gender-based violence continues, the resources for support services are increasingly limited, despite the likelihood of the economic crisis increasing levels of violence and also reducing the financial capacity of women to be able to escape violent situations. Equally, just as progress on crime prevention was being made, there is now a significant risk that this will be stalled.

The processes of legal reform with regard to joint /co-responsibility of care, including the extension of non-transferable paternity leave, have been stalled. At the same time, policies of leave to care at home are being given greater prominence, along with new proposals to open up new measures to encourage part-time working – predominantly affecting women.

The development of public services has not been prioritised in the current measures to tackle the crisis. However, the massive public investment, essential to creating employment and re-activating the economy, presents a unique opportunity to reconstruct social infrastructure; to create universal provision of early-years education, public childcare and public services to care for physically dependent persons; to improve health services, education, and social services; to promote sport and culture; and to improve environmental protection and stop climate change. Jobs can be created across all these sectors, and given that they are publicly funded, conditions to maximise their social utility can be demanded. A core requirement should be that all these projects promote gender equality, environmental sustainability and social cohesion, which currently they do not.

Given this situation, we reiterate:

Women are necessary, now more than ever, as workers and as citizens. In contrast to other recessions, when again women were pressurised to withdraw from the labour market; now we are prepared to resist. Since then, we have acquired greater civil rights and significantly higher skills levels. We have demonstrated our proficiency in a whole range of professions, including managing banks and running countries, as well as achievement in sport and all activities. Many families depend on women's income, and furthermore, unemployed women have higher levels of educational attainment than men. On the other hand, now more than ever, men have to join in care responsibilities. Today, unlike in previous times, we know that biological difference does not in any way excuse women from any area of work or leisure, or men from domestic tasks.

Women's marginalisation is not due to economic reasons: on the contrary, it is this unfounded marginalisation which neither the economy nor society can afford. The "male breadwinner /dependent spouse" model has shown itself to be a trap for women and men alike. Furthermore, it has been shown across the world that women's access to education, employment and income has been a significant factor in improving family wellbeing and economic development. Gender equality is key in making the most of women's human capital, and of the caring capacity of men; for the effective functioning of labour markets and government budgets; for making the change to a more technologically advanced economic model; for a better organisation of production which is not based on the specialization of women in domestic work; to combat overpopulation, population ageing, and world poverty; and for environmental sustainability. Unequivocally, gender equality is crucial for a change towards a more balanced and sustainable form of global development.

International authorities have repeatedly stated that gender equality is a valid proposition for social justice, and carries economic benefits. Instead of returning to previous systems, now more than ever, these institutions have to act on their stated commitments.

Therefore we propose the following as key components of an action plan to combat the crisis:

Gender Equality in job creation and unemployment protection

Instead of artificially maintaining unproductive activities which harm the environment, skilled jobs should be created in competitive and socially necessary sectors, ensuring access for appropriately qualified individuals, and a series of training and development measures open to all.

Besides supporting individuals who become unemployed because of downturn, priority should also be given to those individuals not in receipt of benefits. To that end, we demand:

- That companies evidence their gender equality practice, including equality plans, as part of the assessment process for projects in receipt/or seeking public funds;
- Unemployment benefits be made available to all unemployed persons;
- Full labour and Social Security rights for homeworkers.

Gender equality in social protection and the guarantee of fundamental rights

Now, more than ever, family networks have less capacity to respond financially, making essential the social protection of those most in need, of whom women are the vast majority.

With regard to a foreseeable increase in gender-based violence, particularly male violence against women, it is essential to guarantee the physical safety of all, community safety, and the right to a life free from violence. To achieve this requires:

- Special benefits for single-parent families;
- Increase in guaranteed basic income and non-contributory pensions up to the level of guaranteed national minimum wage
- Provision of resources to services for victims of gender-based violence, including sufficient financial support; and the introduction of special measures for immigrant women;
- Increase in resources for the prevention and punishment of gender-based violence, sexual assault and other male violence against women.

Integrated Public Service Plan

Instead of directing public spending plans to construction projects without strategic priority, there is opportunity to address an historical deficit. Investment in public service infrastructure presents a key opportunity to reorient investment in the construction industry in more efficient ways, to reduce unemployment in other sectors and address social needs.

Lastly, this would be a profitable investment in the medium term to long-term which, moreover, promotes a more socially just gender regime. In particular this requires:

- Universal access to public early-years education and public childcare from 0 years onwards;
- Universal access to public services of care for physically dependent persons;
- Extension of resources for education, and public health, with a particular focus on free provision of services and on gender equality.

Reform of tax and benefit systems to promote a society of individual earner/carer persons

Society has changed, and women have accessed the labour market in huge numbers, yet public policies continue to promote gender-based, stereotypical roles. It is essential to develop co-responsibility for childcare/joint parenting, and to eliminate disincentives for women's paid work. This requires:

- Elimination of all care allowances currently incompatible with paid work;
- Reform of parental leave provisions so that each parent has equal, non-transferable and fully paid leave rights;
- Removal of joint contributions to the personal income tax systems;
- Removal of measures to increase part-time working;
- Measures to rationalise working hours, including: reduction of maximum working hours/working week; elimination of all incentives to long working days.

At the global level, ensure gender equality in international relations

It is essential to cut short uncontrolled financial speculation, over-exploitation, poverty, and violence globally. For this to happen, the rules of economic globalization have to change, along with international relations, and the activities of international finance institutions and development co-operation bodies. In this move towards socially and economically sustainable global development, women's liberation in every country is essential. Gender equality is a key element in making this other work possible, in which so many progressive individuals believe. In particular:

- Debt relief for all those countries who make substantive commitments to gender equality, and preservation of the environment.

Against and in the face of economic crisis – Gender Equality NOW!

If you want to **sign up to this manifesto**, please follow the instructions in the manifesto blog at www.feministnewdeal.com or the spanish blog www.feminismoantelacrisis.com

To sign up as an organisation or website: besides signing the manifesto, please send an email to info@feministnewdeal.com so that we link your web or blog.

Join this collective action – NOW!