Visual Summary of Global Findings
A Feminist Examination of Policy Changes During COVID-19's Exceptionality Period
ARGENTINA
The Pathway Towards the Care System

BARBADOS
Social Policies in times of COVID-19: Analysis of the 'Adopt Our Families' Programme and the Increase of Minimum Wage

BOLIVIA
Plurinational State of Bolivia Conditional Cash Transfer Programmes in the COVID-19 Crisis

CHILE
Collective Care to Confront the Pandemic and the Criminalisation of Migration

CHINA
The Impact of COVID-19 on Domestic Workers and Policy Responses

GHANA
The Socio-economic Cost of COVID-19 Austerity: The Case of the School Feeding Programme

INDIA
Pandemic, Patriarchy and Precarity: Labour, Livelihood and Mobility Rights

JAMAICA
COVID-19, Labour Policy and Domestic Workers' Rights

KIRIBATI
Pacific Labour Mobility Schemes in the COVID-19 Context

MALAYSIA
Organizing Migrant Domestic Workers: Prospects and Challenges in Times of COVID-19 Crisis

SOUTH AFRICA
Social Protection Through Fiscal Policy During the COVID-19 Pandemic

TRINIDAD & TOBAGO
Social Protection and Care Policies in a Time of COVID-19
Prior to the pandemic, many countries had already embraced austerity and orthodox monetary policies to control debt levels. These policies which agreed or aligned with international financial institutions, left countries with limited space for innovative policies to advance social protection systems. Despite some attempts at innovating with countercyclical policy responses and relief measures, austerity continued to be applied. Case studies show that in most cases governments failed to address long-standing gender, race and class-based inequalities. Cuts in public services due to these austerity-driven reductions affected women the most since they earn lower wages, have the highest unemployment rate and carry the burden of unpaid care responsibilities. Our feminist analysis highlights the importance of the interlinkage between macroeconomic policies, care and social protection systems. Unpaid care labour continues to act as a buffer for austerity measures that reinforces labour exploitation, unequal power relations and pushes people into precarious migratory journeys.
Workers, especially informal and domestic workers, underwent further precarisation of labour conditions and exploitation during the initial period of the COVID-19 pandemic. They were first to lose jobs and to be left out of any unemployment insurance system and social protection measures. This was also the case for migrants, refugees and asylum-seekers who additionally experienced state police surveillance and the constant threat of deportation. The case studies showed how the pandemic served as an alibi to push for regressive labour policies and deregulation under the growing influence of the private sector. Selected economic sectors and activities (e.g., tourism and the financial sector) were safeguarded, while others such as care work and non-standard employment were unprotected. Increased demand for paid and unpaid care labour in the form of childcare, healthcare, cleaning and cooking worsened workers’ bargaining conditions and increased the exploitation and precarity of women and girls. In some cases, there have been timid first steps towards regulation and formalisation of informal workers. However, these potential improvements remain unclear and appear to be a façade of formalisation with only partial access to labour rights.
Policy responses during the pandemic brought major restrictions on human mobility and increased militarisation of borders. In several cases, the pandemic took an authoritarian biopolitical turn in the form of institutional abuse, seen in laws and regulations to restrict civil, political and democratic rights. Increased surveillance affected the livelihoods and mobilities of migrants – which in some cases led to stricter lockdowns for migrant communities, anti-migrant policies and deportations. Some migrant workers found themselves stuck in their countries of employment unable to return home. Increased surveillance and the structural exclusion of informal migrant workers from social protection systems compounded their already precarious situation.
G
denment social protection responses were mostly Cash Transfers (CTs) and food programs, which were generally insufficient and short-term. In some cases, already existing CTs were expanded by increasing amounts and coverage with a general bias in favour of formal labour, urban populations, and citizens. In fewer cases new CTs were created to target categories of people who were affected by the crisis and otherwise unprotected. However, case analysis shows the reproduction of pre-existing gender and mercantilist biases, and racialised and class stratification, failing to address deep-seated structural inequalities. Even though it became blatantly clear that we are experiencing a crisis of care exacerbated by the pandemic, governments have adopted few, if any, care-centred policies. The case of Argentina, where a national care system is under development, provides some hope for policy transformation.
Using a feminist intersectional and interlinkages approach, this project closely examines policy changes that have taken place during the period of exceptionality produced by the pandemic, exploring how they may impact the future.