



Hawaii and Canada: Providing lessons for feminist economic recovery from COVID-19

Key recommendations to policy-makers

- Pandemic responses should be underpinned by data that is disaggregated by sex and other markers of inequity at the national and sub-national level. This data should be made public and used in decision making.
- Women-led organizations, feminist academics and women's experiences and ideas should be at the center of recovery efforts in government bodies, official consultations and online spaces.
- The provision of universally accessible, free childcare and long-term eldercare should be central to economic recovery plans and attempts to 'open up' the economy. Precariously employed immigrant care workers should be provided with an expedited path to permanent resident status.
- Austerity-induced budget cuts should be avoided as they impact most greatly on the poor, women and other marginalized groups. Instead policy-makers should strengthen public welfare assistance (such as unemployment benefit) and labor rights (such as paid sick leave, family leave and a guaranteed living wage).
- Special stimulus funds should be designated for high risk groups, such as those who are not eligible under existing government schemes, are disproportionately experiencing financial hardship and poverty, and already face barriers to accessing their rights to health, safety, independence and education.
- Invest in universal, affordable, and sustainable access to water, sanitation, hygiene and housing, and prioritize closing the gender digital divide.
- Support women in female dominated economic sectors particularly hard hit by the pandemic as well as historically marginalized women workers, such as Indigenous women and sex workers.
- A feminist recovery is aligned with a 'green' recovery and the two should be considered in conjunction.
- Revisions of fiscal and monetary policies should be taken as opportunities to address inequality in wages, employment, and quality of life.
- Health systems should be restructured to focus on Universal Health Coverage and to address problems in service access and quality due to sexism, colonialism and white supremacy. Tackling the social determinants of health should be a priority.
- All hate, violence, and oppression against women, gender-diverse people, and Indigenous, Black, and racialized communities must be addressed in the COVID-19 recovery.

Post-pandemic economic recovery plans have relied heavily upon benchmarks set by studies and frameworks that do not address the gendered impacts of crises or take proactive measures to reach women, girls, Indigenous peoples, immigrant communities, and other historically disadvantaged groups. The need for an inclusive, gender-equitable recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic is slowly gaining recognition as it lays bare and exacerbates inequities in economic, social, health, and environmental policies and programs.

The Hawaii State Commission on the Status of Women convened a working group to develop and share principles and practices for implementing a gender-responsive and feminist

response to COVID-19, culminating in the publication of *Building Bridges, Not Walking on Backs: A Feminist Economic Recovery Plan for COVID-19*. Similarly, the YWCA Canada and the Institute for Gender and the Economy (GATE) at the University of Toronto's Rotman School of Management published a joint assessment, *A Feminist Economic Recovery Plan for Canada: Making the Economy Work for Everyone*. The plan highlights critical principles and provides actionable recommendations for the government to develop and implement post-pandemic recovery policies that are equitable and inclusive of all marginalized people.

Together, the Canadian and Hawaiian plans provide a roadmap to recovery

through gender-transformative policy-making. Both are built on an intersectional analysis of the impact of the pandemic and call for an approach to economic recovery that examines and confronts the root causes of inequality, including but not limited to patriarchy, ableism, queerphobia, white supremacy, colonialism, classicism, and racism.

This brief describes the intersecting, complementary, and mutually reinforcing elements of the two frameworks and echoes the call for feminist economic recovery. Taken with the recommendations above, it provides a collection of best practices for the core tenets of post-pandemic policy-making which should be echoed and adapted by policy-makers from other settings.



Establishing the Foundation of Feminist Economic Recovery and Maintaining Accountability

Intersectional analysis and disaggregated data

All pandemic response and recovery measures must be designed using an intersectional lens. This should be based on rigorous feminist research that sheds light on how policies work for people of different social identities and experiences of oppression, based on but not limited to race, Indigenous status, age, gender identity, gender expression, ability, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, and immigration status. The collection, analysis, and publication of disaggregated data at the national and sub-national level – which should be collected in an ethical and sensitive way – are paramount to assessing the impact of COVID-19. This data determines whether economic recovery policies are having intended effects or if they are widening inequities, and enables decision-makers to adjust programs and policies to more effectively reduce inequities.

In Canada, intersectional gender-based analysis, or GBA+, is already mandated for all federal budget measures. The Canadian recovery plan notes that although there were proactive actions taken before the pandemic – including appointing a gender-balanced cabinet and the passage of the Canadian Gender Budgeting Act – there has been a glaring lack of gender-based analysis in the development of post-pandemic recovery policies so far. To remedy this, they recommended that a Gender Advisory Council be established that provides guidance to the federal government, ensuring post-pandemic recovery policies are designed based on truly intersectional gender-based analysis. Further, a COVID-19 post-pandemic gender results framework dashboard should be developed, reporting annually on how the Government of Canada is advancing gender equity.

The Hawaiian plan similarly documents inequities in current recovery plans and insists that gender, social, cultural, and environment project appraisals or impact assessments should be conducted on all proposed recovery policies. It also advocates for the funding of feasibility studies on economic alternatives that enhance social wellbeing as an economic priority.

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Equitable participation and leadership

Another foundational element of feminist economic recovery is the inclusion of the voices of those most impacted by COVID-19 at all levels of decision-making. This could include women, girls, femme-identified and nonbinary people, racialized women and women of color, disabled people, Indigenous women, and immigrant women. The Hawaiian plan emphasizes the importance of putting women-led organizations and women’s experiences and ideas at the center of recovery efforts, and integrating the knowledge developed by marginalized people and communities.

This includes ensuring the representation of women and gender minorities and their organizations on economic recovery task forces, and by implementing innovative practices for public consultation in light of social distancing measures, including by addressing digital exclusion.

Similarly, the Canadian plan calls for gender balance and intersectional representation on Recovery Task Forces for every order of government; centering civil society organizations, including academic research institutions that work to advance gender equity, intersectional feminism, and women’s rights, in

decision-making and consultation processes; and materially investing in civil society organizations through core multi-year funding.

Supporting social infrastructure in the care economy

Caregiving – which is associated with, and expected of women, especially women of color – is necessary for economic production but is undervalued and underpaid, which structurally subordinates and marginalizes women in society.

Increasing public investments in childcare and eldercare can be more effective in reducing public deficits and debt than austerity policies; and provide significant returns to the economy by boosting employment, earnings, economic growth, and gender equality.

Such investments help:

- Facilitate women’s return to paid work they may have left due to increased domestic and care burdens;
- Reduce out-of-pocket costs;
- Provide protection for workers in the paid care economy;
- Increase female labor force participation and add jobs to the economy;
- Support children’s development; and
- Safeguard the elderly population.

The Canadian and Hawaiian plans urge the provision of universally accessible, free childcare and long-term eldercare – which is particularly important for essential workers. The Hawaiian plan specifically calls for the immediate utilization of the Child Care and Development Block grant money and federal waivers to provide no-cost care for emergency and essential workers.

Recommendations pertaining to care work include:

- Establishing parity in the wages of care workers to educators and nurses;
- Expanding government assistance schemes to include family and informal caregivers;



- Coordinating the reopening of schools and childcare centers with that of the broader economy; and
- Creating an expedited path to permanent resident status for precarious immigrant care workers so they can access healthcare and worker protections.

The Canadian plan outlines a national framework for infrastructural and budgetary support for care work, including the creation of a National Child Care Secretariat to track financial allocations across the country and coordinate intergovernmental action, monitoring, and evaluation. It advocates for the designation of direct public funds of at least \$2.5 billion to existing regulated and licensed care services such as by providing increased wages for workers, investing in measures to keep workers safe [such as the provision of personal protective equipment (PPE) to migrant workers and inspections of working conditions], and expanding the number of care spaces available. Additionally, the plan calls for the adoption of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) benchmark of allocating at least 1% of country GDP to early learning and childcare.

Investing in and protecting the welfare of society

Social protection policies and public spending

The Hawaiian and Canadian plans emphasize the importance of avoiding austerity-induced budget cuts, which most often involve cuts to social services, including those for childcare, domestic violence, and maternal, sexual, reproductive, and mental health – all of which disproportionately impact women. They instead advise to undertake gender-responsive spending that will support populations that have been and will continue to be impacted most by the COVID-19 pandemic, which

will return significant economic benefits to society and lay the foundation for long-term recovery. Both plans carefully unpack the gendered nature of the labor force and the

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compounding impact of COVID-19. Black, racialized, and immigrant women are disproportionately represented as personal support workers, cleaners, and in other essential but low-paid occupations – many of which are in the informal economy – that do not provide paid sick leave or family leave. Other workers with limited or no access to social protection include migrant workers, gig economy workers, multiple job holders, sex workers, temporary workers, and people on social assistance – which are also disproportionately women in Canada and Hawaii.

Paid sick leave and family leave are cornerstones of job protection, especially in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and particularly for those in frontline jobs, the majority of whom are women. The Canadian plan specifically proposes legislation to establish a minimum of 14 days paid leave and calls for job protection for individuals with disabilities who are unable to fulfill job duties due to the risk of contracting COVID-19 and face systemic barriers such as lack of access to transportation.

The Hawaiian plan cites raising the minimum wage (to \$24.50/hour) as another form of social protection, particularly for single mothers,

safeguarding livelihoods, as well as reducing women’s dependency on men and public assistance. Immediately lowering the eligibility requirements to access unemployment benefits, or employment insurance, is also critical for women as they are experiencing, and expected to continue experiencing, the highest job losses. Applications for unemployment assistance and other public assistance should be available in multiple languages.

Targeted support for marginalized populations

The Hawaiian plan recommends that urgent support in the form of special stimulus funds should be designated for high risk groups, such as those who are not eligible under existing government schemes, disproportionately experience financial hardship and poverty, and already face barriers to accessing their rights to health, safety, independence, and education. It explicitly identifies undocumented immigrant women, sex trafficking survivors, domestic workers, elderly women, immigrants, and women with disabilities as high-risk populations. It also calls for the release of all pre-trial women detainees and funding for accessible support programs for re-entry, including support for trans people. The plan also spotlights the State of Hawaii’s obligation to fulfill its share of the Public Land Trust Revenue, wherein twenty percent of revenues are to be provided to Native Hawaiians. This commitment to Native Hawaiians should be reflected in the designation of COVID-19 response funds, with a twenty percent pro rata share of the funds in trust for their specific recovery needs.

Infrastructure for sustainable recovery

Investing in universal, affordable, and sustainable access to water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) and housing – both of which are extremely gendered in nature – is fundamental to public health, long-term recovery, and remaining



resilient in the event of future crises. The Hawaiian plan calls for the maintenance and expansion of public restrooms, handwashing stations, and hand sanitizer distribution; the development of innovative programs to address houselessness; a temporary ban on rent increase; reorienting new construction away from luxury property toward mixed use redevelopment and legitimate affordable housing; and free public transportation.

The Canadian plan takes a more macro approach, focusing on the urgent upgrading and building of clean water infrastructure for communities under water advisories, particularly Indigenous communities and those experiencing housing insecurity. It also advocates for the urgent realization of the National Housing Strategy to build 125,000 units of affordable housing, and the deployment of a 33% carve-out for gender-focused investments.

Global gender disparities in access to Informational and Communication Technology (ICT), including mobile phones and the internet, are being exacerbated by the social and economic impacts of COVID-19, and vice versa. As movement restrictions and physical distancing requirements limit access to critical services and information and necessitate the participation in remote work and learning, closing the gender digital divide is more important now than ever before. The Hawaiian plan advocates for the provision of urgent and short-term support in the form of ICT and data plans for poor families, and smartphones and unlimited text/talk plans for survivors of domestic violence and sex trafficking. The Canadian plan focuses on strengthening ICT infrastructure through meaningful subsidies and realizing 100% national broadband access, especially in rural, remote, and Northern communities.

Stimulating sustainable recovery and economic futures

Good jobs for displaced and marginalized workers

The female labor force is disproportionately concentrated in the hospitality, retail, food services, and tourism sectors, all of which are being hit hardest by the pandemic and will most likely not return at the same rate as male-dominated sectors. Publicly funded training, professional development, and job placement programs for displaced women workers and those within Indigenous communities will be critical to long-term recovery. The Hawaiian plan highlights the particular needs of women and sexual and gender minorities to access capital outside of the commercial sex industry through just, humane transition to support programs.

The Canadian plan calls for the implementation of the Calls to Action in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the Calls for Justice in the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Inquiry Report to ensure that Indigenous peoples – especially women, girls, and LGBTQ people – have equitable access to jobs, training, and education opportunities, and that they gain long-term benefits from economic development projects.

Businesses owned by underrepresented groups – including women, racialized people, people with disabilities, Indigenous peoples, immigrants, refugees, and LGBTQ people – are more vulnerable during times of crisis and economic downturn due to lower levels of capitalization, fewer investors, less social support, and an increase in the burden of care and domestic work. The Canadian plan offers a robust strategy for supporting small and medium enterprises (SME's) through pandemic recovery, including minimum set-asides in public procurement

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spending towards businesses led by women, racialized people, and other equity-seeking groups; targeted support to business owners from all underrepresented groups in the forms of emergency funds, skills, training and mentorship; and direct funding to businesses in women-majority sectors, such as caregiving and social enterprises. The plan also advocates for meaningful consultation with Indigenous communities, as well as increasing awareness of, and tools to transition to, co-operative business models. Similarly, the Hawaiian plan urges that Native Hawaiian serving organizations and Native Hawaiian owned businesses be identified, contacted, and evaluated for the recovery need types required to ensure equity-based recovery efforts.

Sustainable and “green” recovery

Because of Hawaii’s dependence on tourism, its recovery plan provides guidance for diversifying the economy, mitigating the social and environmental costs of tourism, and identifying new opportunities for sustainable livelihoods. This guidance includes developing more sustainable forms of tourism led by Indigenous people, implementing stimulus programs focused on “green jobs,” and identifying job creation opportunities in sustainable PPE manufacturing and design that can support the COVID-19 response – all of which should proactively plan for gender equality and include formal programming for women, with special emphasis on displaced workers, communities of color, and women who are in recovery from incarceration.



The Hawaiian plan also recommends investing in subsistence living and the perpetuation of land- and sea-based practices traditional to Hawaii’s ecological and food system, and centering food system workers and farmworkers in agricultural and food self-sufficiency programs. These programs should ensure nutrition and access to local food for low-income residents, many of whom are women. Opportunities should also consider worker-owned cooperatives and other methods to share income generated more equitably. Further, social entrepreneurship by individuals, groups, and start-up companies should be stimulated as they seek to develop, fund, and implement solutions to social, cultural, or environmental issues.

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Equitable monetary and fiscal policies to strengthen the economy

Both the Canadian and Hawaiian plans provide macroeconomic recommendations for how to stimulate the economy and fund post-pandemic recovery. In the short term, the Hawaiian government can enhance state revenues by taking advantage of the Federal Reserve’s \$500 billion lending program to state and local governments. Once the post-pandemic recession ends, the plan recommends increasing property and corporate taxes.

The Canadian plan recognizes that revisions of fiscal and monetary policies offer opportunities to address inequality in wages, employment, and quality of life. It warns against monetary policy focused on constraining inflation rates, which can result in negative outcomes

that are unevenly distributed, and advocates for restructuring the tax system – which currently produces discriminatory after-tax outcomes that negatively affect women, low-income communities, and marginalized groups – to restore government revenues to a sustainable level.

Strengthening health systems

Both the Canadian and Hawaiian plans take strong human rights-based approaches, grounded in gender and racial justice, to strengthening health systems and addressing the social, environmental, and commercial determinants of health.

Accessible, affordable, and quality healthcare for all

The Canadian plan shows how systemic racism against Indigenous and Black communities is a public health crisis that has laid the groundwork for COVID-19’s disproportionately devastating impact. Indigenous and Black women and gender-diverse people face multiple and intersecting forms of marginalization, as well as a lack of culturally responsive health care services and systemically racist health care systems that have long failed them by devaluing and deprioritizing their needs.

The plan recommends the implementation of the Calls to Action in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the Calls for Justice in the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Inquiry Report to provide adequate, stable, equitable, and ongoing funding for Indigenous-centered and community-based health and wellness services that are accessible and culturally appropriate for women, girls, and LGBTQ people.

It also calls for the implementation of the recommendations to remediate anti-Black racism such as those from the City of Toronto’s Action Plan to Confront Anti-Black Racism, the 2020 Black Health Alliance Black Experiences in Health

Care report, and the Parliamentary Black Caucus.

Similarly, in Hawaii, the social determinants of health dictate that low-income, rural communities and communities of Native Hawaiian ancestry and of color are more likely to experience “environmental racism” and to live and work in areas that have been targeted by toxic industries. They also face structural barriers to accessing healthcare and nutritious food, which has likely contributed to a vastly disproportionate COVID-19-related death toll in these communities not just in Hawaii but across the United States of America. To redress these inequalities, the Hawaiian plan calls for enacting universal single payer healthcare, expanding state Medicaid to Compact of Free Association (COFA) migrants, and restoring federal funding for all means-tested benefits for COFA migrants. It also recommends urgent and short-term support through eliminating co-payments for COVID-19 tests and treatment, including for incarcerated women; increasing mental health services that reach women, LGBTQ people, and other marginalized groups, including incarcerated women; requiring all hospitals and COVID-19 test sites to provide interpreters; and providing free PPE for homebirth workers and home care providers.

The Hawaiian plan advocates for harnessing the role of midwifery to improve deficits in maternal and neonatal health care during the pandemic, particularly in rural areas. Recommendations include upscaling the use of homebirth midwives and integrating them into health care teams; matching hospital-based midwives with community midwives to meet the increasing demand for out-of-hospital birth options; ensuring that insurance companies and Medicaid fully cover midwifery services; and ensuring that hospitals are allowing mothers to have support people with them during



birth, and that they are not inducing women too early in an effort to prevent COVID-19 transmission. Additionally, there should be a centralized repository of resources made available for services no longer being provided by hospitals, such as childbirth education, lactation help (including WHO guidelines for breastfeeding with COVID-19), doulas, and community midwives.

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Addressing gender-based violence and hate crimes

All hate, violence, and oppression against women, gender-diverse people, and Indigenous, Black, and racialized communities must be addressed in the COVID-19 recovery. As a result of the pandemic, there has been a global increase in reports of gender-based violence, including intimate partner violence, femicide, sexual harassment, and coercion. Before the pandemic, in Hawaii violence against cis and trans women, and Two-Spirit and gender-diverse people was already a crisis and has since become more pronounced. There has also been an increase in the reporting of hate crimes, particularly against East Asian and Chinese communities. In Canada, several Black and Indigenous women have died during wellness checks by the police. The Canadian plan notes that violence against Indigenous and Muslim communities is more likely to be experienced by women, which points to the marked gendered experience of anti-Indigenous racism and Islamophobia.

In Hawaii, there is an acute shortage in housing, programs, and public interest lawyers, social workers, and advocates to assist survivors of gender-based

violence. Its recovery plan urges the legislature to create a comprehensive campaign to address gender-based violence, infuse funding into existing programs, and take immediate action to enact loan forgiveness for public interest lawyers. It also calls for the provision of smartphones and unlimited data and text/talk plans for survivors of domestic violence and sex trafficking, and for the creation of a sex trafficking coordinator for the State to address the current and anticipated sex trafficking increase after lockdown ends and throughout the recession.

In Canada, the national government has already provided \$50 million to shelters and sexual assault centers supporting survivors of domestic violence, 20% of which went to Indigenous Services Canada to focus directly on the needs of the existing network of 46 emergency shelters on reserve and in Yukon. The Canadian plan urges further action, including the creation of a National Action Plan on Gender-Based Violence that addresses violence against Indigenous Women, Girls and LGBTQ people, as recommended by the Inquiry Report into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, as well as all forms of racism and hate crimes.

Conclusion

Sustainable pandemic recovery will require a deep structural transition to an economy that values and recognizes care work and local practices and knowledge; investments in gender-responsive social protections and public spending that leave no one behind; strengthening and reorienting health systems to ensure access, affordability, and quality during and beyond the pandemic; and addressing all forms of violence and hate.

A feminist economic recovery will repair historic harms that manifest as, and are perpetuated by, male domination, gender-based violence,

economic insecurity, and poor health. The actionable recommendations of the Hawaiian and Canadian plans provide a blueprint for societies to build back better for a future grounded in human rights, equity, justice, and security.

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Authors

Alexandra Solomon, Independent Consultant
Kate Hawkins, Pamoja Communications Ltd.
Rosemary Morgan, Department of International Health, Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health

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