

The gender impact of Coronavirus:

How to move to an economy that cares for people and the planet

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This essay raises some questions about how the Coronavirus crisis affects women and men differently. It reveals the key role of the care sector, referring to both paid and unpaid care work, and women's specific roles and risks during the crisis. The article reviews some measures taken by governments to slow down the spread of the virus, and the impact of these measures on women, men and the environment. The central message is that the Coronavirus crisis is a wake-up call for all of us. It's time for a change. We cannot fall back on the old structures of an economic model that is obsolete for the challenges ahead in terms of climate change, gender equality and human rights for all.

Why are more men dying of Coronavirus than women?

Coronavirus does not discriminate. Everyone runs the same risk of being affected by the virus without distinction by sex, age, nationality, identity, social class, ethnicity or religion. However, there is a gendered gap in terms of death: the risk of dying is clearly higher for men than for women. In Italy the ratio of men to women is 80:20, with an older median age for women (83.4 years) than for men (79.9 years).¹ It is true that more than two thirds of these patients had diabetes, cardiovascular diseases or cancer, or were former smokers, but without the Coronavirus infection they would not have died. In China research shows that men and women have been infected in roughly equal numbers; however, almost 65% of the people who died were men. The death rate among men was 2.8%, compared to 1.7% among women (Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention, February 2020).²

Broadly speaking, there are two reasons why fewer women than men die after being infected with Coronavirus. The first is a biological reason: empirical evidence has shown that women have stronger immune systems.³ The second is a lifestyle reason: men's lifestyles are often different, and in general they smoke and drink more than women, which is a learned behaviour of what 'real' men are supposed to do. This gender-stereotyping increases the risk factors among men.

Are women more exposed to Coronavirus?

Nurses, carers and cleaners are key professions in the survival strategy against the corona virus, and the majority of them are low-paid or unpaid women.

All over the world women comprise the majority of workers in the health sector. Women represent 70% of workers in the health and social sectors.⁴ Nurses are working around the clock on hospital front lines. They are the true heroes in the fight against this virus, risking their own health as they are disproportionately exposed to infected patients. Additionally, most care workers in the social sector are

¹ Andrea Ramussi and Guiseppe Remuzzi (2020): COVID-19 and Italy: what next? *The Lancet*, 13 March 2020. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(20\)30627-9](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(20)30627-9).

² Roni Caryn Rabin (2020): Why The Coronavirus Seems To Hit Men Harder Than Women, *The New York Times*, 2 March 2020. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/02/20/health/coronavirus-men-women.html>.

³ Chris Mooney, Sarah Kaplan and Min Joo Kim (2020): The coronavirus is killing far more men than women, *The Washington Post*, 20 March 2020. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/climate-environment/2020/03/19/coronavirus-kills-more-men-than-women/>.

⁴ M. Boniol, M. Mclsaac, L. Xu, T. Wuliji, K. Diallo and J. Campbell (2019) Gender equity in the health workforce: analysis of 104 countries. Working paper 1. Geneva: World Health Organization. (WHO/HIS/HWF/Gender/WP1/2019.1). Licence: CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 IGO. <https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/311314/WHO-HIS-HWF-Gender-WP1-2019.1-eng.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>.

also women. They care for pre-school children in nurseries, and for elderly people in retirement homes, and they visit people of all ages in need of care, including persons with disabilities and sick people who are at home. With the Coronavirus outbreak there is an increasing appeal to these care workers to support infected people at home.

At the moment we are in the middle of the outbreak at global level, and only limited snapshots are available of the number of workers in the health and social sectors who are infected by the virus; these are not always disaggregated by sex. Given the vertical gender segregation of the health sector, women dominate in the lower-paid jobs doing most of the hands-on work in direct contact with the patients, whereas men dominate in the decision-making jobs at greater distance from the patients. Although there is no empirical evidence yet, there is growing concern that women in these sectors will be disproportionately infected by Coronavirus.⁵

Access to health and reproductive rights

No country is sufficiently prepared for an exponential outbreak such as this pandemic. Health systems are overburdened. There is a lack of health workers, and a lack of medical materials for tests, of protective clothing, of hospital beds, of ventilators for respiratory support and, particularly, a lack of intensive care units. Health workers in intensive care units are making over-hours, facing lack of supplies and many get infected and must stay in quarantine themselves after being exposed. They will not only become overburdened but will also face moral dilemmas when they have to decide who will be given priority and who will have to be denied life-saving intensive care. The question is: are these decisions unconsciously influenced by stereotyped opinions about women and men in all their diversity?

As the virus spreads, the lack of hospital beds and medical facilities increases. In several countries all unnecessary medical procedures have been postponed to give priority to corona patients. In some cases, these measures are used to undermine women's reproductive rights. For example, in Texas and Ohio, nearly all abortions are labelled as non-essential procedures that must be delayed. "In Texas, providers can be fined or jailed for violating the order."⁶ Politicians in Texas and Ohio are using the corona-crisis to undermine abortion rights, which are already rather restrictive in these states.

The unpaid care economy: the resilient cushion of the crisis

By far the largest sector of the economy is the unpaid care sector. The work consists of taking care of children and sick family members, facilitating life for elderly people or family members with a disability, managing the home (shopping, cleaning, cooking, washing clothes etc.) and providing long-term unpaid support to the community of friends, neighbours, (ex-)colleagues and other acquaintances who have a disability or suffer from chronic illness. This unpaid support to the community is estimated to be at least four times larger than the professional care sector.⁷

⁵ Courtney Connley (2019): *How women could be uniquely impacted by the coronavirus*. CNBC, 18 March 2020. <https://www.cnbc.com/2020/03/18/how-the-coronavirus-could-impact-women-in-health-care.html>.

⁶ BBC-News, 24 March 2020 - Coronavirus: Texas says abortions 'non-essential' amid pandemic. https://www.bbc.com/news/52012243?intlink_from_url=https://www.bbc.com/news/topics/cvenzmgyl2dt/txas&link_location=live-reporting-story

⁷ In 2004 we calculated that in the Netherlands only 16% of the care work for people who need support is done by professionals; 86% is unpaid care work mainly provided by women to people in their close circle who are elderly, have a disability or suffer from a chronic disease (Thera Van Osch, Sheila Quinn and J. van Beveren (2004): *Budgeting for all; Manual for local gender budget initiatives*. Utrecht: Vrouwen Alliantie, p. 88).

Unpaid care work is mainly assigned to women. Globally, women perform 76.2% of the total hours of unpaid care work—more than three times as much as men.⁸ However, these unpaid working hours are ignored in the neo-liberal economic model of our times; not valued, not included in economic statistics, and never taken into account in any macroeconomic policy, they are just taken for granted. Throughout history, the economy of care has always existed, functioning as a buffer for economic crisis in the capitalist system, working as a placenta feeding the market economy and the State, but never acknowledged as a basic economic system.

The policy of ensuring physical distance to avoid the spread of Coronavirus led to the shutdown of industries, public places and events, reducing public transport and international air traffic, sending everyone back home and keeping infected persons quarantined indoors. The market and the State were unable to solve this problem and had to appeal to the social responsibility and mutual care of the population. As a result, the entire economy falls back on the unpaid care economy, the area of the economic system that is built on the unpaid work of generations of women and that has been completely ignored in our economic model.

In every country affected by Coronavirus we see people taking responsibility, acting in solidarity, creating joy by singing together from their balconies, caring for themselves and, where possible, caring for others who need help. It shows that care is one of the deeply rooted, universal human values that manifests in times of profound crisis, and keeps society going under the most extreme circumstances.

Caring economics refers to an economy that cares for people and cares for the planet. It builds on the concept of care as defined by Joan Tronto, who sees it as an activity that includes “everything that we do to maintain, continue, and repair our ‘world’ so that we can live in it as well as possible. That world includes our bodies, ourselves, our environment, all of which we seek to interweave in a complex, life-sustaining web.”⁹

The concept of care refers both to activities in the household or the care sector and to an attitude or moral orientation which expresses specific emotions of inter-relationship among people, such as lovingness, affection, warm-heartedness, friendship, esteem, tenderness, responsibility, concern for someone or something, commitment and attentiveness. Care work is more than an activity that can be expressed in objective criteria such as time or (equivalent) value, as it has an intrinsic human value that refers to the deeper sense of life. The shutdown of the economy creates space to release these intrinsic human values, and to reveal the hidden economy of caring human beings.

A lot of work in the monetary economy is now being taken over by the unpaid care economy. Schools are closed, so children have to be cared for at home, and parents have to help them do their homework online. More people at home means more domestic work to be done. Restaurants and fast-food shops are closed, so people have to cook more at home. The longer people stay indoors, the more cleaning work has to be done. The more hospitals and medical care centres are overburdened, the more unpaid care work needs to be done for sick people at home. When products or services become scarce in the market or are no longer accessible or available, people become creative and innovative in the caring economy. When theatres and places of entertainment are closed, they start making music at home, singing together from their balconies, making and sharing poems on the internet, painting, writing and entertaining each other on the internet. If they cannot buy the stuff

⁸ International Labour Organization (2018): *Care work and care jobs for the future of decent work*. Geneva: ILO. https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/---publ/documents/publication/wcms_633135.pdf.

⁹ J.C. Tronto (1993): *Moral Boundaries. A Political Argument for an Ethic of Care*. New York/London: Routledge.

they need, due to a lack of money or because it is no longer available in the shops, they become innovative and start producing alternative products at home. If they cannot pay a carpenter for repairs to their house, or if the carpenter is in quarantine, they find their own solutions. The unpaid care economy is taking over the key functions of the economy and keeping society going.

The question is whether the increased presence of men at home will also lead to their taking on an increased share of the unpaid work. This is a unique situation to involve men and women in redistributing and equally sharing the burden of unpaid domestic and care work.

How safe is home?

We must acknowledge that not everyone knows how to make the best of this economic lockdown. The tremendous pressure on people forced to spend 24 hours a day in their home situation, without knowing how long it will last, has a significant impact on people's mental health. The fear of becoming infected by the virus, the anxiety caused by financial insecurity, the loss of economic income, the disruption to the daily rhythm, the desperate feeling of being lost, of not knowing what to do, the boredom of being locked up at home, all these circumstances may cause serious emotional stress, which can lead to parents and/or children becoming depressed or falling into aggressive behaviour.

So far there are no data available on the impact of the crisis on domestic violence. Despite all the wonderful examples we see on the internet, there are also increased risks, which makes the home an unsafe place, particularly for women and children. These negative experiences are not widely shared online.

Statistics show that the home is the most dangerous place for women and children. Before the Coronavirus crisis, the risk of women dying as a consequence of domestic violence by intimate partners or other family members was at least twice as high as the risk of dying as a consequence of Coronavirus. In 2017 a total of 87,000 women were intentionally killed. Around 50,000 (58%) of them were killed by intimate partners or other family members—meaning that 137 women across the world are killed by a member of their own family every day!¹⁰ During the first 70 days of the Coronavirus outbreak (from 11 January to 21 March 2020) the Coronavirus death toll was 12,983. This means that globally 185 people died on average per day. Women accounted for 20–35% of deaths, which means between 37 and 65 women on average every day. This is far below the average of 137 women that are daily killed by their intimate partner or other family members.

The magnitude of violence against children under 18 years is also tremendous. In 2019 the World Health Organization estimated that up to 1 billion children aged 2–17 years experienced physical, sexual or emotional violence or neglect in the past year.¹¹ Experiencing violence in childhood has a lifelong impact on health and well-being. Many parents are unable to handle the stress related to the current situation. Depression and aggression are ways to regulate stress, creating unsafe family situations for children. For example, in the Netherlands the number of children who have called the kids' telephone—an emergency hotline for children in need of support—has increased, with hundreds of calls per day, since the schools closed and families have been in quarantine.¹²

¹⁰ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2019): *Global Study on Homicide; Gender-related killing of women and girls*. Vienna: UNDOC. https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/gsh/Booklet_5.pdf.

¹¹ World Health Organization (2019): *Factsheets: Violence against children*, 7 June 2019. Geneva: WHO. <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/violence-against-children>.

¹² Aaldert Van Soest (2020): Meer spanningen thuis, Kindertelefoon roodgloeiend, *Nederlands Dagblad*, 19 March 2020. <https://www.nd.nl/nieuws/nederland/961027/meer-spanningen-thuis-kindertelefoon-roodgloeiend>.

Domestic violence and violence against women and children are the most frequent forms and most underreported cases of violations of human rights. It continues as long as unequal power relations between men and women keep on dominating society—both the caring economy and the market economy—and as long as governments fail to address and prevent this social problem.

The question is whether the risks of women being killed by their intimate partner or other family members, and the risk of children becoming victims of violence, will increase now that people are isolated or quarantined in their homes to avoid spreading the virus. So far, no data are available on this issue, but it is an urgent political human rights issue that needs to be addressed now.

The environmental impact of the Coronavirus crisis

Air quality is improving, saving the lives of many, particularly in the densely populated industrial areas and cities where road transport has reduced and industry has closed down. In terms of reducing air pollution, Coronavirus has achieved more in a couple of months than international summits and agreements on climate change have achieved in the past five years. Since governments took drastic measures that paralysed traffic and market production, there has been an amazing decline in air pollution due to a rapid fall in nitrogen dioxide (NO₂), a gas that ends up in the air from burning fuel, primarily from cars, trucks, buses and power plants. As a result, fewer people have suffered from respiratory diseases such as asthma and bronchitis, and more lives have been saved—probably more than the number of lives lost due to Coronavirus.

NASA satellite images show the tremendous reduction in air pollution resulting from the measures taken by China in response to the Coronavirus pandemic.¹³ Many little children in China saw a blue sky for the first time in their life. On 24 February 2020 the Nikkei staff writer Yusko Cho wrote, “*Blue skies return to China as coronavirus cuts coal consumption*”.¹⁴ Coronavirus brought China’s economy to a standstill, reducing the amount of coal burnt by Chinese electricity companies by a third from the average in 2015. “*Government data shows average concentrations of PM2.5 fine particulate matter dropping to their lowest February levels since 2014 in many cities.*”¹⁵ “*Nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) pollution concentrations over eastern and central China were 10-30 percent lower than what is normally observed over the time period.*”¹⁶

Marshall Burke calculated the health benefits from this reduced air pollution, coming to the conclusion that the lives of 4,000 children under 5 and 73,000 adults over 70 have been saved in China due to the reduced pollution, which is much more than the lives lost due to Coronavirus in the country.¹⁷

¹³ Rafi Letzer (2020): *Dramatic effect of coronavirus lockdowns seen from space; The air above China cleaned up faster than ever before in living memory.* <https://www.space.com/coronavirus-changes-pollution-over-china.html>.

¹⁴ Yusko Cho (2020): Blue skies return to China as coronavirus cuts coal consumption. February air pollution readings drop to 6-year low in many cities, *Nikkei Asian Review*, 24 February 2020. <https://asia.nikkei.com/Spotlight/Coronavirus/Blue-skies-return-to-China-as-coronavirus-cuts-coal-consumption>.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Daily Sun (2020): Virus shutdown clears air pollution over China, *Daily Sun*, 3 March, 2020. <https://www.daily-sun.com/printversion/details/466357/Virus-shutdown-clears-air-pollution-over-China>.

¹⁷ “*I calculate that having 2 months of 10ug/m³ reductions in PM2.5 likely has saved the lives of 4,000 kids under 5 and 73,000 adults over 70 in China. Using even more conservative estimates of 10% reduction in mortality per 10ug change, I estimate 1400 under-5 lives saved and 51700 over-70 lives saved. Even under these more conservative assumptions, the lives saved due to the pollution reductions are roughly 20x the number of lives that have been directly lost to the virus (based on March 8 estimates of 3100 Chinese COVID-19 deaths)*” (Marshall Burke (2020): Stanford University co-blog, 8 March 2020. <https://web.stanford.edu/~mburke/>).

Not only in China but worldwide, air pollution is decreasing, and the planet is becoming healthier where measures are taken to flatten the curve of Coronavirus incidence. It shows that governments are able to take drastic measures for climate change. Greta Thunberg's call to "Act Now!" can no longer be criticised as being unrealistic. Coronavirus has forced governments to act now. What we can do to reduce the impact of Coronavirus, we can also do to reduce the impact of CO₂ emissions on climate change. The evidence has now been provided.

Less air pollution will reduce the incidence of respiratory diseases and the anxiety of patients suffering from chronic respiratory illnesses. The gender impact will be positive, as it reduces unpaid care work, which is mostly performed by women who care for people with chronic diseases. It will also reduce medical costs. The well-being of both patients and their family members and friends will increase, which will benefit their capacity to contribute to social and economic development.

Less traffic means that there is less danger for children to play outside or to walk in the streets. It reduces the time required by parents—most often mothers—to keep children inside the home or to continuously monitor their safety when playing outside. Particularly in areas with heavy traffic, the safety of children playing outside has increased, and women's unpaid care burdens have decreased, due to the measures that reduced road transport.

Reorganization of work

Many offices, companies and institutions have started to transform their organization to enable their employees to work from home.

Women's organizations in several countries have been claiming for at least two decades that reorganization, flexible working times and teleworking are needed to reduce time lost in traffic jams at rush hour and to enable workers to better combine their jobs with care responsibilities. In particular, administrative work, research, policy development, training, helpdesk services, customer services, meetings and many other tasks can be organized in a decentralized way with online communication. The Coronavirus crisis is finally forcing companies, offices and institutions to create conditions that allow their employees to work from home. Of course, this is not possible for all jobs, but at least some of the jobs in any company could be done from home.

Employees who start to work from home for the first time in their life also have to learn how to reorganize their home situation to create the right space and time to carry out their job effectively.

The current crisis opens the mind for alternative approaches, new forms of organization and decentralized business models. It challenges the assumptions of traditional chief executive officers with regard to their subordinates, as they have to trust that their workers are able and willing to do a good job from home without the controlling presence of their boss behind them.

This experience is a learning lesson for CEOs, managers, employees and politicians. It shows we can transform rigid economic structures in a short space of time, and create new structures that are flexible and better attuned to women and men who have to combine a job with family responsibilities. Such a transformation is an important aspect of policies to promote equal opportunities for women and men, as it contributes to creating an enabling environment for the redistribution of paid and unpaid work between women and men. It also creates better conditions for persons with disabilities who prefer to work from home.

Decentralization is also taking place in the education system. Since schools, universities, academies and training centres are closed during the Coronavirus crisis, classes are continuing online, and new forms of communication are being set up between teachers, pupils and students. This transformation

of the education system may contribute to the creation of innovative methods for permanent education and distance learning. In times of worldwide migration, such online education systems can become very helpful to keep all boys and girls of migrant families on board.

We should continue this transformative process after the Coronavirus crisis, and try to prevent organizations falling back into the old, rigid hierarchical structures that have been harmful to the planet and to people's equal opportunities.

The economic effects of the crisis

The workforce that is hit first and most by the crisis are the self-employed, freelance and informal workers who have no financial buffer to fall back on. It is a highly diverse workforce, active in all sectors of the economy, and comprising women and men of all ages and from a great variety of backgrounds, including visible minorities, migrants and refugees.

They are the most flexible workforce of the economy, working mainly at their own risk. They function like the transmission oil of the economic machine, responding to any demand; jumping into emergency situations; finding solutions for uncommon problems; providing ideas, advice and training; and assuming any type of work that is being outsourced by the rigid structures of the economy.

Under normal circumstances, it is the most flexible, most creative and innovative part of the economy which functions as a regulator of economic fluctuations. Together with the unpaid sector, this part of the economy is highly resilient. However, their access to formal social security systems is limited, and they often work in precarious circumstances with fluctuating incomes.

The creation of an unconditional basic income for this group during the Coronavirus crisis is one of the good measures taken in some countries, including the Netherlands and Germany. It will take away the anxiety about their social and economic insecurity and allow these workers to let their inventiveness and creativity flourish, while contributing to practical solutions for the multitude of problems that are arising and have to be addressed during and after the crisis.

Basic income is an excellent way to revitalize this segment of the economy, and to promote equal opportunities and gender equality. It is an inclusive social security policy that should be continued and expanded after the Coronavirus crisis.

Challenges ahead

So far, Coronavirus has mainly affected countries with relatively good health care infrastructure. When the virus spreads to refugee camps where physical distance and permanent hand washing are simply impossible, or to countries with poor health infrastructure, there will be a humanitarian disaster. We can foresee that this will happen, and we must already start preparing new scenarios and raise the money for drastic measures.

An inspiring example from the UK could be applied to provide decent housing to refugees: hotels in London offered rooms to homeless people where they could stay in physical isolation. Solidarity taxi drivers took them to the hotels. At the moment there are many hotel rooms available that could host refugees, as all trips, traffic and events have been cancelled for the coming months. To prevent a humanitarian disaster in the overcrowded refugee camps of Greece and Turkey, we could move thousands of refugees into the empty hotels.

A wake-up call

The Coronavirus crisis is a wake-up call for all of us. It's time for a change. For the challenges to come, we need a new economic system that cares for people and cares for the planet. We cannot fall back

on the old structures of an economic model that is obsolete and that accumulates money in the hands of a few who dominate the world, destroying our planet for the sake of profit, stock exchange listings and gross domestic product (GDP).

Coronavirus forced governments to put care for people at the centre of policy measures, which is uncommon, because in the current neo-liberal economic model, the ‘caring human being’ does not exist. This model is built on the concept of ‘the rational economic man’, a paradigm of the ‘homo economicus’ derived from Utilitarianism, an ethical theory stemming from the late 18th and 19th century, used by Adam Smith (1723–1790) and his contemporaries to explain the market theory. Human beings are considered to be independent, autonomous, rational economic individuals who pursue maximum satisfaction with a minimum of costs. In a free market this human behaviour is supposed to ensure the efficient allocation of scarce goods and services. Society is the sum of all these rationally acting individuals. Fortunately, this one-dimensional concept of human beings is only a theoretical construction.¹⁸ In real life such a person would have an antisocial behaviour disorder—a socially isolated individual, without emotions, without moral conscience and without relations with others, only focused on taking rational decisions to achieve maximum economic gain without taking into consideration the needs and interests of others.¹⁹

There is however a group of politicians, business leaders, financial investors and advisors who strongly internalised this concept of economic rationality by making a utilitarian calculus of the Coronavirus crisis, justifying that human lives of people over 70 should be sacrificed for the benefit of the stock markets and the economic growth. In a briefing of 24 March 2020 at the White House, president Donald Trump warned that the Coronavirus outbreak “is a medical problem, and we are not going let it turn into a long-lasting financial problem”. Texas Republican Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick followed up this briefing by saying that it is not worth to close the economy for such a low mortality rate of mostly people over 70. “Do we have to shut down the entire country for this? I think we can get back to work.” He suggested that Americans over 70 should be happy to die to restore the American economy.²⁰

Meanwhile a solidarity economy emerges among the vast majority of people; the economy of care. What we see in the Coronavirus crisis is people caring for each other. The ‘caring human being’ is first and foremost an interdependent person, socially connected, affected by and involved in relations to other persons.²¹ A caring economy requires mutual trust among interrelated citizens. It is the caring human being that keeps society running, in good times and in bad times, in times of crisis and war, in the formal and informal economy, in modern and traditional societies. The economy of care is always there—every day and everywhere.²² Care is a key feature of the global human context in which the market economy is embedded. Even if markets collapse, the economy of care continues to function. This is what the Coronavirus crisis is showing us.

¹⁸ In Adam Smith’s vision, the rational economic man was not yet considered to be one-dimensional. In his book *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759), he describes the perfection of human nature as “*To feel much for others and little for ourselves; to restrain our selfishness and exercise our benevolent affections*”.

¹⁹ For an extensive analysis of the neo-classic paradigm of the ‘homo economicus’ see: Irene van Staveren (2001): *The Values of Economics. An Aristotelian Perspective*. London: Routledge.

²⁰ The Guardian, 24 March 2020: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/mar/24/older-people-would-rather-die-than-let-covid-19-lockdown-harm-us-economy-texas-official-dan-patrick>

²¹ Virginia Held (2006): *The Ethics of Care; Personal, Political and Global*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

²² Thera Van Osch (2013): Towards a Caring economic Approach. Paper presented at the Progressive Economics Annual Conference, European Parliament, Brussels, 6 March 2014.

How to move to caring economics?

Why not build our future economic model on these universal values of caring human beings? After this economic break, why should we fall back on the old model of the neo-liberal economy that has proven unsustainable from both human and ecological points of view?

The model of caring economics is a comprehensive, resilient model focused on maintaining, continuing and repairing the world in which we live, to sustainably improve quality of life for all. Caring economics is aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals. The current economic break provides the opportunity to make a paradigm shift in economic thinking and acting. We now have the opportunity to replace our outdated economic model with a new one. An economic system that cares for people and the planet is possible. The Coronavirus crisis shows that putting 'care for people' at the centre of politics generates new dynamics, solidarity, clean air, new ways to combine work with family responsibilities etc. Here is a selection of some of the urgent policy measures that governments should take or continue after the Coronavirus crisis:

- Keep dirty industries closed. Don't create a debt burden at the cost of future taxpayers to keep dirty industries going. Let these industries fade out; instead, invest money in creating opportunities for decentralized green energy production units managed and controlled by men and women from local communities and organizations. Many simultaneous local, sustainable energy projects can revitalize the economy, create employment and innovation at local level, and are good for the planet.
- Continue providing an unconditional basic income to the working population that is currently excluded from the traditional social security system, including self-employed workers, freelancers, informal workers and unpaid care workers, and expand basic income step by step to the whole population.
- Strengthen teleworking processes to reduce commuter traffic and to create an enabling environment for flexible working hours that allows men and women to easily combine a job and family responsibilities.
- Monitor the incidence of domestic violence and gender-based violence, and put in practice the Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (the Istanbul Convention, 2011).
- Ensure that reproductive health and rights are protected during and after the Coronavirus crisis.
- Include the unpaid care economy in macroeconomic policy, and calculate the impact of any economic policy on the volume of paid and unpaid work of women and men.
- Move people from refugee camps in Greece and Turkey as soon as possible to the empty hotels all over Europe to stop the spread of Coronavirus to refugee camps and to avoid a humanitarian disaster.

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