



## How to cope with the corona and climate crises in a gender-just way<sup>1</sup>

### Discussion paper

*Many excellent papers about gender aspects of the corona crisis have been written by gender experts and organizations at an early stage. We don't want to repeat, merely to summarize them<sup>2</sup>. The links between the corona crisis and the climate crisis, in contrast, are mentioned less often and then rather cautiously, with the exception of the discussions about emergency assistance and economic recovery programmes. In particular environmental organisations are demanding strict climate protection requirements for economic stimulus packages.*

*This discussion paper is an attempt to highlight the connections between the corona crisis and the climate crisis, and the responses in Germany. Together, they contribute to create another crisis that has already become apparent, at least in the nursing and education sectors: the crisis of care work.*

A look at the (very similar) effects of the corona and climate crises on gender relations shows that they are based on structural inequalities and discrimination. It seems that life and survival, and the maintenance of daily life in both the corona and the climate crises are only secured by the fact that the resulting work is absorbed in an area that is already heavily burdened: the paid and unpaid care work in hospitals, nursing homes, homes for the elderly and private households. Many gender experts therefore worry about the long-term negative effects on gender relations and a re-traditionalization of gender roles.

Here is a brief overview on some of the gender aspects of the crises:

### Corona crisis<sup>3</sup>

- Significant increase in nursing, care and educational work (homeschooling) in private households, nursing and educational institutions;
- Additional burdens of home office work at times when children are not being cared for in daycare and school, increased effort for shopping, cooking, cleaning etc.;
- Risks from infection and overload in nursing and care professions with poor pay and poor conditions (85% women in Germany);
- Restriction of sexual and reproductive rights including the corresponding care, as for example in prenatal care;
- Invisibility of those who do this work within private households;
- Aggravation of domestic violence against women and children;
- During the lockdown nocturnal restriction of freedom of movement for women in public spaces due to lack of social support;

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<sup>1</sup> Gender is neither unchangeable nor binary. When we speak of women and men in the discussion paper, we explicitly mean persons who identify themselves as non-binary and trans\*women and trans\*men.

<sup>2</sup> see e.g. EIGE 2020, Schalatek 2020, van Osch 2020

<sup>3</sup> You can find more articles and analyses at <https://www.genanet.de/en/topics/gender-and-corona.html> or <https://www.feministcovidresponse.com/resources>

- Low proportion of women in the expert advisory and decision-making bodies, with the result that the topics relevant to them tend to be given less attention (e.g. Leopoldina, the advisory panel for the German government during the Corona crisis: 24 males, 2 females). Reduced visibility of female experts (e.g. virologists) in the media.

#### **Climate crisis<sup>4</sup>**

- Significant increase in nursing and care work, especially in situations of extreme weather events (floods, heat waves, etc.);
- Shifting climate protection measures to private households without identifying who should do the additional work;
- Invisibility of this burden shifted to households;
- Aggravation of violence against women and people who identify themselves as non-binary or queer in disaster situations;
- Low share of women in decision-making and development of technologies;
- Different carbon footprints by gender due to different behaviour e.g. in nutrition. Different needs e.g. with regard to care-related mobility are hardly taken into account when developing climate protection programmes and monitoring the effects of these programmes (see Röhr et al. 2018).

#### **Exacerbation of the precarious situation in care work by both crises**

- Nursing staff from abroad who have alleviated the care crisis in Germany significantly reduced due to corona restrictions, which has to be compensated for by (mostly unskilled) relatives;
- Corona measures in day care centres and schools fail due to poor structural conditions and a lack of teachers and child care workers;
- Constraints in educational infrastructures increase the pressure on care, education and home-schooling in the private household;
- Increasing care work, in turn, increases part-time work of women with long-term impacts on careers and pension levels;
- For single parents (approx. 90% female), work outside the home is completely impossible with closed or very reduced day-care centres and schools, and for this, home office is not a solution;
- The shifting of responsibility for environmentally and climate-friendly behaviour into private households leads - if there is insufficient political support - to additional work because behavioural routines have to be changed, information needs to be collected and educational work as well as conflict management has to be done within the family;
- The corona crisis might reduce climate protection efforts in private households because there are so many additional tasks to be performed, and at the same time loss of income limits the options for climate-friendly consumption;
- Heat waves due to climate change, particularly in urbanized areas, lead to higher health problems for risk groups, which in turn require more nursing care.

There is little data on how the crises affect vulnerable parts of society (migrants, people with disabilities, LGBTIQ \* etc.). In some countries, e.g. Sweden and Great Britain, there is evidence that in districts with a high proportion of migrants, the infection rate is significantly higher than the average, which may be due to cramped living conditions, but also due to the fact that a high proportion of this population is working in systemically relevant jobs and uses crowded public transport every day (taz 4.5.2020).

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<sup>4</sup> see Röhr et al 2018

### **Common foundations of the crises**

In both virology and climatology, there has been scientific evidence for a long time that draws attention to the dramatic and uncontrollable consequences for the economy, society and our civil freedom if countermeasures are not taken in time.

Both climate change and the spread of the COVID-19 virus have close links to the neoliberal economic system, globalization and the destruction of ecosystems. Industrial livestock farming and processing increase the risk of epidemics.

One factor in the rapid spread of the COVID-19 pandemic was the constant flow of people and goods. Another factor was the lack of protective masks and protective clothing for nursing staff, which was even a cause of conflict. A third factor is the unconditional priority of profit over all social criteria, even if it jeopardizes health and safety. For Germany, as for many other countries, the production of protective goods had been outsourced to China, where the exploding demand could no longer be met, also due to the closure of production facilities. The same applied to chemicals for testing and many vital medicines that are no longer produced on site. How could this happen? Neoliberal economic policy, without regulatory intervention, makes it possible. When the precarious situation became obvious, the cry for permanent domestic production of protective masks (and medication) got loud, but has already ceased. It remains to be seen whether and what might be changed.

For climate change policy the wrong priorities of the economy and the lack of policy regulation are even clearer. The constant growth paradigm, end-of-pipe solutions instead of fundamental transformation of the social and economic system have put us in a situation where irreversible damage is unavoidable, which now could only be stopped with drastic measures<sup>5</sup>. Any decision that is postponed today as too difficult will lead to even more difficult decisions tomorrow (Dechamps & Lebel 2020). In contrast to the protective measures in the corona crisis, climate protection will not be limited to few weeks or months.

### **How do politics and business react to the current crises?**

In the initial phase of the lockdown, when the overburden of nursing staff as well as the lack of adequate safety precautions became increasingly clear, their low pay and lack of social recognition were denounced. Citizens in many EU countries responded with regular applause in the evening for all workers who do systemically relevant work and supported this with the demand for better pay for such jobs. Politicians reacted by awarding a non-taxable single premium of EUR 500, which is topped up by some federal states up to a maximum of EUR 1,500. A small amount, given the fact that nursing staff have been getting close to their stress limits and putting their families at risk of infection. The required permanent increase in salaries has not been taken up.

The rapid decline in the appreciation of systemically relevant jobs was also striking in the rapidly emerging discussions about easing the lockdown. The media reported most often and most rapidly about the possible easing and corresponding safety plans for professional soccer. Subliminally and under the guise of health care for children the opening of day care centres and schools was not called for at that time. Here it becomes obvious that children, single parents, and care workers doing their work in the invisibility of private households don't have a lobby. The reasoning was that professional soccer is an economic factor.

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<sup>5</sup> Even with the emissions reduction during the lockdown, which is currently forecasted globally at 5% lower emissions for 2020, the Paris climate protection goals cannot be achieved. An annual reduction of 7.6% is required (taz 3.4.20)

The basis of the economy, care work - which, if paid, would add just about 40% of the gross value shown in gross domestic product - is still not seen as part of the economy.

But it gets even worse. The automotive industry - with around 75% male jobs - is, as always, one of the first branches of the economy to call for state support – despite billions of Euro profit in recent years, despite high bonuses and dividends, despite the shift of profits into tax havens in order to avoid taxes. In addition, every opportunity is used to insist that stronger regulations for climate and environmental protection should now be put on hold. Hard to believe, but as a backward-looking and anti-climate instrument, the scrapping premium that failed so terribly in the financial market crisis in 2009 comes to mind (see box). The new premium requested would be EUR 3,000 for a newly purchased car, of course without any climate protection requirements. This demand is supported by the Prime Ministers of Bavaria (home of BMW, governed by CSU), Baden-Württemberg (home of Daimler/Mercedes, governed by the Greens) and Lower Saxony (home of Volkswagen, governed by SPD). When it comes to the automotive industry, there is (male) agreement across political parties. The mobility premium demanded instead by many NGOs was obviously not even noticed.

Apart from the fact that the question immediately arises, what about other products, will purchasing them be promoted with premiums, as well? For example, what about a scrapping premium for old household appliances that no longer meet current efficiency standards? Anyhow, the system's imbalance can hardly be shown more clearly: the workers who helped us through the lockdown and in medical care got a premium of EUR 500 to 1,500, and those who will purchase a car might get 3,000 Euros.

#### **The scrapping premium 2009**

The scrapping premium (the official term was 'environmental premium') to alleviate the financial market crisis in 2009 was as controversial at the time as the new version requested today. The ineffectiveness of the premium for the economy and the environment has been clearly demonstrated. How it worked: Those who owned a car that was at least 9 years old could get a premium of 2,500 EUR for buying a new car if the old one was proven to be scrapped. EUR 1.5 billion was reserved for this programme. The run on the premium was large, so that the amount was increased to a total of 5 billion euros. This was the largest consumer subsidy programme to date of the German federal government.

In 2009, the premium led to purchases of 2 million new cars, but only to a small extent from German car manufacturers (at whose support the programme was aiming). Instead, mainly small cars from foreign manufacturers were bought, whose market share thereby grew by 10%. After the buying frenzy in 2009, sales slumped dramatically, as did the used car market. The market did not recover from this government intervention until 2012. The fact that car manufacturers and suppliers survived the crisis was mainly due to - also state-funded – short-time working arrangements, and sales in China.

The premium did not contribute to climate protection because hundreds of thousands of cars ended up in the junkyard that would otherwise have been able to do their job longer. Since some 1/5 of a car's CO<sub>2</sub> emissions over the entire life cycle occur during its production, this shows another absurdity of the instrument. This is also the result of the Federal Environment Ministry's monitoring: "The new cars hardly contribute to reducing CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from car traffic." Even the German economy newspaper 'Wirtschaftswoche' comes to the conclusion: "The balance of the premium is bitter: Almost 30 million German taxpayers have donated two million car buyers 2500 euros each. For absolutely nothing." (Wirtschaftswoche 4.5.2020).

At the time, Maja Kuhl (2010) examined the instruments of financial market rescue from a gender perspective. It shows that only 21% of the population could actually benefit from the scrapping premium anyway, namely those who owned a car that was eligible under subsidy law (at least 9 years old). Statistically, 16% of women and 34% of men had a car at the time, so that if the premium was used accordingly, 3.3 billion Euro of the subsidy would benefit men and 1.7 billion women. She concludes that this instrument simply cannot be gender-just, also because it does not take into account the means of transport that are mostly used by women. "However, the structure of exclusively promoting cars is unjust from a gender perspective. A lot more men than women own a car, while women use public transport more and are more dependent on it than men." (Kuhl 2010: 23)

Of course, the economy has to be supported with loans and subsidies in and after the corona crisis - but with strong climate and social policy requirements. There is now a unique opportunity for a social-ecological transformation that will not return in the foreseeable future. However, contrary to all assertions<sup>6</sup> by the Chancellor and Environment Minister at the 11th Petersburg Climate Dialogue, it currently appears that this opportunity is not being seized. No climate protection requirements, no discussion about a shift in mobility, no social requirements let alone requirements for gender equality. France can be seen here as a positive example, at least with regard to climate protection, as it imposes conditions for its support of Air France: improving the carbon footprint, closing routes for shorter domestic flights, for which rail connections are available as an alternative, renewing the aircraft fleet with more efficient and less polluting aircraft. Nothing of the sort can be heard with the loans of the German government to rescue Lufthansa.

If you combine the two factors mentioned here - no fundamental upgrading of the nursing professions, but subsidies for fossil fuel-structures will be maintained and cemented over decades (Allmendinger 2020) that must be changed now. The planned subsidies are not short-term measures, as the funds are tied up for years and the cars will be driven for 15 to 20 years (or at least until the next scrapping premium in the next crisis). Conclusion: opportunity for a change of paradigm wasted. Yesterday's industrial policy is supposed to solve tomorrow's crises. And the next crisis is already here. Drought and heat waves ensure that the climate crisis is not completely forgotten even during the pandemic. Not to mention the associated increase in care work.

### **And gender relations? Is patriarchy returning?**

At the beginning of the pandemic, there was a clear focus of media attention on the system relevance of care, nursing and care work, and poor payment was denounced in these professions. Feminist economists have been pointing to this fact for 30 years and have called for a corresponding reorientation of the economic system: "What are the challenges we have to confront? The acute crises range from the overconsumption of resources to global financial crises, famine in many countries and the crisis of care work. These crises are connected to each other, and it is not enough to take a one-dimensional approach – we need to look at the whole system and its interdependencies" (Genanet 2011: 1).

Yet, in real life, the response in 2020 is still applause and a small bonus, and then silence regarding the system relevance. Instead, a clear re-traditionalization of gender roles can be seen. According to a study by the Böckler Foundation (2020), only 62% of couples who practiced an equal distribution of unpaid work before the pandemic are still doing so. Even more, "while male and female employees are affected by short-time work just as often, noticeably more women (24%) than men (16%) have reduced working hours in other ways. They are released significantly more often and are slightly more likely to take a vacation due to the crisis. If children live in the household, in the vast majority of cases women take over most of the childcare work after day care or school closings" (Böckler Foundation 2020: 3). This exacerbates the gender-specific division of labour that already exists in many families, and gender roles are consolidated.

The crisis clearly shows who has no lobby: single parents, children and women. Obviously, it is assumed that "Mummy will fix it" (Habeck in Anne Will, May 3, 2020). Even worse, no one even thinks about who should do the care work when all other care structures are closed. "However, this blindness is not by accident, but part of a problematic understanding of economics. In the prevailing economic theory and practice, all non-market-mediated activities are systematically hidden; they do not count monetarily for

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<sup>6</sup> Svenja Schulze: "In order to better prepare ourselves against future crises, we need a climate-friendly restart of the economy. Our mission statement is not the old, but a better world that is more crisis-proof and more climate-friendly." (BMU Newsletter from 6.5.2020, translation UR)

the world market or for the capital market and at the same time are exploited as an invisible basis, sometimes even completely destroyed.” (Çağlar et al. 2012:2)

The small proportion of women in management positions is already visibly declining (Allmendinger in Anne Will, May 3, 2020). Industry does not want to accept guidelines for gender balance in management positions, as this could not be expected of them in this difficult situation. Allmendinger also concludes that the differences, especially between mothers and fathers, increase: "In earnings, in professional development, in old-age security, in financial independence, but also in the free time that we all simply need".

According to the latest Green Startup Monitor (Borderstep 2020), the proportion of women in green start-ups has grown significantly and is 22% compared to 13% for non-green ones. Since women start up with significantly less capital and above all use their own savings and that of friends and family, they risk being hit particularly hard in the crisis.

The signs of dramatic setbacks in gender justice are as clear as those in climate protection. Now the course has to be set for the future and the possibilities opened up by the necessary economic stimulus programmes have to be used, for technologies as well as for gender relationships and roles. For this reason, all support measures must be geared towards eliminating gender inequalities (e.g. pay gap) and promoting climate protection. They should be subject to social, gender and age budgeting that is also geared towards environmental and climate protection (Allmendinger 2020). In order to be able to design and review the programmes and their impacts accordingly, it is now more important than ever that data is collected that is differentiated according to gender and social categories in order to uncover injustices and to support programmes being adjusted.

### **Coping with the crisis: realignment of our political, economic and social model?**

At the beginning of the corona crisis, there was a call for a fundamental (economic and social) readjustment towards a transformation, also from social actors who had not yet emerged in this regard. However, the longer the crisis lasted, the louder the demands for the lifting of the lockdown became, the quieter the transformation voices became, and the louder the voices of those who wanted everything to be as it was before.

The necessary transformation has been demanded by the climate movement for many years, especially by the climate justice movement and by gender and climate activists (see e.g. Röhr et al. 2008, Röhr 2009). Only fundamental changes and readjustments in economic, environmental and social policy will lead to achieving climate targets - (probably) 50-55% emission reduction by 2030, 95% by 2050 –and the mitigation of the climate crisis.

The movements made clear that economic transformation also includes social transformation towards a just society, and above all a gender-just one. Without gender equality, there will be no sustainable coping with the crises, regardless of whether it is the climate crisis, the corona crisis or the distribution and valuation of care work, which is becoming increasingly critical.

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