POLICY BRIEF FOR GUIDELINES FOR GENDER-FOCUSED POLICIES AND PROGRAMS

Documento Político de la Red Mujer y Hábitat de América Latina y el Caribe ante COVID-19

Producción realizada en el marco de los Foros Regionales de la Red Mujer y Hábitat, con el apoyo de LDS-FMS

Red Mujer y Hábitat
América Latina y Caribe

FONDO DE MUJERES DEL SUR

Policy Brief for Guidelines for Gender-Focused Policies and Programs

*Systematization by *Sur Corporación.* Tania Macuer, Olga Segovia.

1. Inequalities in cities and neighborhoods facing COVID-19

Latin American cities are fragmented territories in socio-economic terms and physical infrastructure and services, in which, in addition, various discriminations and gender inequalities are expressed. It is in this context that it is necessary to review the effects of mobility restriction measures and on COVID-19 pandemic prevention policies. Not all neighborhoods are the same, not all housing is adequate, not everyone has similar resources to cope with job losses. And very specifically, the crisis affects women more than men.

During the pandemic, women and men have been asked to stay in their homes to protect themselves from contagion. However, it has been shown to be an impossible recommendation for many people to comply: their homes are precarious, small, do not have necessary equipment; or many lost their jobs and needed to take to the streets for a living. The pandemic showed that public policies implemented from central governments do not recognize the reality of large sectors of cities and territories: various social inequalities; diversity of composition homes; and the specific needs of particular groups of the population.

Faced with a basic situation aggravated by the crisis caused by the pandemic, proposals have emerged from women's organizations, different forms of local organization, and resurgent community survival and sourcing strategies. Among other initiatives, in popular neighborhoods the mandate "stay at home" (which was impossible to fulfill) became a "stay in your neighborhood", as an expression of the solidarity of community networks in the places of greatest needs.

The debate and lessons from various territorial experiences contained in the Virtual Forums "Feminist Readings on Cities and Territories", conducted by the Women and Habitat Network of Latin America and the Caribbean, suggest proposals for public policy guidelines in feminist key, which are organized below around three axes:

1. The first addresses: the need for urgent responses to violence against women, especially domestic violence, which has increased and exposed many women to being locked up with their abusers.
2. The second presents; the issue of care to groups of people in dependency and their relationship to the economic autonomy of women in their urban environment, and participation in relation to local governments.
3. The third axis corresponds: to the need for adequate housing. The problems associated with teleworking, which are affected by the precariousness of the houses and their equipment, are highlighted in this regard.

2. Guidelines and recommendations for a feminist approach to territorial inequalities in the pandemic

In this perspective, the lines of gender-based violence, care and autonomy, and the right to adequate housing are relieved.

2.1. Violence against women in situations of social isolation

As the data indicate, and for the various reasons identified in the Forums—confinement, economic narrowness, among others—domestic violence against women has increased. Guidelines for addressing, reducing and eliminating these violence include:

a) Improve and diversify information channels for citizens in prevention and attention to gender-based violence.

One of the widespread issues in the region has been the lack of information and awareness of possible situations of violence resulting from confinement. It is proposed to generate systems of awareness, information and mass guidance for the approach of cases of violence in the context of social isolation, available to all citizens.

b) Generate alternative channels for reporting and strengthening government care and protection systems.

There is an inability of the justice system to generate alternative spaces for effective denunciation and protection measures in the field of gender-based violence, the increasing difficulties faced for women in coexistence with "the aggressors". This is supported by a significant increase in calls to guidance and consultation channels reporting situations of violence, although it is not clear that such calls have come to be tracked and effective in overcoming the reported problem. In this context, it is proposed to:

c) Facilitate and generate alternative reporting systems that allow access to justice even in situations of social isolation, where the possibilities of accessing the system have been limited by measures to restrict mobility and social isolation.

The system of prevention, care and reparation of gender-based violence implemented by governments should include alternative measures that allow women to access it even in situations of isolation, with the main attention to the main protection groups. For example: providing more shelters, issuing protective measures without prior risk assessment, allowing women to leave to make complaints, even if there are travel restrictions.

d) Installation and strengthening of community prevention mechanisms.

It is necessary to strengthen community models of prevention of violence against women that allow to address violence in the context of the community in which they reside. And together with this, support women's organizations in their objectives, in particular in the use of

information technologies that enable them to communicate effectively with appropriate protection enabling them.

e) Creation of special protocols in emergency situations.

Emergency action protocols between local governments, women's social organizations and specialized institutions are needed to prevent, address and ensure access to justice for different types of violence against women in emergencies, and especially in social isolation.

f) Differential measures considering intersectionality in the problem of violence.

Considering the different ways in which violence takes place, it is recommended to generate differentiated measures for groups of principal protection, responding to the characteristics of these groups (children, the elderly, indigenous women, sexual diversity, migrants, among others) and their level of exposure to violence in public and private spaces.

g) Traffic, safety measures in public space.

Women should be provided with safety for the development of their health, care and sourcing work at night hours, as confinement has increased insecurity in public spaces due to depopulation, lack of lighting and surveillance. It should be considered in this regard that insecurity in public space limits the possibilities of displacement and articulation of women and, therefore, their participation in spaces of community organization when such instances take place at night.

2.2. Care and autonomy. Urgent responses and beyond confinement

In the context of the current serious health crisis, domestic and unpaid care work for children at home has increased due not only to school closures, but also to survival strategies within housing, which are in addition to the care of chronic and/or disabled sick people.

In this area, the following guidelines are proposed:

a) Putting the sustainability of life and solidarity at the heart of public policies.

Long-term sustainable social and economic policies are urgently needed. Inclusive policies of economic revival and employment that develop from a new governance with social dialogue. Policies that address inequality in its many dimensions, with systems that ensure universal and quality access to health services, social protection and care systems.

b) Strengthen social protection and social security systems.

The social security and protection systems in place in most of our countries to deal with the reality of the pandemic do not correspond to the reality of important sections of the population. In fact, they have demonstrated their inability to influence the spread of COVID-19 and mitigate its impacts, as well as to give a responsible and sustainable response to all citizens in the face of a crisis situation, and need to be redesigned.

*c) Advance the co-responsibility of homec*are.

This requires promoting measures to recognize, reduce and redistribute the unpaid labor overhead that occurs within households for the care of dependents and is mostly absorbed by women. Hence the urgency of advancing co-responsibility in care between the family, the state and the community, in the private sphere and in the public sphere. This involves recognition, redistribution, reduction of care tasks performed mainly by women.

Some measures in this regard are:

- Licenses for the care of daughters and sons or other family members with chronic and/or disability diseases.
- Provision of early childhood care services and dependents, public, private and community, that alleviate women's work.
- Additional bonuses and subsidies for the recruitment of child care services, for people who are unable to work from home.
- Promote maternity and paternity paritarian leave.

d) Prioritize gender-focused economic recovery.

In the current context, it is necessary to prioritize the sector of women most affected by the loss of livelihoods: migrant women, trans women, street vendors, domestic workers, commercial establishment employees. It is necessary to highlight the resilience that women have shown, creating from their homes and their neighborhoods mechanisms for their survival and that of their families.

e) Strengthen the role of local governments in supporting women's care and autonomy activities.

During the pandemic, public policies have been shown to be the importance of the territory, the neighborhood, the block, as the place where public policies are made or fail (because of their misrecognize). In this regard, the importance of local governments has been demonstrated on several occasions as the scale on which public policies meet citizenship. From this scale it is possible to recognize and enhance different networks:

- *Survival networks.* Community responses must be recognized. Solidarity and exchange have been the survival strategies that have been driven by the inhabitants (mostly women) in the popular neighborhoods. Examples include popular canteens, community kitchens, the creation of community care mechanisms and the identification of care strategies: creating a handwashing space with little soap and water, hanging with loops to facilitate access and reduce contact and contamination.
- *Marketing networks.* One way to support the recovery of the neighborhood economy is to facilitate the commercialization of informal production. Women,

above all, have created from their homes mechanisms for their survival and that of their families: manufacture of masks and gel alcohol for sale, food (meal times, ice cream, pastries, typical dessert food), home services to ensure the sale of their products. In addition, older adults, despite restrictions, offer services, sell books, and generally move alone, even though in large supermarkets they have already been banned from entry, without considering that they live alone and do not have family networks to meet their needs.

- *Social media.* Social media has been the means of promoting the products and services generated by the population, in particular women; in some cases they go mouth to mouth, and in others, in breach of established rules, offering from house to house either sweeping and washing pedestrian areas, sharpening knives, gardening, repairing appliances and shoes, including those who directly ask for help to feed their families. From local governments you can support these networks by creating digital platforms and offering free internet access.

- *Computer networks:* It has become clear that a significant part of the population, especially older adults and people without access to digital practices, whether for lack of necessary implements — computers, internet connection — or digital literacy, are marginalized from remote access to certain benefits and services, especially pension payments, bonds and other monetary supports. Creating support networks in this line is a priority, and in fact requires human resources and public funding.

2.3. Human right to adequate housing

Social isolation and the confinement of the population in their homes, as a measure of individual prevention of the contagion of the pandemic, made present inequality in access to adequate housing and the provision of basic services in our cities. Not all families have adequate housing, and even in some cases the prevention measures issued have contributed to increasing levels of transmission of the virus in already precarious territories and communities.

In marginalized areas, with densely populated environments, small housing, water scarcity and basic sanitation systems, women, particularly households, and their families, in the absence of public responses have found collective solidarity responses in neighborhoods to implement actions to prevent and mitigate the impacts of the pandemic on health, work and hunger.

Proposals for guidelines in this area include:

a) Advance the application of the human right to adequate housing.

At the heart of the discussion on adequate housing production is the dominant neoliberal development model in most Latin American countries. Thus, housing has been defined as a tradable good, a commodity subject to the laws of supply and demand. In cities with high levels of social and economic fragmentation, with critical levels of overcrowding and large areas lacking basic services and urban equipment, the right to housing for a significant fraction of the population is limited by the ambition of real estate agents.

The right to adequate housing is recognized in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 (Article 25.1); International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights of 1966 (Article 11), and in the Constitutions of several Latin American countries. As the pandemic has shown, access to adequate housing is an unsatisfied right. For example, you need to:

- *Prevent forced evictions.* Families, especially the ones with a women in charge, have been evicted from their precarious pieces or housing because they do not meet the payment due to lost income. In this context, it should be added that migrant women are a particularly affected group, especially those engaged in informal activities and living in tenants.
- *Ending discrimination in access to housing.* In particular, this discrimination affects immigrant and indigenous women who, forced by violence in peasant areas or for economic reasons, arrive in the cities and have no choice but the neighborhoods of the periphery, in lease or invasions, where they face violence from the owners of the premises.
- *Provide homes with water and basic services.* During the pandemic, some of the basic services are of decisive importance for survival. Access to safe drinking water is one of these, as it is not only necessary for life under normal conditions, but is required in greater proportion to enable compliance with basic health provisions. In this regard, States and local governments must ensure the provision of water throughout the city, including those areas that have so far not been considered in the expansion of service networks.
- *Give land and housing tenure security to women heads of households and their families.* In times of pandemic, legal certainty plays a decisive role for women, considering that they are most severely affected by the loss of livelihoods, both because of the threat of possible eviction and because they cannot access government benefits, for which it is necessary to demonstrate with utility receipts the holding of housing.
- *Location of living.* If we place the daily life of women as the center of feminist urbanism, the location of housing is not enough in itself. Places close to the necessary services are required, so that travel to access them, means that women lack time to make their lives in the political and social sphere.
- *Cultural adequacy.* Homes, their designs, building materials, must allow the expression of the cultural identity of women from different backgrounds, worldviews and cultures, and in which intersectionality imposes multiple identities. The location of large groups of migrants on the peripheries or in the areas of high social marginality of cities is a challenge for public action, in the perspective of defining alternatives of cultural adequacy for its new inhabitants.

b) Design homes with a gender perspective.

The pandemic has shown that the design of social housing is focused from an individual "family" vision: women being delegated to the kitchen and care of children, while open and meeting places are intended for men. In the face of this conception and its corresponding practice, in the popular neighborhoods the tasks of care and survival have loosened the barrier between private and public spaces: the neighborhood, collectively, offers a complementary space to that of the houses.

A proposal for feminist housing design should, inter alia, consider the above flexibility and diversity of households, made up of different types of families. This, however, has not been reflected in housing policies. The maternalist conception of politics is not enough: progress must be made to install housing as a right, and not as something linked to the maternal role assigned by androginal society.

c) Improve the urban equipment of the neighborhoods, the environment of precarious homes.

A sharp shift in the conception, design and implementation of public housing policies is required, so that they are based on law and not only address the diversity of families and women, but consider the close connection between the right to housing and the other human rights of women : the right to safety, work, education, health, among others.

d) Promote women's organizations for the right to housing.

Within the framework of the pandemic, the promotion of the organization in neighborhoods and communities is essential to articulate women's organizations and networks around the demands for the right to housing, health, and care policies and programs that put at the center the rights of all and all to inhabit the city with dignity.

e) Variety of forms of tenure.

The conception of property as the only way to exercise housing tenure not only creates discrimination, but strengthens the idea that domestic and care work should fall on women, while the provision of monetary resources to achieve housing ownership and family support rests with men. There are alternatives to such a structure, such as collective and public holdings, the collectivization of domestic work, living spaces and care not limited to single-family private housing.

f) Adequate housing offer at affordable prices.

A major problem on the continent is that there is no adequate housing offering at affordable prices, and more than one hundred million people in Latin America live in favelas and inadequate neighborhoods, many without proof of ownership, lack of access to safe water, houses built with inadequate materials, with Brazil and Mexico being the greatest exponents of these problems.

State intervention is required to regulate soil speculation and to boost housing production by women's organizations, cooperatives, and other types of non-profit entities.

In conclusion, it should not be forgotten that these guidelines, presented as a response to the urgency of alleviating the effects of the pandemic, are part of a proposal of feminist urbanism that the Women and Habitat Network developed with the horizon of a city shared by women and men.

Thus, these guidelines fall within the realm of feminist urban planning, in which the Network has been a pioneer. It has carried out safe city programs for women and girls; it has

collaborated and worked with feminist women's organizations on housing and soil, coexistence and security, equipment and territorial planning plans with a perspective on gender and climate change, among others. This accumulated baggage is now geared towards the task of the emergency; tomorrow to gender-based reconstruction of urban communities.