

# Towards an Inclusive Future

Reflection paper of the Nova  
Helvetia working group on  
Inclusion & Gender

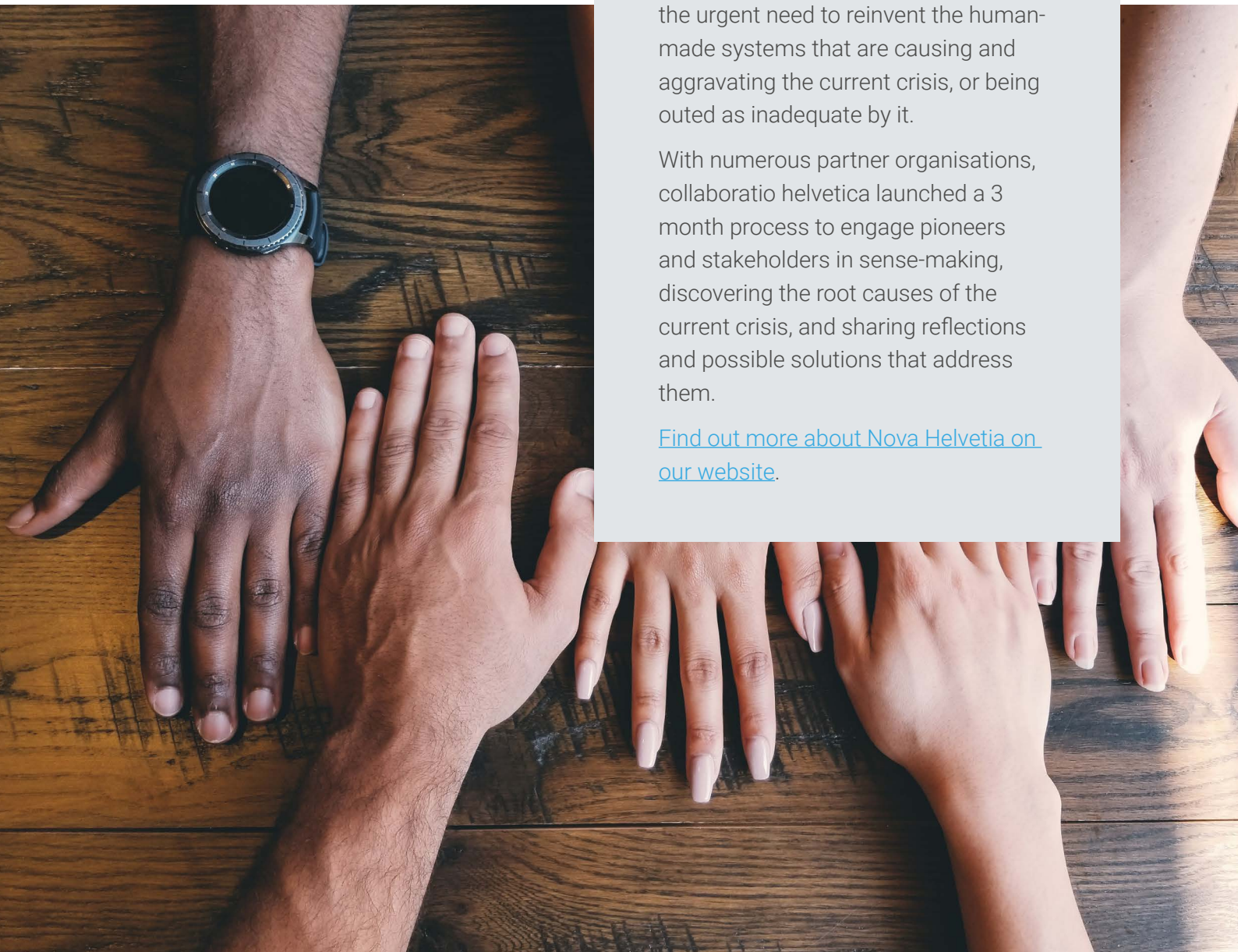
(SDGs 5 & 10)

## About Nova Helvetia

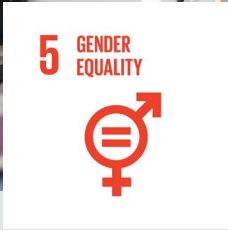
Nova Helvetia is a process to address the urgent need to reinvent the human-made systems that are causing and aggravating the current crisis, or being outed as inadequate by it.

With numerous partner organisations, collaboratio helvetica launched a 3 month process to engage pioneers and stakeholders in sense-making, discovering the root causes of the current crisis, and sharing reflections and possible solutions that address them.

[Find out more about Nova Helvetia on our website.](#)



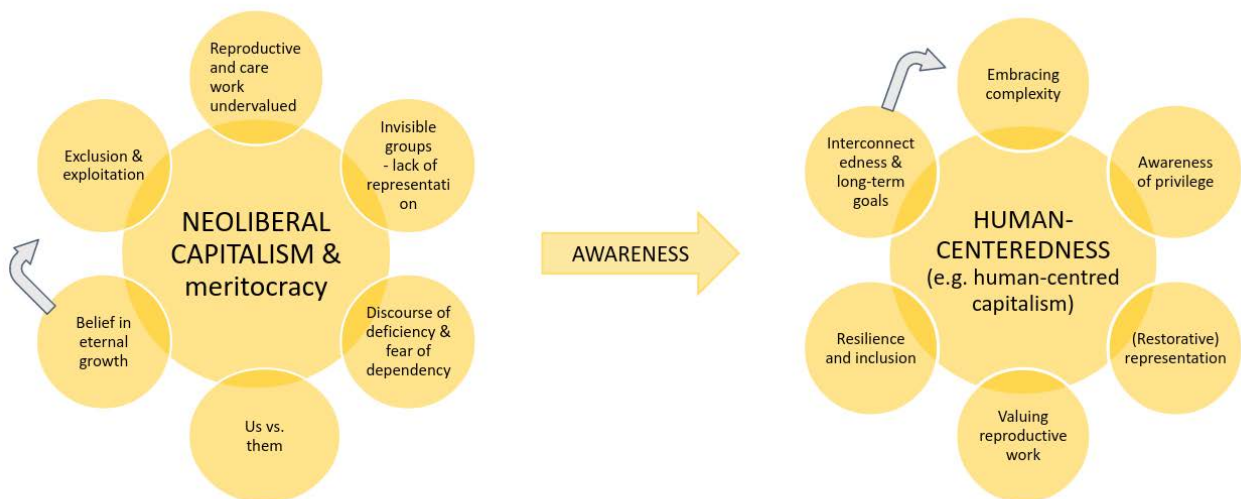
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## In a nutshell

We researched and reflected upon the effects that the COVID-19 crisis had on gender relations, with a particular focus on women\*<sup>1</sup> and people belonging to marginalised groups. We focused on narratives around care work, the distribution of and value differential between productive and reproductive work, changes in the world of work, gender representation in the media and increased marginalisation of certain identities within the framework of our socio-economic system. We asked questions: *How is the COVID-19 crisis disproportionately affecting women\* and people in precarious socio-economic situations? How might we ensure that there is equitable representation for ALL voices when approaching the process of (re)shaping our socio-economic future in the wake of COVID-19?*

The following image offers a summary of our key reflections based on collective research, personal interviews and regular dialogue sessions within the group.



<sup>1</sup> We use the \* in recognition of the many different dimensions - biological, cultural, social, societal - which make up the gender identity of each individual person. When we refer to "women\*", we therefore include all humans who self-identify as women, whether by nature

## Visible effects of COVID-19 on gender equality, inclusiveness and marginalised groups

The COVID-19 crisis affected Swiss populations differently depending on their socio-economic background, employment, health, migration or family status.

Even though a virus as such doesn't discriminate, we can see that the crisis caused by the pandemic magnified many pre-existing inequalities<sup>2</sup>. For example, the lockdown, the closing of schools and childcare structures and the organisation of home schooling and home-office have deepened gender inequalities in the household<sup>3</sup>. Women\* are tendentially overburdened in 5 areas: domestic (cooking, shopping, cleaning), mental load (organisation), parental (childcare, homeschooling), professional (home office, face-to-face work) and emotional (psychological well-being of those around them, support, loneliness, violence)<sup>4</sup>. These phenomena have been all the more salient for single parents and immigrants without the security of residency papers or stable income<sup>5</sup>. In general, the situation was especially hard on parents of all genders, who were expected to perform a 100% workload in a home-office setting.

Furthermore, women\* were also at the forefront of the battle against COVID-19, making up nearly 70% of the social- and health-care workforce, which exposed them to a greater risk of infection. At the same time, they were in less of a position to have control over their own risk-taking, as the decision-making processes and leadership positions in the sector continue to be mainly held by men\*. The voice of women\* is typically lacking in media in healthcare debates and thus not heard or taken into consideration in policy responses.<sup>6</sup>

Despite the many, undeniably negative consequences of the crisis, we also saw opportunities where we identified potential for change. For example:

- **Workplace Flexibility:** The boost in digitalisation that many companies introduced during the lockdown has increased acceptance of remote- and flex- working scenarios. For example, companies such as Facebook and Twitter have announced that they "are giving employees the opportunity to work from home permanently".<sup>7</sup> While many diversity and inclusion professionals agree that flex-work is an important factor in improving gender equality in both the workplace and caretaking roles, experts assume that a major shift towards home office after the lockdown is unlikely in Switzerland because of the prevailing corporate cultural barriers in many companies.<sup>8</sup>
- **Gender Relations in Parenting:** Many parents enjoyed working from home "despite (...) the

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of their assigned sex, gender expression, or gender identity.

- 2 Gender Campus (2020). [The corona crisis from a gender perspective: opening up a debate](#). Gender Campus website.
- Elzbieta Korolczuk (2020). [Crisis is gendered. Women in the times of pandemic](#). Heinrich Böll Stiftung. Gunda Werner Institute. Feminism and Gender Democracy.
- 3 Sarah Bütikofer, Julie Craviolini, Michael Hermann, Daniel Krähenbühl (2020). [Schweizer Familien in der Covid-19-Pandemie](#). Sotomo - Gesellschaft, politik & raum. Eidgenössisches Büro für die Gleichstellung von Frau und Mann EBG (Auftraggeber).
- 4 According to Camille Froidevaux-Metterie, in Marie-Pierre Genecand (2020). [Le confinement a creusé les inégalités entre les hommes et les femmes](#). Le Temps.
- 5 Beobachtungsstelle.ch (2020). [Migrant\\*innen drohen rechtliche Folgen aufgrund von Corona](#).
- 6 OECD 2020: [Women at the core of the fight against COVID-19 crisis](#). OECD website. Anne Chemin (2020). [L'effacement des femmes de savoir pendant la crise sanitaire](#). Conseil supérieur de l'audiovisuel (2020). [La représentation des femmes dans les médias audiovisuels pendant l'épidémie de Covid-19](#). Site internet du CSA. David Doukhan, Cécile Méadel, Marlène Coulomb-Gully (2020). [En période de coronavirus, la parole d'autorité dans l'info télé reste largement masculine](#). Institut national de l'Audiovisuel. La Revue des médias.
- 7 Harry Kretchmer (2020). [COVID-19: Is this what the office of the future will look like?](#) WEF Website
- 8 Pauline Turuban and Samuel Jaber (2020). [Corona-Krise beflügelt Homeoffice nur vorübergehend](#). Swissinfo Website

distraction of having children around”.<sup>9</sup> Past studies that have researched men\* who take parental leave find that those men\* tend to engage more in family care work even after their parental leave is over.<sup>10</sup> Thus we have reason to hope that additional time spent at home with the family might boost a more equal distribution of care work between genders.

- **Questioning Consumerism:** During the lockdown phase, consumer behaviour in Switzerland massively changed, with an overall decrease in spending.<sup>11</sup> People were questioning what they truly needed at the same time as realising that they could actually work less when they consumed less.<sup>12</sup> It would be interesting to analyse if this effect lasts after the lockdown is over, however early numbers indicate that private consumption in Switzerland has almost already reached the same level as before the lockdown began.<sup>13</sup>
- **Spotlight on System Relevant Jobs:** System relevant jobs such as supermarket workers, caretakers, nurses, and cleaning staff and others typically dominated by women\* have taken on new importance in the crisis response.<sup>14</sup> What remains to be seen is whether this visibility will translate into a higher valuation of those jobs and industries in the long term.
- **Recognition of Female Leadership:** Many of the most effective political leaders during the Corona-crisis have been women\* (for e.g. the Prime Ministers of Finland and New Zealand and German Chancellor, Angela Merkel). This shows the upside of greater representation of women\* in political leadership roles. We also see evidence of an emerging leadership paradigm based on resilience, courage, flexibility, listening, empathy, collaboration, caring and recognition of collective contribution.<sup>15</sup>

As we dove deeper into researching and observing the visible symptoms and effects the crisis had on Swiss society, we also identified certain key elements below the surface, which we believe continue to reinforce (gender) inequality.

## Eternal growth and exploitation

Our current economic system, Neoliberal Capitalism<sup>16</sup>, functions on the assumption of continuous growth with the aim of maximising profit. It upholds the idea that the “best talent” makes it to the top of the corporate career ladder (= Meritocracy<sup>17</sup>) thus deserving recognition through giant salaries. Meritocracy also assumes that individuals are solely responsible for their own success or failure, ignoring the effect of structural discrimination on free will and self-actualisation<sup>18</sup>.

This myth of Meritocracy was visible during the crisis, in the discourse on the value of individuals, where the contribution of some were valued higher than those of others. For those caught up in a complex web of marginalised identities, for example unemployed migrants on social welfare, access to critical support mechanisms like cyber cafés facilitating job searches were completely cut off.

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9 Keystone SDA (2020). [Half of Swiss working from home – and enjoying it](#). Swissinfo Website

10 Emily Eaton and Carole Jackson (2020). [Want to improve gender equality at work? Help men take parental leave](#). Mercer Website

11 Eva Schultz (2020). [Veränderung der Ausgaben für verschiedene Konsumbereiche während der Corona-Krise in der Schweiz im Frühjahr 2020](#). Statista Website

12 John Humphrys (2020). [After Lockdown: Carry On Being ‘Consumers’?](#) Yougov Website

13 Matthias Benz and Florian Seliger (2020). [Die Wirtschaft läuft wieder zu 90 Prozent – das zeigen unkonventionelle Echtzeitdaten](#). NZZ Website

14 Regina Frey (2020). [Corona und Gender - ein geschlechtsbezogener Blick auf die Pandemie und ihre \(möglichen\) Folgen](#). Universität Göttingen Website

15 Laura Hood (2020). [Why women leaders are excelling during the coronavirus pandemic](#). The Conversation Website

16 International Development Economics Associates (2017). [Neoliberal capitalism and its crisis](#). IDEA website.

17 Wikipedia. [Meritocracy](#).

18 Sophie Hodel (2016). [Wo Integration ausgehandelt wird](#). Denknnetz website.

Although this made it even more difficult if not impossible, to meet the minimum requirements for support payments, the Swiss unemployment offices did not relax such requirements.<sup>19</sup> The opportunity for discourse on equitable solutions for long standing social issues, whether combating poverty through guaranteed basic income or calling for increased support for infrastructure in overcrowded asylum centres, was lost in deference to a speedy return to 'business as usual'.

We attribute many of these attitudes to the neoliberal rationalisation of humans and nature as resources to be exploited. Continuous growth and profit are only possible on the basis of this exploitation - of nature, women\* and marginalised groups<sup>20</sup>. The tendency is to use these 'resources' to generate short-term profits which are not shared with those who were instrumental in their generation. The socio-economic and thus the power status of involved individuals determines the likelihood of getting a share of the profits.

## Undervaluing reproductive work

Feminist analyses of the economy have elaborated on the concepts of care, care work and care economy in order to characterise the invisible or unspoken un(der)paid labour as a fundamental underlying condition for the success of a capitalist economy. We can thus draw distinctions between different types of work<sup>21</sup>. There is productive work, in other words goods and services that have monetary value, and reproductive work, such as giving birth, raising and educating children (thus providing the workforce necessary to do productive work), as well as caring for the elderly and the sick. Because the tasks associated with reproductive work do not generate visible profits, nor are they perceived as requiring any particular skills, they are not valued as 'real' work and are therefore paid poorly, if they are even paid at all.

In Switzerland, we see this manifested in the costs of child- and elderly- care, and the absence of paternity leave. The burden of this un(der)valued reproductive work falls overwhelmingly on women\*, without whose labour the current economic system would not function.

## Exclusion and underrepresentation

The definition of humans as a resource, together with the devaluation of care work results practically in the exclusion of certain groups from decision making processes and leadership. This all but removes the possibility for excluded groups to actively shape their work environment and living conditions. For example, during the pandemic, women\* in general but more particularly the voices of nurses, teachers, sex workers and migrants have been missing in the national crisis unit, tasked with deciding how to implement Corona security measures.<sup>22</sup>

Generally, the research available and the 'experts' that we as a society turn to for guidance are themselves part of the dominant power groups - notably white, privileged, western thinkers, as evidenced in the makeup of our own CoHe Gender reflection group. We call for a radical shift towards better representation for all identities at all levels of society, as the pathway to creating more equitable social and economic systems.

## Discourse of Deficiency and Fear of Dependency

19 Emma-Louise Steiner (May 2020), [Die Sozial Schwächsten sind vor, während und nach Corona dieselben](#), Das Lamm Website.

20 Sarah Schilliger (2007). [Festung mit Dienstboteneingang: Die aktuelle Migrationspolitik und ihre Auswirkungen](#).

21 Sabrina Schmitt, Gerd Mutz, Birgiz Erbe (2016). [International Feminist Perspectives on Care Economy](#). Women's Academy Munich. Munich University of applied Sciences.. See also Nancy Fraser's work. Sarah Leonard & Nancy Fraser (2016). [Capitalism's Crisis of Care](#). Dissent Magazine. Nancy Fraser (2016). [Contradictions of capital and care](#). New Left Review.

22 Andrea Arežina (2020). [Wer managt in Bern die Corona-Krise?](#) Republik Website

Another core belief that shapes our system is that there is not enough for everyone. With this “pie” mindset, we perpetuate a cycle of competition which categorises worthy people as productive and intelligent in contrast with their unworthy - lazy or stupid - counterparts.

People who have not ‘made it’, for example people who are unemployed, are characterised as not trying hard enough, or lacking in competencies, education, skills or behaviours that meet “Swiss standards”.<sup>23</sup> What results is the internalisation of the message that, as people outside the productive system, there’s no place for them. Not surprisingly, internalisation of this belief over time is demoralising and only serves to push them further away from opportunity, disregarding both their wisdom and talents.<sup>24</sup>

By the very nature of their precarious situation these people, whose insights might help us to disrupt this cycle of marginalisation, namely of those who currently receive social welfare, or those who have fallen out of the system completely, facing the real dilemma of losing access to critical safety nets should they dare to critique ‘the hand that feeds them’.

An environment praising individual success and valuing competition does not appreciate dependency. When dependency is seen as a weakness, then we categorically stereotype human connection as useless or only for people who are ‘less than’ others. This psychological protection mechanism is the start of a slippery slope leading to the eventual decision that the challenges faced by my neighbours are not my problem. This lack of compassion keeps us in an ‘us vs them’ framework instead of moving us towards a more inclusive society.

## **Towards a regenerative, inclusive and resilient economy**

In order to improve equity, fairness and inclusion in our society as well as to be prepared for the challenges yet to come (for e.g. climate change, biodiversity loss, possible future pandemics, to name a few) we need a socio-economic system and social contract, that is not built on difference, hierarchy and deficiency but on the recognition of interconnectedness (humans and nature), inclusion of all (genders and groups of people), and a focus on long-term goals<sup>25</sup>. A resilient economy is the basis for a society that can not only survive major challenges, but also adapt and grow from them.

We argue that for that level of transformation to be sustainable, we need to reframe the whole paradigm, with the recognition that our current intellectual and cultural references exclude the experiences of many essential groups in our society. We call for those currently invisible and marginalized to be brought to the forefront, to be heard, seen and valued in the public sphere, in political debates, in decision making arenas, in academic research, and in the media.

How might we get there? The following are key elements and ideas we deem necessary to foster a more inclusive future.

### **Self and Collective Awareness**

Self- and collective awareness are key to moving towards a more inclusive and resilient society. Concretely, this means questioning and challenging our own patterns of thought and belief and recognising their influence on the structures we take as given and ‘normal’ in our society. Through

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23 Meral Kaya (2019). [Rassismusbedingte Bildungsungleichheit. Rassismuskritisch lernen und lehren.](#)

24 Carole Berthoud (2015). [Dequalifizierung im Arbeitsmarkt.](#)

25 Democratizing Work (2020): [Work. Democratize. Decommodify. Remediate.](#) Democratizing Work website.

awareness of these patterns, needs, resources, privileges, social statuses and desires, and aligning that awareness with our values and goals, we can generate the individual and collective action that is required to move into a desired reality.

## **Valuing reproductive work**

In an equitable economic system all contributions are valued, especially care work, whether at home with children, supporting the elderly or in other system relevant jobs that are currently un(der)paid<sup>26</sup>. The focus shifts from short term profit to long-term sustainability and solutions that bring value to all members of society.

## **Avoiding tokenism through restorative representation**

In order to build an inclusive economy and society, it is important to increase the representation of women\* and marginalised voices in all arenas - business leadership, political office, social organisations, educational institutions and research among others. Yet, that alone is not enough. In our exploration, we found that even in very progressive, human-centred and eco-friendly communities who have been established as an alternative to our neoliberal way of life, we observe that political and care work are often not evenly distributed between genders<sup>27</sup>. Somehow, gender roles and fundamental, often subconscious beliefs of 'us vs. them' are incredibly difficult to overcome, even when dealt with awareness and best intentions.

In order to truly increase representation, rather than simply virtue signalling, or tokenising groups without offering true power, we call for restorative representation: Where a majority of voices in decision making processes and leadership come from groups who have been historically underrepresented.

## **Acknowledgement of Privilege and Embracing Complexity**

To enable such a power shift, we must be aware of our privilege and recognise it as a gateway to opening spaces and networks for people who are currently not heard. Deeply influenced by the Black Lives Matter movement sweeping across the globe, we begin to understand that privilege is not something to be ashamed about, but rather reflected upon, understood and utilised in our roles as change makers. By acknowledging our own privilege, we acknowledge the damage we do, even with the best of intentions, when talking 'about' people instead of with them.

Throughout this process we were greatly influenced by personal interviews with women\* personally facing many of the discriminatory dynamics we have documented here. We use that awareness as a reminder to always seek out and invite diverse voices into our personal and professional arenas, and most especially into spaces where decisions about our collective future are made.

To do so is to embrace the complexity of identities at the intersection of gender, race, age, background, class, family status and more. Designing economies and social systems with that complexity in mind, and with insights, influence and leadership directly sourced from the people involved and affected is the pathway to a truly inclusive and interconnected society.

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26 Claire Legros (2020). [Le souci de l'autre, un retour de l'éthique du "care"](#). Le Monde.

27 Sabine Carl and Mike Korsonewski (2017). [Für ein Bündnis von Care Revolution und Degrowth - Teil I.](#)

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## Appendixes

### Toolbox

During our reflection and research we have come across many interesting projects, organisations and readings we would like to share with you.

### Feminist literature and podcasts– Our suggestions

- Chimamanda Adichie Ngozi: [We should all be feminists](#)
- Sharon Blackie: [If women rose rooted](#)
- Bell Hooks, [Feminism is for Everybody](#)
- Glennon Doyle: [Untamed](#)
- Silvia Federici: [Aufstand aus der Küche](#)
- Bettina Haidinger Käthe Knittler: [Feministische Ökonomie, Was ist es & Alternativen zum jetzigen ökonomistischen System](#)
- Christine Rudolf, Doreen Heide & andere: [Schneewittchen rechnet ab: Feministische Ökonomie für anderes Leben, Arbeiten & Produzieren](#)
- Silvia Federici: [Caliban und die Hexe; historische Abhandlung des Kapitalismus & Care Arbeit](#)
- Mascha Madörin: [Quer denken](#)
- Ulrike Knobloch: [Ökonomie des Versorgens](#)
- Caroline Criado Perez: [Invisible women](#)
- Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak: [Can the subaltern speak?](#)
- Cinzia Arruzza, Tithi Bhattacharya, Nancy Fraser: [Feminismus für die 99%. Ein Manifest.](#)
- Christopher Weber-Fürst: [The future is female. The art of new living](#)
- Virginie Despentes: [King Kong théorie](#)
- Charlotte Bienaimé: [Prendre soin, penser en féministes le monde d'après](#)
- Victoire Tuillon, Thomas Rozec: [Dans le genre confiné.e.s](#)
- Victoire Tuillon: [Le patrimoine, enjeu capital](#)

### Academic papers

- The Economy's Other Half: How Taking Gender Seriously Transforms Macroeconomics. [Read more](#)
- Sorge ins Zentrum einer Alternative zum Kapitalismus. [Mehr](#)
- Grundeinkommen und Care-Arbeit. [Mehr](#)
- Für ein Bündnis von Care Revolution und Degrowth – Teil I. [Mehr](#)
- Ohne geht es nicht: Radikalität, Kapitalismuskritik und ein feministischer Grundkonsens. [Mehr](#)
- Gemeinsam aus der Corona-Pandemie lernen – für solidarische und nachhaltige Lebensweisen streiten. [Mehr](#)
- Eine Chance am Ausgang der Corona-Krise? Für eine grundlegende Veränderung des

Gesundheitssystemen streiten. [Mehr](#)

- Postwachstumsgesellschaft: Who cares? - eine feministische Perspektive. [Mehr](#)
- Netzwerk Care Revolution. [Mehr](#)
- Feministischer Zusammenschluss gegen den Corona-Lockdown: Corona-Krise oder Care-Notstand? [Mehr](#)
- When women *don't* speak. [More](#)
- Le genre du capital. Comment la famille reproduit les inégalités. [Plus](#)

## Articles & Media

- Die Krise der Kleinen. [Mehr](#)
- MMT (modern monetary theory). [More](#)
- Hawaii has a has a 'feminist economic recovery plan.' [More](#)
- Die New York Times schrieb jüngst, unbezahlte Arbeit von Frauen sei 1,5 Trillionen Dollar wert (bei Mindestlohn). Wenn wir unter der Last der [#Arbeit](#) nicht zusammenbrechen wollen, brauchen wir eine andere [#Zukunft](#). Aber wird die nach Corona wirklich kommen? [Hier](#) ein paar Statistiken dazu!
- Was bedeutet Corona für Randständige? | Unzipped Reportage. [Mehr](#)
- Gender in Krisen-Zeiten - was heisst das? Und was für Fragen stellen sich? Franziska Schutzbach im Gespräch. [Mehr](#)
- In den Köpfen vieler Menschen gibt es diese Koppelung von Expertise und Männlichkeit. [Mehr](#)
- Economic growth is an unnecessary evil, Jacinda Ardern is right to deprioritise it. [More](#)
- Women academics seem to be submitting fewer papers during coronavirus. 'Never seen anything like it,' says one editor. [More](#)
- [#Corona](#)-Krise = Krise für die [#Gleichberechtigung](#)? - [Video](#)
- «Frauen trifft die Krise berufsbedingt am härtesten» [Mehr](#)
- Frauen verlieren ihre Würde. [Mehr](#)
- The coronavirus backlash: how the pandemic is destroying women's rights. [More](#)
- Terra Cognita. Schweizer Zeitschrift zu Integration und Migration. [Mehr](#)
- Corona-Krise: Eine feministische Analyse und ein feministischer Aufbruch. [Mehr](#)

## Organisations

- [Frauen\\*Streik](#)
- [INES \(Institut Neue Schweiz\)](#)
- [Denknetz](#)