SOCIAL CONNECTEDNESS
FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM

Young Feminist Recovery

Fostering belonging by giving young women and gender-diverse individuals the power to lead the economic recovery.

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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Covid-19 pandemic brought to the forefront the fact that those who bear the brunt of social and economic costs in times of crisis are precisely the most disadvantaged groups, i.e. those who already experience complex barriers to meaningful participation in society. In Canada, the crisis disproportionately impacted the lives and livelihoods of young women and gender diverse individuals - in particular those living on lower incomes and experiencing intersecting inequalities based on race, class, disability, education, immigration status, among others. But even though they were among the hardest hit by the pandemic, several stakeholders expressed their concern for the lack of opportunities they have to shape recovery measures.

The reality of the pandemic coupled with the failure of mainstream economic approaches to provide solutions to the crisis, led to the proposal of the feminist economic recovery as the model to build a more resilient, inclusive, and sustainable society and economy. Feminist economists propose to broaden the scope of classic economic analysis to include those activities and life experiences that are not counted in market-driven approaches. They interrogate the ways we understand value and power, and propose a more integral approach that advances gender justice, belonging, and societal well-being. This research describes what such an inclusive and transformative 'recovery' would look like concretely for young women and gender-diverse individuals, based on qualitative research.

More than two years into the pandemic, I intend to contribute to the understanding of the long-term impact of the crisis on the lives of young women and gender-diverse youth - many of whom shared feeling systematically excluded and disenfranchised. I sustain that their underrepresentation in decision-making spaces is a gender justice issue that must be at the centre of the economic 'recovery'. The findings of this study are conceptualized through the lens of intersectionality, decolonial feminism, and the feminist politics of care. I bring forward the interconnectedness of the Covid-19 crisis with other systemic issues, showing the importance of understanding young peoples' experiences in an intersectional manner, and the centrality of care, in its multiple capacities - ranging from individual to collective care and care for the environment - as relationships were transformed and re-configured due to the pandemic.

I describe some of the barriers that young women and gender diverse individuals face to assess decision-making spaces in the political and professional sphere. Next, I elaborate on the main pillars of a young feminist economic recovery: prioritize mental health, reframe productivity, sponsor young women and gender-diverse individuals, build ties with the community, and advance a sustainable recovery.

This report concludes with a series of recommendations organized by themes directed to key stakeholders - from policy-makers to civil society organizations and the private sector. In brief, these are:

1. Utilize the intersectional approach
2. Invest in the care economy and social infrastructure
3. Create better jobs for young women and gender diverse youth
4. Increase representation of youth in leadership positions across institutional spaces
5. Actively engage communities and sponsor community-based solutions.

Renouncing the pretension for one-off solutions to multidimensional problems, this research is an example of the type of findings and discussions that including young women and gender diverse individuals in decision-making spaces would foster. I close with a reflection on what 'recovery' means from a feminist standpoint, proposing to move forward an exclusive

economic perspective to a more holistic approach that centers on the experience of marginalized communities.

2. INTRODUCTION

2.1 Background

More than two years into the global pandemic that has disrupted our lives on an unprecedented scale, we are at a turning point. As we begin to look beyond the Covid-19 emergency into the process of economic and social recovery, we have the opportunity to take concrete action and create lasting change. Various sectors across society - from grassroot organizations to governments - are calling to make the most of this opportunity to "build back better"; that is, to seize the momentum to build a more resilient, inclusive, and sustainable society and economy.[1] The systematic exclusion of women and many other historically marginalised groups from participation in society, coupled with the limits of mainstream economics to respond to the unfolding crisis, led several stakeholders to propose a feminist economic recovery as the model forward.

Feminist economists have long argued against the classical economic propensity to position market forces as the key levers of economic growth. The problem with the assumptions of classical economists - in particular their overemphasis on the market, efficiency, and competition - is how they use these assumptions to establish what is counted as "productive" and "valuable" in the economy (e.g. disregarding the contribution of particular activities to the economy such as unpaid care work).[2] The context of the crisis brought to the spotlight what feminist economists were long arguing, that mainstream economics beliefs and

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[1] Just to name a few examples, see Government of Canada. "Building Back Better: A Plan to Fight the COVID-19 Recession"; OECD. "Building back better: A sustainable, resilient recovery after COVID-19"; United Nations. "UN Research Roadmap for the COVID-19 Recovery"; Fora: Network for Change. "Building Back Better For Women: Young Women".

[2] Rai, Shirin, Debbie Budlender, and Ulla Grapard. "Feminist Classics/Many Voices: Marilyn Waring. If Women Counted: A New Feminist Economics." *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 16, no. 3 (July 3, 2014): 523–29. https://doi.org/10.1080/14616742.2014.923243.

policies are actually detrimental to women and many other groups in society (e.g. as their value, power, and well-being is systematically neglected).[3] Rather, they have been working to broaden the scope of economic analysis to better reflect the reality of women's lives and experiences, and to advance a science for improving the general well-being.[4]

Research shows that advancing such a transformative economic recovery involves putting the experiences of young women and gender diverse individuals at the centre. A crucial pillar of a feminist economic recovery is the inclusion of underrepresented youth in all levels of decision-making, as well as meaningful engagement with their perspectives and lived experiences.[5] This research project sought to incorporate their perspectives and experiences of the Covid-19 pandemic, and learn how they envision a feminist economic recovery that rightfully gives them space to lead the change. I was particularly interested in understanding whether they could access decision-making spaces across political and professional spheres over the last two years, and identify some of the barriers that impede that access. The ultimate goal of the project was to gain insight on how underrepresented youth can be concretely placed at the center of post-pandemic recovery, bridging the gap between symbolic acts of inclusion and meaningful engagement in all levels of decision-making.

In what follows, this report first presents a brief background discussion and an overview of the research framework, key questions, methodology and limitations. Subsequently, the report unpacks the key findings of the qualitative study through an analysis of relevant primary data. Drawing from these findings, key recommendations for key

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[3]Myra H Strober, "Rethinking Economics Through a Feminist Lens," *The American Economic Review* 84, no. 2 (May 1994): pp. 143-147.

[4] *Ibid*

[5]Anjum Sultana and Carmina Ravanera, "A Feminist Economic Recovery Plan for Canada: MAKING THE ECONOMY WORK FOR EVERYONE" (The Institute for Gender and the Economy (GATE) and YWCA Canada, July 8, 2020).

stakeholders are proposed, to enable them to support young woman and gender-diverse individuals to advance a feminist economic recovery.

2.2 Canadian Context

The Covid-19 pandemic brought to the forefront that those who bear the brunt of the social and economic costs in times of crisis are precisely the most disadvantaged groups, e.g. those who already experience complex barriers to meaningfully participate in society. In Canada, the pandemic has exacerbated long-standing institutional and systemic inequalities, including the amplification of gender-based barriers. This is evident in the disproportionate impact that the pandemic continues to have on the lives and livelihoods of young women and gender-diverse individuals - in particular those living on lower incomes and experiencing intersecting inequalities based on race, class, disability, education, immigration status, among others.

These groups lost their jobs at an unprecedented rate at earlier stages of the pandemic, representing over one-third of all job losses reported by women (36%).[6] They experienced a dramatic disruption in their education, with Indigenous women, Black women, and youth living with disabilities more likely to have stopped or postponed their education due to the pandemic[7]. And they experienced an alarming deterioration of their mental health, with only one in four youth considering their mental health as 'excellent' or 'good' - vs 60% prior to the pandemic.[8] The pandemic impacted even more those already experiencing poor

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[6]Scott, Katherine. "Women Bearing the Brunt of Economic Losses: One in Five Has Been Laid off or Had Hours Cut." The Monitor, April 10, 2020.
https://monitormag.ca/articles/women-bearing-the-brunt-of-economic-losses-one-in-five-has-been-laid-off-or-had-hours-cut/.
[7]"Making up Time: The Impact of the Pandemic on Young Adults in Canada" (the Environics Institute for Survey Research, the Diversity Institute and the Future Skills Centre, 2021),
https://www.torontomu.ca/diversity/reports/making-up-time/.
[8]Statistics Canada, "Youth Mental Health in the Spotlight Again, as Pandemic Drags On," Statistics Canada (Government of Canada, May 6, 2022),
https://www.statcan.gc.ca/o1/en/plus/907-youth-mental-health-spotlight-again-pandemic-drags.

mental health before the crisis, including the LGBTQ2+ community who were 1.5 more likely to report negative mental health than non-LGBTQ2+.[9]

More than two years into the pandemic, with young women returning to the workforce, the employment rates for Indigenous, Black, racialized and LGBTQ2+ youth are still not recovering.[10] And data shows that even if young people have reported an improvement on their overall mental health since the movement restrictions were loosened, a recent national survey found that young people aged 18 to 34 were well above the national average in feeling like they are at a "breaking point".[11]

The far-reaching impact of the crisis holds the threat of jeopardising young peoples' rights and widening intergenerational inequalities.[12] Yet, their voices and lived experiences are neglected in precisely the spaces where the decisions on the issues that affect them are taken. Young women and gender diverse individuals reported not feeling seen or heard by those in positions of power in our society.[13] And youth-serving organizations voiced their concern about the lack of opportunities for young people to shape response and recovery measures (e.g. lack of participatory mechanism that include them).[14]

To contextualize how the Canadian government has responded to this crisis, it is useful to consider the budget for recovery and the debates surrounding the allocation of

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[9]Statistics Canada, "Canadian Social Survey: Covid-19 and Well-Being," The Daily (The Government of Canada, September 24, 2021), https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/210924/dq210924a-eng.htm.
[10]Employment and Social Development Canada, "More than 140,000 Great Work Opportunities for Young People Now Available through Canada Summer Jobs 2022," Government of Canada, April 25, 2022, https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/news/2022/04/more-than-140000-great-work-opportunities-for-young-people-now-available-through-canada-summer-jobs-2022.html.
[11]"Canada's Mental Health Crisis," Maru Group/Public Opinion (Maru Group, March 14, 2022), https://www.marugroup.net/public-opinion-polls/canada/canadian-mental-health-crisis.
[12]Miriam Allam, Moritz Ader, and Gamze Igrioglu, "Delivering for Youth: How Governments Can Put Young People at the Centre of the Recovery" (OECD, 2022). https://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/delivering-for-youth-how-governments-can-put-young-people-at-the-centre-of-the-recovery-92c9d060/.
[13]Bailey Greenspon, "Building Back Better For Women: Young Women." (FORA: Network for Change & W20, September 2020).
[14]Scarpetta, Stefano, Monika Quiesser, Veerle Miranda, and Shunta Takino. Report. *What Have Countries Done To support Young People in the COVID-19 Crisis?* OECD, July 6, 2021. https://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/what-have-countries-done-to-support-young-people-in-the-covid-19-crisis-ac9f056c/.

resources. The 2022 federal budget faced significant criticism from advocacy organizations for prioritizing male-dominated industries (e.g. such as the construction and clean technology sectors, who are expected to benefit from the climate related measures) and for failing to adequately address gender inequality.[15] The government has recognized that 42% of the total investment is expected to directly or indirectly benefit men while only 14% benefit women.[16] In stark contrast to the 2021 budget, which was distinctly marked as a 'feminist' budget due to the historic investments on advancing gender equality, the new budget presents disappointing gaps.[17] Still, the current 2022 budget includes several initiatives that will help improve gender equality and women's rights. These include affordable childcare, menstrual equity, and funding to support LGBTQ2+ people. The resources allocated to collect more disaggregated data have also been positively welcomed, as it will lead to a crucial understanding on how intersecting factors shape women's lived experience.[18]

Nevertheless, gender justice organizations agree that, in general, the budget falls short in advancing gender equality and concretely addressing systemic barriers.[19] Concerns by social impact leaders have been expressed about the generalist language adopted, the absence of gender-sensitive and intersectional analysis, the lack of a strategic plan to improve the care economy, and the lack of focus on the needs of young women and gender-diverse folks; in particular in terms of supporting them with tailored training to gear them towards leadership positions.

[15]Joseph Tunney, "Government Report Acknowledges 'Feminist' Federal Budget Benefits Men More than Women," CBCnews, April 9, 2022,
https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/women-budget-2022-gender-inequity-1.6414178.
[16]Palak Mangat , "'Foot off the Accelerator': Feds' Budget Benefits Men More than Women," Politics Today, April 19, 2022,
https://www.politicstoday.news/parliament-today/foot-off-the-accelerator-feds-budget-benefits-men-more-than-women/.
[17]"Budget 2021 Delivers Historic Feminist Investments Domestically, But Falls Short On Global Response." Oxfam Canada, April 21, 2021.
https://www.oxfam.ca/news/budget-2021-delivers-historic-feminist-investments-domestically-but-falls-short-on-global-response/.
[18]Christine Pickering and Brennan Doherty, "Scorecard: Does Budget 2022 Offer Communities the Support They Want and Need? Social Impact Leaders Weigh In," Future of Good, April 11, 2022,
https://futureofgood.co/budget-2022-grades/.
[19]Ibid

2.3 Research Framework and Key Questions

2.3.1 Intersectionality

In the face of the unequal impact of the pandemic on the lives and livelihoods of women, especially those who were already experiencing multiple disadvantages prior to the pandemic, feminist researchers and groups have been calling for an intersectional analysis of the Covid-19 pandemic - one that takes into account the unique experiences of different groups of people.[20]

The concept of intersectionality was coined by Kimberle Crenshaw (1989) to refer to the combined effects of racism and sexism - and other forms of oppression - on Black women's lives.[21] Since then, the concept has been embraced by the field of gender studies as a powerful tool of analysis to understand how different aspects of a person's identity interact to create unique experiences of oppression and privilege. Intersectional feminism holds that gender subordination does not operate in isolation from other forms of oppression, such as race, class, sexuality, age, disability, migration status, and others. This framework helps us move from a silo-approach that treats gender as a single dimension of experience, and women as a homogeneous group (e.g. not all women were equally impacted by the pandemic).[22] A comprehensive feminist study necessitates the deployment of intersectional approaches in order to take into account the various systemic injustices that overlap and compound, and helps us to account for how gender is interconnected with other sources of social inequality.

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[20]Nessa E. Ryan and Alison M. El Ayadi, "A Call for a Gender-Responsive, Intersectional Approach to Address COVID-19," *Global Public Health* 15, no. 9 (July 2020): pp. 1404-1412, https://doi.org/10.1080/17441692.2020.1791214.

[21]Kimberle Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color," *Stanford Law Review* 43, no. 6 (July 1991): pp. 1241-1299, https://doi.org/10.2307/1229039.

[22]Nessa E. Ryan and Alison M. El Ayadi, "A Call for a Gender-Responsive, Intersectional Approach to Address COVID-19," *Global Public Health* 15, no. 9 (July 2020): pp. 1404-1412, https://doi.org/10.1080/17441692.2020.1791214.

The term "intersectional inequalities" refers to the combination of different types of inequality that people experience based on their unique intersection of gender with other dimensions of experience. By taking an intersectional approach, we can more fully understand the unique needs of each individual and community, and develop more effective responses to the needs of these groups during and after the pandemic. This research adopts an intersectional lens, since previous research has shown that its use is crucial to nuance data in order to formulate policies and community-based solutions that do not further marginalize people.[23]

2.3.2 Towards a Decolonial Feminism

We further engage with decolonial feminism, which "questions and brings to light women's issues with a broader, more inclusive field of action", by framing them into the "modern-colonial historical processes".[24] In particular, the scholar Lorena Lugones is interested in the ways that colonized peoples have been dehumanized in order to fit them into colonial systems of power. For Lugones, the coloniality of power is a system in which Western domination is perpetuated through the active reduction of colonized peoples. This system results in a hierarchy which relegates/isolates people who do not conform with hegemonic ways of thinking, and relegates them to the margins.[25]

Decolonial scholars have long called on feminist scholars to identify and critique colonial processes and structures more explicitly, as well as decentering *Whiteness* from research.[26] We need to consider colonialism as a process that is not in the past, but taking place in the present, and interlocked to other forms of oppression such as racism. In this

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[23]Farhana Sultana, "Climate Change, Covid-19, and the Co-Production of Injustices: A Feminist Reading of Overlapping Crises," *Social &Amp; Cultural Geography* 22, no. 4 (2021): pp. 447-460, https://doi.org/10.1080/14649365.2021.1910994.

[24]Jen Gobby, *More Powerful Together: Conversations with Climate Activists and Indigenous Land Defenders* (Halifax, NS: Fernwood Publishing, 2020).

[25]Maria Lugones, "The Coloniality of Gender," In: Harcourt, W. (eds) *The Palgrave Handbook of Gender and Development*, 2016, pp. 13-33, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-137-38273-3_2.

[26] *Ibid*

study, we endeavor to center the experiences, and amplify the voices, of those in the margins (in particular Black, racialized, and Indigenous women, Two-Spirit, and LGBTQ+ individuals).

2.3.3 Politics of Care

In addition, we incorporate the feminist politics of care to reflect on the centrality that care has in our lives and our socio-economic systems. The Covid-19 crisis has also been called the *crisis of care.*[27] Its impact has reminded us everyday of just how vital the provision of essential services is to our livelihoods, whether caring for the sick, or the innumerable tasks that contribute to keeping us alive. The pandemic brought to the spotlight what feminist economists have long argued and underscored, which is the urgent need to rethink and reimagine the future of our economies beyond the market-driven paradigm.[28] We need to seize the momentum and prioritize a "care-led" and "human-centered recovery".[29]

We recognize that 'care' is a widely used concept that takes on multiple meanings and is present at different scales of experience. We embrace this plurality in adopting a model of 'universal care'[30] that "recognises our mutual interdependence and vulnerability", and "envisages a world in which genuine care is everywhere —from our most intimate ties to our relationship with the planet itself."[31] This will allow us to highlight the multiple care relationships that appeared in our research, from the importance of *care work* at the societal and individual level, to *care* for the environment.

Feminist studies have long argued that the underrepresentation of young women, and those historically marginalized groups, in decision-making spaces is a gender justice issue. This is especially true in the context of economic recovery, where young women and gender

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[27]Layla J. Branicki, "Covid-19, Ethics of Care and Feminist Crisis Management," *Gender, Work & Organization* 27, no. 5 (September 2020): pp. 872-883, https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.12491.

[28]Naila Kabeer, Shahra Razavi, and Yana van der Meulen Rodgers, "Feminist Economic Perspectives on the COVID-19 Pandemic," *Feminist Economics* 27, no. 1-2 (March 1, 2021): pp. 1-29, https://doi.org/10.1080/13545701.2021.1876906.

[29] *Ibid*

[30] The Care Collective, *The Care Manifesto: The Politics of Interdependence* (London, UK: Verso, 2021).

[31] *Ibid*

diverse youth' voices are critical to ensuring that any recovery is equitable and inclusive. A feminist recovery from the pandemic - one that is intersectional and care-led - must involve meaningful participation.[32]

<u>Key Questions</u>

Guided by the aforementioned framework, this research aims to gain a clearer understanding of how we can effectively put young women and gender-diverse individuals at the center of recovery by means of a qualitative process, guided by the following questions to interviewees:

- How has the COVID-19 pandemic uniquely impacted the lives and livelihood of young women and gender diverse individuals?

- What are the barriers young women and gender diverse individuals experience to access and participation in decision-making spaces?

- How do young women and gender diverse individuals envision a feminist economic recovery?

- How can people in management and senior leadership positions across society give young women and gender diverse people the trust, space and power to lead the economic recuperation?

- How can public, private, grassroots and community institutions create space for young women and gender diverse people to meaningfully participate and become agents of change within their organizations?

- How can fostering social connectedness and belonging support an economic recovery that is more equitable and sustainable?

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[32]Naila Kabeer, Shahra Razavi, and Yana van der Meulen Rodgers, "Feminist Economic Perspectives on the COVID-19 Pandemic," *Feminist Economics* 27, no. 1-2 (March 1, 2021): pp. 1-29, https://doi.org/10.1080/13545701.2021.1876906.

2.4 Research Methodology

To answer the key questions identified above, the primary method used in this study is the use of *semi-structured interviews*.[33] This project collects and consolidates knowledge and data on, by and with young women and gender diverse individuals. I conducted in-depth interviews with 18 participants.[34] The interviews lasted an average of 50 minutes. All the interviews were conducted online through the video call software program Zoom, except one interview that was conducted over the phone, as agreed with the research participant.

A preliminary recruitment of participants began with my participation in the Fora: Network for Change annual Leadership Forum, which took place in Toronto, on June 12th, 2022.[35] The Forum brought together young women and gender diverse individuals from across Canada for a full day of connection, sharing and learning. This was a great chance to meet some of the young people participating from the Girls on Boards program as well as other members of the community and key stakeholders in person, and invite them to participate in the research.[36] As a second step, I proceeded to contact the participants of the 2022 cohort of the Girls on Board program by email as a follow-up of our in-person encounter. However, the research was not limited to participants of the Girls on Boards program, and other research participants who fulfilled the requirements for participation were referred by another participant and/or stakeholder.

The participants of this research come from a diversity of backgrounds, ages, and lived experiences. Since this study focuses on an issue that is country-wide, the research

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[33]Kathryn E., Harry P. Hatry, and Joseph S. Wholey. Interview by Arianna Seferiades Prece. Semi-structured interviews. Location, Date Interviewed.

[34] From the total of participants, 27% considered themselves LGBTQ2+, 33% racialized and 22% Black.

[35]Fora: Network for Change is a non-profit organization based in Canada, which places young women and gender diverse youth in decision-making spaces. This research unfolds in the context of a partnership between Fora: Network for Change and The Samuel Centre for Social Connectedness to conduct the research project "Young Feminist Recovery".

[36]Fora: Network for Change designed the Girls on Board program to support emerging young leaders from diverse backgrounds to access boards.

participants come from a number of Canadian provinces.[37] It is important to note that although this study focuses on the experience of young women and gender diverse individuals (18-24), I understand the boundaries of this age bracket in a flexible manner so as to include participants who would otherwise not be eligible to participate for exceeding this age limit.

While this project has not been a strictly collaborative project, in that the participants have not been involved in all stages of the research, I understand the nature of knowledge production as one that emphasizes the importance of "social connections over individually acquired knowledge".[38] Therefore, it is not the intention of this study to provide final and closed answers, but to open a conversation with the participants of this research and to incorporate their lived experiences and perspectives.

2.5 Ethics and Limitations

The following approaches were taken during this research in relation to ethical considerations:

1) Informed consent, since all participants were given full information about the purpose of the study and what their involvement would entail. They were also informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time without repercussions.

2) Anonymity - All participants were given pseudonyms to protect their identity.

3) Compensation - All participants, informed of the voluntary nature of their participation, were offered a gift card as honorarium for their given time. In this study, we chose to include a remuneration with the intention to show respect for the participants' time and for the difficulties that the participation in this research may have brought.

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[37] The provinces represented include Ontario, Quebec, British Columbia, Manitoba and Yukon.
[38] Emily Yates-Doerr, "Antihero Care: On Fieldwork and Anthropology," *Anthropology and Humanism* 45, no. 2 (December 2020): pp. 233-244, https://doi.org/10.1111/anhu.12300.

4) Confidentiality - All data was stored securely and only accessible by the researcher.

This research project presents limitations that should be addressed in future research. Due to time constraints, as this research had a fixed timeframe, it was not possible to interview young women and gender-diverse individuals from all the provinces and territories (e.g. we did not have representation from the Maritime Provinces). In turn, and due to the nature of the recruitment process, certain territories are slightly overrepresented with over 30% of the research participants coming from Toronto, Ontario. It is important to note that, as aforementioned, this report does not pretend to dictate one-size-fits-all answers, but rather to bring to the front the lived experiences of young women and gender diverse individuals with intersecting identities. This report is a preliminary study of a longer project being conducted by Fora: Network for Change, therefore the organization will address this gap in their future research.

3. ISSUE, EVIDENCE AND KEY FINDINGS

3.1 The interconnectedness of the crisis

As one of the great crises of our time, the Covid-19 outbreak cannot be understood in isolation. Recent feminist studies underline the importance of analyzing the pandemic in connection with the other major crises of our time, which are impacting our lives in unprecedented ways. Farhana Sultana suggests that we learn more by looking at how the Covid-19 pandemic and climate change intersect. "Both climate change and the coronavirus pandemic" says the author, "have uneven, unequal and long-lasting impacts that depend on where you live, who you are, and what you have".[39]

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[39]Farhana Sultana, "Climate and Covid-19 Crises Both Need Feminism – Here's Why," The Hill (The Hill, May 16, 2021),

Analysis demands this attunement to the overlapping of crises to identify how injustices are co-produced. The emergence of the Covid-19 pandemic overlapped with other ongoing crises to "co-create new challenges, vulnerabilities, and burdens on top, while reinforcing old ones".[40] This became clear in the interviews with respect to two major crises, climate change, and the *"epidemic of systemic racism"*; borrowing a term of one of the research participants. From my discussions with young people, it became clear how central it was for them to allow space to discuss the interconnectedness of these intense events happening all at once in their lives. One of the participants shares how the pandemic and its impact is relevant in the context of systemic racism:

> *"So I always attach the pandemic to the racism epidemic…I was impacted on a personal level, you know, just emotionally disturbed and completely traumatized and uncomfortable from the racism and the racial kind of things that were happening, with George Floyd and Black Lives Matter."*

My discussions with young women and gender diverse youth revealed the importance of understanding the interconnectedness of these intense experiences as we transition into post-pandemic recovery. This overlap of crises has caused a lot of suffering, pain, and anger in young people and we should investigate their intersection further. In addition, exposing this connection allows us to understand how these crises are related to power dynamics that are based on systemic inequalities and marginalization of certain communities.

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https://thehill.com/opinion/energy-environment/553707-climate-and-covid-19-crises-both-need-feminism-heres-why/.

[40]Farhana Sultana, "Climate Change, Covid-19, and the Co-Production of Injustices: A Feminist Reading of Overlapping Crises," *Social & Cultural Geography* 22, no. 4 (2021): pp. 447-460, https://doi.org/10.1080/14649365.2021.1910994.

3.2 The Crisis as Disruption, Dissolution and Pause

Disruption of Employment

The Covid-19 crisis had a profound impact on the lives and livelihoods of young people. Young women lost their jobs at an unprecedented rate at the outset of the pandemic, or had their employment hours reduced or interrupted for months. Over 60% of the research participants reported to have suffered from some kind of disruption to employment, and nearly all the research participants underwent financial stress. But, the impact was significantly higher among young women and gender-diverse individuals living on low incomes and experiencing intersecting inequalities, who are still facing difficulties in generating a stable income.

This was the case with Andrea, a 24-year-old young woman who identified as racialized, and living on low-income. Andrea told me that the pandemic had a *"tremendous financial impact on her life that is far from being over"*. At the outset of the pandemic, she lost her part-time job in the service industry, as did other members of her family, which was a source of stress for the entire household. She shared her frustration as she continues to struggle in the present to *"basically make money and find jobs above minimum wage"*. Instead, she has *"to work two minimum wage jobs that still do not add up to 40 hours"* to make ends meet.

Another research participant, a "young mother" and young First Nations "young woman" and a "young mother", as she described herself, shared how a set of overlapping factors disproportionately impacted her access to opportunities. Having lost her job as an educator when the pandemic started, she could not find a source of income until very recently. The long waitlists to access childcare in her territory - Yukon - and the lack of skills and resources to migrate to the virtual world, impeded her ability to find employment and

confined her to be a stay at home mom. *"We aren't able to financially recover right now from the pandemic",* she shared with me. Even if restrictions have loosened in her region, Juli could not successfully return to the workforce, and had to apply to college where she got support through funding, what she describes as "the only help I could get".

Over 30% of the research participants reported not having fully recovered from the pandemic yet, as they continue to struggle to secure a stable income. While each experience is unique due to the intersected identities of the person, there are factors that allow us to draw more general conclusions. For instance, one research participant mentioned the *"poor rural internet"* as one constraint that impacts her everyday life, which hints to a systemic inequality that disfavours young people from rural areas - the phenomenon known as the Digital Divide.

Nevertheless, even for some of the research participants from rural communities, the migration to the digital world brought benefits, e.g. improving their access to remote opportunities. They told me how they could get access to more opportunities that were previously unavailable to them, without having to move to the city and/or commute. This evidence shows how the experiences of young people are not dichotomous (either "negative" or "positive"), but compounded and multidimensional.

A Pause in Growth, a Dissolution of Pre-Existing Networks

"I feel like those experiences were really taken away from me, the opportunities to connect with people and build my network"

Beyond the direct financial impact on their livelihoods, and even if young women and gender diverse individuals reported being in a substantially better position than they were at the peak of the pandemic, the context of the crisis has affected their ability to develop their career growth. Even the participants who reported having suffered from significantly less

financial stress based on their unique circumstances felt that the pandemic stunted their growth professionally.

Over 40% of the research participants described the pandemic as a sort of 'pause' in their lives. As one of the young women underlined, *"I grew up my age, but I didn't actually experience growing up"*.

Given the restrictions to meet people in person and build a network, their access to internship opportunities and job opportunities proved to be much more limited. Every single interviewee pointed to the absence of physical networking as a main constraint to building their professional careers and securing a full-time job. This lack of opportunities for networking hindered their access to decision-making spaces across society. Abi, a 24-year-old woman who was doing an internship at the time of the pandemic, shares how the migration to digital impacted their ability to network, build relationships, and be close to decision-makers:

> *"Because of the shift to online work, it decreased my ability to develop my career to the full extent. For example, the internship program I did during the pandemic, it was a very in-person opportunity that put you in close proximity to decision-makers. Doing the same thing online was not really the same, there was a lot less opportunity for interacting and building my network."*

Half of the interviewees reported not being able to justify doing an internship, as they had very low salaries or they were not paid at all. Many of the young people interviewed need an income to make ends meet - since they do not have financial support from their families and/or need to contribute to their households, so they cannot afford to take an unpaid internship, and are thus systematically deprived of opportunities.

3.3 The Centrality of Care

All the young women and gender diverse individuals interviewed referred to the central role of *care* during the pandemic in a number of capacities - from the increasing burdens of care that they experienced in their households to the central role it played on their individual and collective well-being.

Mental Health

In Canada, the pandemic has significantly aggravated the mental health crisis by increasing associated risk factors (e.g. financial insecurity, unemployment, fear). Nevertheless, not everyone was impacted equally. A recent study confirmed that people with less secure employment, lower educational status, and lower income experienced significantly higher rates of mental distress during the Covid-19 crisis.[41] Likewise, the gender gap has widened, as more women reported to suffer depression and anxiety - and particularly young women with intersecting inequalities.[42] In addition, the crisis of the healthcare system has made it difficult for young people to access mental health services.[43]

Over 80% of the interviewees shared that they suffered from some kind of mental health issue during the pandemic, and almost half of the research participants mentioned having some kind of issue accessing mental health services (i.e., the most common being having to wait for months to access a healthcare professional). Due to the circumstances of the pandemic, many of the young people interviewed reported having felt deeply isolated, without the possibility of nourishing individual and collective relationships, which are key factors to their general well-being. In the words of one of the interviewees, *"the pandemic*

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[41]Stefano Scarpetta, Francesca Colombo, and Emily Hewlett, "Tackling the Mental Health Impact of the COVID-19 Crisis: An Integrated, Whole-of-Society Response" (OECD, May 12, 2021), https://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/tackling-the-mental-health-impact-of-the-covid-19-crisis-an-integrated-whole-of-society-response-0ccafa0b/.

[42] *Ibid*

[43] *Ibid*

changed my life emotionally…I didn't have access to a lot of people, I didn't have the opportunity to go to work, to go to places, and experience the living world".

<u>From Individual to Collective Care</u>

The pause imposed on our lives by the pandemic was not only limiting. Many of the interviewees mentioned the positive aspect of the pause to *"slow down"*. For some, the hardships of the pandemic led them to *"start therapy"* and do some *"soul-searching"*, as one of the research participants shared, or *"re-evaluate priorities in life"* and *"learn to put boundaries",* as another suggested. Over 1 in 2 research participants mentioned having experienced emotional growth. All the struggles encountered led many to learn how to better take care of themselves, as one young woman told me *"Now, no amount of work, no matter how urgent it is, is as important as taking care of myself"*.

"I believe that we're all still recovering from some of the emotional damage", one of interviewees told me as we were discussing how relationships have been transformed due to the pandemic. This transformation towards caring relationships with oneself extended to relationships with others in a multiplicity of ways. Many research participants said that despite having felt "detached" and "isolated" during the pandemic, losing some relationships and connection with their community, they now feel they have "deeper" and "more empathetic" relationships with others. In the words of one of the research participants, *"those reaching out, are doing so stronger than ever, and they're valuing those close connections".* In fact, nearly half of the participants in the research reported having the support of their communities as a crucial aspect in overcoming social isolation, or having care-relationships with their communities:

> *"Despite the context of the pandemic, I felt closer to my community, and I had a closer relationship with a lot of members in the community throughout Covid-19. And this isn't because of any actions of the*

> *government, it's because the community decided that we needed to come together and take care of each other."*

We should again mention that these experiences are not universal, and that they depend on a multiplicity of factors. One of the interviewees from a rural area, shared with me that *"living in a rural area, far from the city, and not having a community to rely on"* made her feel very detached*.* While another told me how she didn't feel she belonged *"anywhere"* as she was isolated with her family, without *"having a lot of people that aligned with my values"*.

3.4 Moving Towards a Feminist Economic Recovery

The pandemic caused a social and economic downturn that disproportionately impacted women - what is known as the 'She-cession'.[44] As the gendered dimension of the pandemic became evident, several stakeholders - from community organizations to global bodies - began to actively demand governments to tackle the systemic causes behind this crisis. It was clear that our economic recovery from the pandemic required a political commitment to deal with the gender-justice issues and the systemic inequities underlying this dramatic shock.

When discussing a feminist economic recovery in Canada, I am referring to an ambitious and sustained plan oriented at reversing the cumulative disadvantages faced by women and historically marginalized communities. Beyond reversal, a feminist economic recovery is transformative, and challenges our understanding of what constitutes an economy and, more specifically, how it should function.[45] Feminist economists share a fundamental commitment to understanding the structural causes of oppression while developing a transformative economic framework for the future. At the most general level, the

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[44] Alisha Haridasani Gupta, "Why Some Women Call This Recession a 'Shecession'," (The New York Times, May 9, 2020), https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/09/us/unemployment-coronavirus-women.html.
[45] António Guterres, "A Sustainable Feminist Recovery," UNSDG (United Nations, March 7, 2022), https://unsdg.un.org/latest/blog/sustainable-feminist-recovery.

goal of the feminist economic recovery is to increase the equality for women and underrepresented groups across all strata of society so that everyone belongs.

The Covid-19 pandemic highlighted what feminist economists have been stressing for quite some time: that we need to we need to imagine alternative economic frameworks that prioritize the needs of people and the planet over profit.[46] A more even distribution of resources can improve the lives of everyone and increase the well-being of our society as a whole. This involves challenging and reimagining what we deem valuable and worthy in our economic system. As the feminist researchers Ozkazanc-Pan and Pullen suggest, we need to rethink "the ways in which we allocate value to our individual and collective human activities" and "recognize women's contribution to the economy and the value of women's work to economic recovery".[47] Feminist researchers and activists have encouraged us to ideate on what systemic change would look like in practice (e.g. questioning the very idea of "productivity").

A feminist economic recovery in Canada would entail a number of significant changes to the current social and economic structure of the country. This involves altering the power dynamics that contribute to existing inequalities and systematically relegate groups to the margins. As the United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres suggested, tackling gender inequality "demands that power is equally shared across every institution, at every level". A feminist economic recovery can "reveal the 'connective tissue' across crises and advance an agenda for social transformation".[48]

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[46]Naila Kabeer, Shahra Razavi, and Yana van der Meulen Rodgers, "Feminist Economic Perspectives on the COVID-19 Pandemic," *Feminist Economics* 27, no. 1-2 (March 1, 2021): pp. 1-29, https://doi.org/10.1080/13545701.2021.1876906.

[47]Banu Ozkazanc-Pan and Alison Pullen, "Reimagining Value: A Feminist Commentary in the Midst of the COVID-19 Pandemic," *Gender, Work & Organization* 28, no. 1 (January 2021): pp. 1-7, https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.12591.

[48]Pauline Cullen and Mary P. Murphy, "Responses to the Covid-19 Crisis in Ireland: From Feminized to Feminist," *Gender, Work & Organization* 28, no. S2 (July 2021): pp. 348-365, https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.12596.

Several organizations have put together a set of recommendations for a feminist recovery plan in Canada. They advocate for a number of policies and reforms to address the gendered impacts of Covid-19 with an intersectional lens. A feminist economic recovery includes putting people first[49]; centering the experience of women and gender-diverse people[50]; investing in social protection systems and the care economy[51]; addressing systemic racism; and increasing representation of women and gender-diverse people in leadership positions and decision-making spaces across society[52]. A feminist approach centers on those lived experiences and perspectives that have been systematically neglected and left behind, for not being considered valuable or worthy of attention.

3.4.1 The Underrepresentation of Youth in Decision-Making Spaces

One of the crucial pillars of feminist economic recovery is the inclusion of young women and gender-diverse people at all levels of decision-making. While there seems to be a widespread recognition by key stakeholders of the role of young people as changemakers, this is not reflected in their concrete access to decision-making spaces. Young leaders are already challenging the status quo as activists and advocates, speaking out against injustice, promoting collective well-being, and fostering new forms of solidarity in their communities and beyond. And yet, they remain underrepresented in leadership positions across spheres of society. A recent survey of Statistics Canada on the diversity of boards in charities and non-profit organizations reflected that, even if women account for almost 60% of board members, there is a concerning lack of diversity.[53] For example, only 14% of participants

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[49] "6 Principles for a Just Recovery," Just Recovery for All (Just Recovery), accessed July 20, 2022, https://justrecoveryforall.ca/.

[50] "A Feminist Recovery Plan for Canada," A Feminist Recovery Plan for Canada (YWCA and GATE, 2020), https://www.feministrecovery.ca/.

[51] António Guterres, "A Sustainable Feminist Recovery," UNSDG (United Nations, March 7, 2022), https://unsdg.un.org/latest/blog/sustainable-feminist-recovery.

[52] *Ibid*

[53] The role of organizations actively engaged in tackling this gap is key to introducing change and redistributing power. Such is the case of the Fora: Network for Change's Girls on Board: program, which places young women and gender diverse youth on boards.

were immigrants to Canada; 11% belonged to a visible minority group; 8% identified as LGBTQ2+ individuals; 6% were persons with a disability; and 3% were Indigenous.[54]

Young women and gender diverse people's participation and leadership in political and public life is essential. Bringing about this change involves a political will to redistribute power and create the space for a real intergenerational collaboration. Political and public life should be an arena where everyone has a voice, regardless of gender.

Youth organizations are concerned about the lack of opportunities for young people to shape Covid-19 recovery measures, i.e. lack of participatory mechanisms to ensure youth voices are included in the process. A recent policy document adopted by the UN Human Rights Council states that "girls and young women lack the same opportunities as boys and young men to participate in decision-making, due to stereotypes and discrimination."[55] It is imperative to tackle the barriers that keep preventing young women and gender diverse folks from participating in decision-making, and to give them the space and power to introduce change.

Structural barriers such as ageism and gender bias impede young women and gender diverse individuals from stepping up within the organizations they are involved in. Other prejudices and stereotypes impede youth participation, such as the assumption that they do not have enough experience to participate, or that youth are not civically involved. They have valuable lived experiences, background and perspectives, yet they are left behind when their lived experiences are neglected.

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[54]Statistics Canada, "Diversity of Charity and Non-Profit Boards of Directors: Overview of the Canadian Non-Profit Sector," The Daily (Government of Canada, February 11, 2021), https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/210211/dq210211a-eng.htm.

[55]"UN Adopts First Ever Global Policy on Girls' and Young Women's Activism," Plan International UN Liaison Offices (Plan International, July 13, 2022), https://plan-international.org/un/blog/2022/07/13/un-adopts-policy-girls-and-young-womens-activism/.

3.4.2 Do You Feel Heard?

"I feel *people like me* aren't heard. Or I have to say, I'm not really *sought after*, maybe that's a better word. I haven't had many opportunities. I haven't seen many opportunities. *And I feel like it's not really my obligation to go and seek out opportunities to be heard.*"

> *"I've never felt like I've been represented or included in the community. I just have never seen people like myself in leadership positions here"*

One of the questions I asked the participants in this research was whether they felt heard by policy-makers and leaders across the society, and if they felt included in the decisions that impact their lives. Over 90% of them responded that they do not.

One of my conversations with a research participant stayed with me for a while. During our video call interview, a 24-year-old young woman from an Indigenous community told me without hesitation: *"People like me aren't heard"*. Then, she added that she is not *"sought after"*. She told me that the only time she felt engaged was when she participated in a consultation for a non-profit, as this was actually the first time she was given the space to express her opinions. Another research participant told me: *"I don't see myself as having any power to make decisions."* As aforementioned, the reason why many young people feel powerless is linked to a history of systematic exclusion that relegated them to the margins. The relative absence of people from diverse backgrounds in leadership positions represents a major barrier that continues to keep them out of those spaces, thereby perpetuating their exclusion, and hindering their sense of agency and power. As human beings and citizens, they are part of a system that is constantly reminding them that they are powerless; that they do not belong.

Even those research participants who are in a more privileged position and have access to decision-making spaces, reported a concern about the prevalence of tokenism (e.g. as one of the research participants said, *"they gave me access "to a certain extent"*). The concept of tokenism is used to describe how members of marginalized groups are often

given token positions within an organization as a way to showcase diversity, without actually changing the inequality that exists within the system.[56] That is, making only a token effort to be inclusive to members of minority groups by allowing them entrance, but not "full participation".[57] For instance, one of the research participants, Gabrielle, elaborates this issue in the context of an internship she was doing for the government:

> "First of all, *there's a very select number of young people that are even invited into these decision making spaces.* And they always tend to be the same people. So when I attend conferences, it's the same people that I see everywhere who are engaged. So when we are entering these spaces, despite our efforts to try to bring policy recommendations, funding proposals, we are given a little pat on the head, quick photo for their social media and saying great work, come back in about five to 10 years when you have your Master's and PhD."

Leaders or organizations who engage in tokenism may say that they value diversity and inclusion, but their actions often do not reflect those values. People who are considered minorities or underrepresented may be given a seat at the table or a voice in decision-making, but if they are not supported and meaningfully engaged, their participation will not make a real difference. I explore this further in the next section as I outline some of the barriers that our research participants encounter in accessing decision-making spaces.

The other major problem, referenced above and expressed by many research participants, is the lack of diversity among the young people included in decision-making spaces. As one of them said, this is something *"really biased towards upper-middle class folks".* Even though tokenism remains a reality that impedes meaningful participation, many research participants recognized that the access to spaces of power is inextricably linked to their positionality. We must be aware of how systemic barriers affect young women and gender diverse individuals experiencing intersecting inequalities in distinctive ways.

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[56]Lynn Zimmer, "Tokenism and Women in the Workplace: The Limits of Gender-Neutral Theory," *Social Problems* 35, no. 1 (February 1988): pp. 64-77, https://doi.org/10.2307/800667.
[57]*ibid*

<u>3.4.3 Barriers to Full Participation</u>

Participating in decision-making spaces "*is not straightforward*", as one of the young women interviewed suggested. Here I briefly sketch the main barriers experienced by research participants to access decision-making spaces:

Lack of Information

One of the biggest obstacles to youth participation is a lack of awareness of opportunities to get involved. Many young people are not aware of the various ways they can participate in decision-making, or how their voices can be heard on issues that matter to them. For instance, one of the interviewees highlighted how those spaces are not accessible, since *"it's not widely known information."* In the words of another research participant: *"Where do I go? How do I find how to be involved? I don't know how to go out and ensure that I, and people like me, are taken into account."* The lack of information on existing opportunities is a major roadblock to participation.

Lack of Proactivity from Current Decision-Makers

As we mentioned before, some research participants reported not being *sought after* by decision-makers. That is, many of them suggested that it should not be solely the responsibility of young people to find ways to access those spaces – who often do not have the resources– but rather, it is people in positions of power who should be actively seeking to engage them. In the words of one research participant:

> "I've been really lucky to insert myself into those youth spaces…But again, the thing is that you have to insert yourself into those spaces and not everyone has the time and resources". "If young people feel their opinions don't matter" another interviewee told me, "it is because they're not given the time and space to express them, they're expected to express them on their own, and almost fight to express them on their own."

Lack of Resources

Another major barrier to participation which came up in the interviews was the lack of resources. *"We're being asked to constantly participate in youth councils or engagement forums on what we think…but we don't have the resources to take time off. If we're not being paid to do this kind of work, then our labor is just being exploited."* Many of the young people interviewed reported positive experiences of youth engagement in volunteering. While this is indicative of the importance of community networks for meaningful youth engagement, it also speaks about a systemic barrier experienced by marginalized youth, who do not have the time or resources to afford volunteering. This is an issue that has already been flagged by young people in a recent national survey.[58] Another barrier that came up in the interviews is the locality, as often opportunities are concentrated on urban areas, meaning *"young people in rural areas just aren't engaged."*

Misconception on a Lack of Experience

Stereotypes about young people create an environment where they are not taken seriously and their voices are not heard. "Access to decision-making", research shows, "becomes more difficult when young people's status and standing is undermined".[59] During the interviews, several negative stereotypes came up that diminished the status of youth over the last two years, such as that they were irresponsible, excessive, and careless. These stereotypes not only contribute to undermining young people's sense of belonging, but are concretely utilized to steer them away from spaces of power.

There is one prejudice that appears repeatedly in the round of interviews, namely that young people do not have enough experience or valuable experiences to draw on, simply

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[58]Statistics Canada. "Canada's First State of Youth Report: for Youth, with Youth, by Youth" (Canadian Heritage, 2021), https://www.canada.ca/en/canadian-heritage/campaigns/state-youth/report.html.
[59]Maurice Devlin, *Inequality and the Stereotyping of Young People* (Dublin: Equality Authority, 2006).

because they are young. As one of the research participants mentioned, *"there is a kind of stereotype that pushes us back, and says that we are not experienced enough, and that our experience does not count as experience in the field."*

We can relate this neglect of people' life experiences to the traditional economics impulse to privilege 'expertise', 'data', and quantitative analysis more than lived experiences, especially so if they are gendered. The feminist critique of classical economics' claim to 'objectivity' and its 'data-driven' proclivity, is useful to shed light on why these experiences are easily disregarded by decision-makers as not really valuable. This concerns not only the individual bias of a decision-maker, but a system that does allow for the creation of space for such experiences to be meaningfully engaged.

Lack of Safe Spaces

Some people may feel unsafe in decision-making spaces because of the way they are treated, the power dynamics at play, or the lack of diversity. This can lead to people feeling like they cannot fully participate in the space and that their voices are not heard. For instance, one of the research participants told me that they would participate more if there were more safe spaces, as they usually encounter *"a lot of backlash"* when expressing an opinion. This becomes even more problematic when these spaces are not diverse, and people do not find an interlocutor who empathizes with their lived experiences. For instance, another participant who is doing an internship with the government noted how accentuated the lack of diversity was among decision-makers who *"often have had a lot of privileges"* and *"are unable to fully appreciate the lived experience of others".* On the side of current decision-makers, they might not act upon, or at worst disregard or relativize those particular experiences, since there's a lack of quantitative aggregated data to support the case of the value of expanding the diversity of lived experience. For instance, a 24-year-old young woman who is currently working for the federal government described how in spite of trying to

bring to the table her lived experience and those of others, *"it's very hard to be able to bring those perspectives and have them listened to".* She links this to the lack of disaggregated data on the lived experience of marginalized people and the data-driven impulse of decision-makers: *"They want hard data to make decisions and that's that data is not available to tell the story of marginalized and diverse groups"*.

This is a systemic barrier that is amplified for young people experiencing intersecting oppressions. In the words of another research participant: *"I don't think that those spaces are actually open to young women and to gender diverse people, and to people with lived experiences of marginalization. And if I am feeling that they're not open to me, as a young woman who has a lot of privileges, then I think that they're probably not open to people who haven't had the same privileges and experiences that I've had".*

Not only barriers to participation emerged from our conversations. Many young people shared positive experiences of participation in decision-making spaces. When asked to elaborate on the details of these experiences, remarkably, over 50% of the participants brought to the front the composition of the team and the leadership (e.g. a team partly/wholly composed of young people, a leader who was a woman often from a marginalized community). This is no coincidence. Research shows that diverse teams deliver superior performance and encourage organisational diversity.[60] We need to generate spaces that are more diverse and safe, where young people are meaningfully included in an intergenerational collaboration, and valued as part of a reciprocal exchange.

3.4.4 The Power of Collective Action

One of the things I discovered from my conversations with young women and gender diverse folks is that we need to reimagine what we conceive of as change. Even if most of

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[60]Rai, Shirin, Debbie Budlender, and Ulla Grapard. "Feminist Classics/Many Voices: Marilyn Waring. If Women Counted: A New Feminist Economics." *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 16, no. 3 (July 3, 2014): 523–29. https://doi.org/10.1080/14616742.2014.923243.

the research participants did not feel included in decision-making spaces in the political and professional spheres, many turned to action during the pandemic, and contributed to the economic recovery in a multiplicity of ways, generating social impact. At this point it is important to outline briefly what 'recovery' means in this research. Here we join feminist economists in proposing a more holistic notion of 'recovery', one that takes into account quantitative metrics such as unemployment rate, but goes beyond the notion of economic growth based on GDP growing points. Economic recovery involves focusing on "non-conventional" activities, which traditionally do not count in GDP calculations such as childcare, unpaid care work, and unpaid domestic work. It also involves focusing on women and historically marginalized communities, and recognizing their contribution to the well-being of their communities.

Change is not only an end result, measured in discrete outcomes, but also a relational process of continuous becoming.[61] In other words, change does not happen in isolation – it happens between people relating to each other and leveraging the power of collective action. Without delving into the debates on the theories of social change, we recognize the importance of bringing to the forefront the transformational power of collective action across spaces of society. One of the participants, who has created a space for decolonization within the university, shared with me her vision of change:

> *"I do feel like the work we are doing is contributing to change within the university spaces and the academic spaces, and outside, so it's all about how we conceive of change happening. And I see it more like a butterfly or ricochet effect. And so for example, we work with different departments on how to deconstruct their syllabus and bring in marginalized voices and marginalized knowledges into the classroom. And **bringing these people into the same space**, I believe, **pushes the boundaries** of what the next generation is going to have access to"*

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[61]Jen Gobby, *More Powerful Together: Conversations with Climate Activists and Indigenous Land Defenders* (Halifax, NS: Fernwood Publishing, 2020).

This is particularly relevant when we discuss the degree of youth participation in decision-making spaces, and pushes us to consider more concretely what a decision-making space looks like. We do not intend to bring a substantive definition, but to embrace a more expansive understanding of youth participation that is not only limited to formal and/or institutionalized forms of participation. Research shows that youth participation takes multiple forms.[62] The point is to ensure that across society– from collectives and grassroots organizations, to the private sector, and the public domain– space is actively given to young women and underrepresented youth to introduce change when necessary, while recognizing their agency and their role as changemakers.

3.5 How Do Young Women Envision a Feminist Economic Recovery?

In this section, we elaborate on key themes that emerged in our conversations with young people about a feminist economic recovery. This is not intended to be exhaustive, or to cover a complete feminist economic recovery plan, but to encompass the issues most relevant to the research participants, based on their lived experiences.

3.5.1 Prioritizing Mental Health

A just and equal recovery will not be possible without addressing the mental health crisis that has been exacerbated by Covid-19. Over 1 in 2 young women mentioned mental health as a staple of a feminist economic recovery, and over 70% of the interviewees mentioned the importance of nurturing individual and collective well-being.

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[62]Adam Miller, "2 Years into the Pandemic, Canada's Mental-Health System Is at a Crisis Point," CBCnews (CBC/Radio Canada, March 11, 2022), https://www.cbc.ca/news/health/canada-mental-health-crisis-covid-19-pandemic-1.6382378.

The Covid-19 pandemic exposed the shortcoming of our social and economic systems to care for people experiencing mental health issues. Research shows that our current approach to mental health is flawed and that a systemic change is needed.[63] This would involve moving beyond an exclusively medical understanding of mental health. Consequently, one of the key areas of the feminist economic recovery is improving the quality and access to health care. But it is not circumscribed to that. The mental health crisis is a multidimensional issue that demands integral solutions that account for the socio-cultural and economic aspect of the problem. As a mental health expert recently suggested, addressing the mental health crisis should not be limited to medical treatment, but to the "nurturing of community, economic support, and a sense of purpose".[64] Almost all the research participants reported a recent improvement on their mental health in relation to the improvement of other social and economic factors, such as employment, the loosening of restrictions, and the recuperation of their social life.

3.5.2 Reframing Productivity

From a feminist standpoint, the notion of productivity has been fundamentally interrogated. When we think of productivity we are typically concerned with the value we produce in our work and how this value is quantified or measured. The COVID-19 pandemic has forced us to rethink the way we do things. We have had to come up with new ways to work and live, and in the process, we have begun to question the very idea of productivity. What does it mean to be productive? And who benefits from our productivity?

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[63]Stefano Scarpetta, Mark Pearson, and Shunta Takino, "Supporting Young People's Mental Health through the COVID-19 Crisis" (OECD, May 12, 2021), https://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/supporting-young-people-s-mental-health-through-the-covid-19-crisis-84e143e5/.
[64]Thomas Insel on 'The Ezra Klein Show', Podcast, "A Top Mental Health Expert on Where America Went Wrong," (The New York Times, July 22, 2022), https://www.nytimes.com/2022/07/22/opinion/ezra-klein-podcast-thomas-insel.html.

The way we use our time is a reflection of our priorities. The circumstances of the pandemic led many young women to question their use of time, and re-order their priorities. As part of a feminist economic recovery, more than 40% of the research participants suggested that we need to reasses the meaning of productivity, as well as what type of activities are considered productive. They brought to the spotlight the importance of re-organizing labor relations to have more flexible working arrangements that recognize the additional unpaid roles they likely have (e.g. unpaid work such as childcare) and the gender role expectations that condition their usage of time. Some of the interviewees pointed to the 4-day working week as one alternative, which would contribute to making work-life balance more achievable for everyone, especially women.[65]

The circumstances of the pandemic made visible the impact of the Second Shift on women - a term coined by the sociologist Arlie Hochschild to refer to the household and childcare duties performed after their paid work shift. A feminist economic recovery is concerned with transforming the notion of productivity so that it includes essential activities such as caregiving and community-building.

3.5.3 Sponsor Young Women and Gender-Diverse Individuals

A feminist economic recovery supports young women and gender-diverse individuals so they can fully participate in decision-making spaces. More than half of the interviewees stressed the need for mentoring and training as a crucial aspect of their career development. For instance, one of the research participants suggested that they "*need to have more mentorship opportunities, and opportunities to work with people who are in decision making spaces, not only to help us build our skills, and experience, but also in bringing our perspectives to the table.*" Mentoring relationships are essential in order to open doors for

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[65] The Young Women's Movement, "We're Moving to a 4-Day Week," YWCA Scotland, 2021, https://www.ywcascotland.org/were-moving-to-a-4-day-week/.

young people, so that they can advance their careers, access job opportunities, and meaningfully participate in the organizations they are part of. Another of the research participants identified, as a main priority of the post-pandemic recovery, the need to allocate *"resources to actually support, train, and mentor young people"*. A positive mentoring relationship can make a difference in the lives of young people, as one of the research participants suggested: *"I feel like how I became where I am today is because of the certain mentors I've had who have given me funding, given me direction on how to excel in this career of academia.".* Mentorship opportunities are not only beneficial to individuals in terms of their career development, but they engender networks of support among young people, which in the long term favors diversity and inclusion. As a mentor herself, the aforementioned research participant elaborated further, *"it's really my passion to utilize the resources that I do have to give back to youth, to open doors for youth"*

3.5.5 Build Ties With the Community

One of the essential dimensions of a feminist economic recovery for the young people interviewed involves the generation of ties with the community, in particular with groups who experience systemic barriers to fully participate in society. They mentioned the importance of allocating resources to build relationships among local stakeholders at the community level, and to generate spaces for the community to come together. In the words of one of the research participants:

> *"We need to hold space for the community to come together, whether that be virtual, whether that be in person. Especially in this time of such disconnection, where we feel fragmented as a society, recognize the importance of coming together and take time to share our experiences, to listen, and create meaningful social connections"*

Another essential aspect of building links with the community is through active outreach to ensure that their perspectives and lived experiences are included. As one of the research participants suggested, *"bad decisions are taken because there's a lack of understanding around what communities need"*. A political commitment to collaborate and cooperate with local players who are in close proximity to the community is necessary to make better decisions. This would support decision-making tailored to community needs, avoiding *"a general approach"*. As another young woman suggested, *"social engagement goes beyond those who are bringing themselves to spaces. We need to actively seek out people you wouldn't hear from otherwise, so that they can have perspective and can be in the conversation".* This would involve abandoning the pretense of coming up with universal solutions to multidimensional issues that leave people behind. As another participant clearly described it, *"the benefit of intersectionality, of including everyones' perspective, is the opportunity to have creative solutions that engage more than one group."*

The idea is not to foster any kind of relationship, but relationships based on care and trust. *"Young people feel empowered to speak up"* one of the interviewees *told me, "when they trust the people they're speaking to".* To build these types of bridges, it is necessary to reimagine the way we organize ourselves, with creative and innovative strategies to create social connectedness beyond physical and virtual borders. In the words of one of the research participants:

> *"And you know, experience sharing, connecting with people, understanding lived experiences, creating solutions to these systemic problems. It really goes beyond borders…, the movement doesn't stop because we can't gather in person. [The pandemic] helped us realize how to make our work more accessible and reach more people"*

3.5.4 Advance a Sustainable Economy

Another axis of feminist economic recovery that is central to youth is sustainability. The pandemic has shown us just how vulnerable our societies are when we do not put people

and the planet first. Feminist economic recovery is about much more than just fixing the damage that has been done by the pandemic. It is about building a just and more sustainable future for everyone. Over 30% of the interviewees mentioned the importance of addressing the environment as part of a feminist economic recovery. Some of the ideas that came up in the interview were the need to invest in the generation of more green jobs, and more research on the intersection of gender and the environment to inform decision-making and policy-making. As we mentioned earlier, a care-led project calls for a radical transformation of our relationship with ourselves, with others and with our environment. This is something that was brought forward by one of the young women interviewed, *"as we understand we need to work less and take care of ourselves more, focusing on our health, hopefully, we will create a focus on the environment too"*.

This way of approaching recovery has close connections with indigenous communities' ways of understanding and inhabiting the world. Indigenous activists "are already using their knowledge and understanding of reciprocal relationships with the environment to demonstrate a more sustainable approach to good governance."[66] A more sustainable economic recovery needs a fluid and flexible system, which incorporates perspectives and knowledge that have been historically neglected. Only true and reciprocal conversations with indigenous communities can bring about the change we need, and this involves respecting their refusal to continue to be entangled in the logic of imperialist states and colonial power.[67]

4. RECOMMENDATIONS AND IMPACT

As stated, this report does not pretend to dictate one-size-fits-all answers, but rather to bring to the forefront the lived experiences of young women and gender diverse individuals

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[66]United Nations Academic Impact. "Sustainability Inherent to Indigenous Political Ecology," (United Nations), accessed July 20, 2022,
https://www.un.org/en/academic-impact/we-are-indigenous-sustainability-inherent-indigenous-political-ecology.
[67]Audra Simpson, *Mohawk Interruptus: Political Life Across the Borders of Settler States* (Durham, NC: Duke Univ. Press, 2014).

with intersecting identities. Nonetheless, we list below several recommendations grouped by common themes, based on the voices of research participants as covered in the previous sections.

Invest in the care economy and social infrastructure: We need to 'put people before profit' and revisit how 'value' is measured in our economy to integrate the vast contribution of care and other forms of unpaid work performed by women and gender diverse individuals (e.g. more than a point in our GDP).

- The federal government, as a major player in advancing gender justice, should lead a national strategy to improve the conditions of the care economy, such as improving the social infrastructure and the quality of service, increasing the wages of care workers and frontline workers, and supporting unpaid caregivers (e.g. by increasing the paid family leave and provide cash transfers).

- Investing in mental health should be top priority to support flourishing communities. Develop the Canada Mental Health Act as a national standard. This would guarantee the commitment of public funding to mental health services to provinces and territories, improve access to psychiatrists, psychologists and general practitioners, and provide support to mental health providers at the community level.

Investing in creating better jobs for young women and gender diverse youth: the improvement of employment opportunities and the support of professional development is essential for a sustainable economic recovery.

- Invest in developing more paid internship opportunities with competitive salaries, especially targeted to support the professional development of underrepresented youth.

- Legislate to increase minimum wages rates across provinces to support frontline workers with rising costs and inflation.

- Improve labour market inclusion for persons with disabilities by funding skill development, training and programs to connect employers with people with disabilities.

- The *Task Force on Women and the Economy* should be re-established to guide a feminist economic recovery that advances systemic change.[68]

Increase representation of youth in leadership positions across institutional spaces: From the government to the civil society and the private sector, action must be taken to increase the representation of young women and gender diverse individuals in leadership positions and decision-making spaces - especially in a context of crisis by ensuring their inclusion in task forces. At the same time, participatory mechanisms should be reconsidered to include the lived experiences of young women and gender diverse individuals.

- Design innovative participatory mechanisms beyond conventional forms of participation to actively foster youth participation across spaces and platforms (e.g. more online and non-formal mechanisms of participation).

- Develop more paid opportunities to foster participation in public consultations.

- Develop public accountability mechanisms to track youth participation across decision-making spaces, such as a youth participation tracker across all provinces.

- Ensure young people are represented in all public consultation processes in a non-tokenistic manner by working with civil society organizations (CSOs) in order to guarantee meaningful and diverse participation.

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[68]"Task Force on Women in the Economy," Department of Finance Canada (Government of Canada, March 16, 2021), https://www.canada.ca/en/department-finance/task-force-women-economy.html.

- Implement more paid training and mentorship programs to strengthen leadership skills, especially targeted to underrepresented youth - by consulting and/or funding CSOs to ensure that such programs are non-tokenistic.

Utilize the intersectional framework

- Ensure that the Gender Based Analysis+ approach is applied in the 2023 federal budget.
- Provide a detailed analysis on how exactly the measures implemented by the federal, provincial, and municipal governments advance gender equality.
- Collect more disaggregated data on how intersecting factors shape young women and gender diverse individuals' lived experiences across spheres of society.
- Invest resources to conduct additional research and data collection on the gendered dimension of the environmental crisis, and the centrality of gender equality in the migration to a green economy.
- Take measures to encourage the private sector to apply the SDP - UNDP's SDG Impact Standards to put sustainability and gender equality at the core of management and investment decision-making.

Actively engage communities and sponsor community-based solutions: Give the power to communities to develop innovative solutions at the local level.

- The federal, provincial, and municipal government should generate formal channels of communication with local grassroot organizations, universities and communities to reach more young people, in particular from marginalized communities and support their professional development.

- Increase funding for youth, women and gender-diverse organizations which are acutely under-funded. The federal government should increase the commitment of resources to civil society organizations (CSOs) supporting young women and gender diverse individuals with mentoring programs and leadership training.

5. CONCLUSION

The social and economic recovery process from Covid-19 is far from over. As this research shows, the crisis ushered in by the pandemic cannot be singled out from other issues that shape young people's experiences. Overlapping crises and systemic inequalities uniquely condition young women's lives. This study demonstrates that underrepresented youth experience concrete barriers to access those spaces of power where decisions are made on the issues that directly affect them– from lack of resources and information to the lack of political willingness to seriously engage with their perspectives and lived experiences. I have shown how the underrepresentation in decision-making spaces across spheres of society is a gender-justice issue that needs to be addressed. And how these constraints do not stop them from introducing change as they build meaningful relationships at the community-level.

This study thus shows the urgency of finding new ways of living together as a society that do not further exclude and marginalize certain people on the basis of historically constructed hierarchies of power. Young people have been systematically excluded from fully participating in society – in particular young women and gender-diverse individuals with intersected identities. This study endeavored to incorporate their perspectives and lived experiences to understand how such a transformative change would look in practice for them.

This research brought forward the importance of addressing the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic with an intersectional lens, renouncing the pretension for one-off solutions to multidimensional problems. Drawing from young people's lived experiences, I suggested a set of recommendations oriented to create systems that are more flexible and fluid. Systems that can adapt to the changing reality we are living in, with young women and gender diverse youth leading the way. This involves reimagining what youth engagement looks like with an intersectional approach, fostering participation by investing in building social connectedness at the community-level, designing more accessible and innovative participatory mechanisms, and allocating resources to support and mentor young people, in particular those from marginalized communities.

6. A FINAL REFLECTION ON 'RECOVERY'

Feminist economists challenge classical economic approaches for its androcentric bias. They argue that the standard economic model does not adequately take into account women's productive and reproductive activities, such as the unpaid work performed in the household. There are different approaches to feminist economics, but one key goal is to develop an economic system that takes into account the experiences of women and other traditionally marginalized groups, advancing general well-being.

This means that our societal idea of 'recovery' is flawed because it is primarily driven by economics - economic growth as measured by GDP and employment rates. This is problematic because it ignores broader social and environmental factors, which affect society's well-being. For once, this metric does not always accurately reflect women's economic activity - given that much of their work is unpaid and therefore not included in GDP calculations. So from a feminist standpoint, when we talk about 'recovery', we talk a more holistic understanding of 'recovery' beyond economistic terms.

We need to reimagine the boundaries of what counts as 'productive' and 'valuable' in our economy (e.g. include unpaid work in GDP calculations to recognize everyones' contribution to our society). This involves introducing a transformation in our economic system and our institutions. At the heart of a feminist recovery is the value of care - from individual and community care to environmental care. Perhaps our real challenge is to come up with innovative ways of measuring the multiplicity forms of care that make up vibrant and sustainable communities. Young women and gender diverse youth have a central role to play in this respect.

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