

Our Future is Public

From global inequalities to social, economic and climate justice

CROSS CUTTING THEMES

1. Economic, tax and debt justice and financing universal public services
2. Climate justice, decolonisation, Indigenous Peoples Rights and just transitions
3. Feminist alternatives and gender-transformative care services
4. Democratic public ownership, community collaborations and reimagining government

Scope of cross-cutting themes

1. Economic, tax and debt justice and financing universal access to public services public services

Half a century of neoliberalism has established a paradigm of unlimited and unregulated economic growth. In this context, public services were perceived as a burden for governments and their budgets, better to be commercialised, privatised or outsourced. However, after the multiple and interconnected crises and destruction they have fostered, the neoliberal paradigm is being increasingly questioned and resisted. Overcoming global economic injustice is at the very core of any discussion about expanding public services provision, access and sustainable financing. Domestic mobilisation of public resources is essential for States to provide financing for universal quality public services. However, for many countries, efforts to mobilise sufficient resources are undermined by systemic and international issues, including: escalating war economies, unfair fiscal pact, unfair trade agreements, unsustainable and illegitimate debt, tax abuse by multinational corporations, tax havens, loan conditionalities and coercive policy advice leading to austerity measures, cuts in public sector wage bills and a lack of democratic and inclusive decision-making on global economic and tax governance.

This means advancing the case for tax and fiscal justice nationally and internationally, commitment to reprioritize budgets toward economies that care for people and the planet, ending the debt crises and moving away once and for all from the neoliberal cult of austerity. At the same time we need to build equitable public community collaborations ensuring that all public services are owned and organised in the most democratic fashion, taking a firm stance against the growing repression and authoritarianism of today.

Questions to guide discussions:

- How has the neoliberal narrative / austerity failed (including in relation to the Covid-19 pandemic)?
- What are the implications of neoliberalism / austerity for public services?
- What are some of the key structural issues in common across the economic justice and public services agendas?
- How can we push back on the use of public sector wage bill constraints?
- What are the alternatives to neoliberalism or transformative actions needed nationally and globally? How can we strengthen links with feminist economists who are promoting alternatives to private control?

- How can tax systems be redesigned to ensure more fiscal justice and adequate financing that allows public services to achieve their objectives?
- What are some of the main current barriers to achieving economic justice and financing public services? What are some of the key levers/entry points possible?
- How can the public services movement bring our ideas into the narratives for countering neoliberalism and how can we better connect with tax and debt justice movements?

2. Climate justice, decolonisation, indigenous peoples rights, and just transitions

Public services embody a collective social commitment that is essential to implementing the measures to reorganise social and economic systems, services and resources to respond to the climate and environmental crisis, building more resilient societies and implementing a global transition to renewable and lesser energy use as well as sustainable food systems that prioritise collective well-being, of the overall population, in particular of racialised, rural, Indigenous, migrant, poor and gendered populations. Environmentally just public services are key to pivot away from economic growthism and global (neo)colonial capitalism, ensuring they are designed and implemented in a equitable, democratic, participatory, rights-respecting, non-discriminatory and inclusive manner, as well as articulated across sectors and borders. Transforming public services for universal provisioning that puts people, especially the most oppressed front and centre, instead of private profiteering, is essential to build economies and societies that can care for both people and the planet. Most governments, industries, and organisations are increasingly discussing how to better respond to the climate crisis, including by mobilising resources and reorganising and restructuring social and economic systems.

Part of this response requires addressing the historic and still growing colonial debt that the global North owes to global South by facilitating safe and humane migration, treating energy transition technologies as international commons, ensuring Indigenous and subsistence land practices to lead climate change policy. This response must also entail channelling sufficient public funds to minoritised and racialised communities – in the global South and in the global North – so that they have ample capacity to build the social and environmentally just public services needed to mitigate and adapt to the climate crisis.

Socio-economic transformation and a just, feminist, and equitable transition for people and the planet needs the necessary fiscal, judicial and policy space. This means promoting a rebalancing of the global economy with more vibrant, inclusive, and circular local/national economies; moving away from natural resource intensive global value chains and towards agroecological food systems; promoting decent work and responsible business conduct; advance ecological resilience; reducing resource consumption; restoring biodiversity; and move away from extractive, discriminatory, racist economies that erode the ecological basis of our collective wellbeing.

Questions to guide discussions:

- How do the social, economic, cultural, and physical challenges resulting from the climate crisis affect different public services? How can public services adapt to this disruption?
- How can the different public services be mobilised or re-structured to respond to the challenges posed by the climate crisis and to ensure a just transition?
- How are the root causes of the climate crises and the current systemic barriers to global economic justice interconnected?
- How can we better connect the climate justice and public service movements in the struggle to challenge the neoliberal economic model and advance sustainable alternatives?

- How can global financing to address the climate crisis be channelled through the public sector and public services, rather than be plundered for private profit?

3. Feminist alternatives and gender-transformative care services

Women provide a massive subsidy to the entire global economy derived from the unpaid domestic and care work that falls on their shoulders. When public services fail or are underfunded, women are trebly disadvantaged: losing access to services when they are privatised or fees are charged, assuming a disproportionate share of the rising burden of unpaid care and domestic work, and losing access to some of the best prospects for decent work in public services. Multiple crises (climate, inequality, Covid-19, among others) have added to the factors that put women's human rights at risk. When public services are democratically organised, with strong participation from gendered and racialised working people, they can play a decisive role in the transformation of asymmetrical and unjust power relations. At the same time, as reactionary forces are on the rise across the globe, women's human rights are increasingly under attack. That's why now is a crucial moment to explore the role of public services in transforming gender relations and to examine what truly gender responsive public services look like, both from a user and worker perspective, explicitly taking into account the needs of peoples with disabilities, LGBTQIA+ groups and informal women workers, among many others. As feminist movements advance the case for the social reorganisation of care, what is the role of public services?

Questions to guide discussions:

- How do the privatisation and commercialisation of public services affect gender equality, including the intersection of gender with the many other social identities women carry?
- How can public services be made more gender transformative?
- What are the convergences (and are there any divergences) between the Future is Public Manifesto and the Social Organisation of Care manifesto? How can we connect these struggles more effectively?
- How is women's subsidy to the global economy intrinsically related to public services?

4. Democratic public ownership, community collaborations and reimagining the role of government

Counter narratives to the evolving forces of neoliberalism and authoritarianism require imagining, proposing and developing new forms of public ownership and accountability, opening the door towards worker and resident participation and community-led initiatives and innovation within local, regional, and national governments. We need to question and transform the role of "the State" by organising for local to internationalist mass movements that call for democratic and participatory governments that genuinely share and co-create wealth and economic decision-making powers with working people and other rights-holders. At the same time, we need to fight both privatisation and growing repression and authoritarianism by strengthening and expanding public services as well as by building equitable public-community, public-public, and public-worker collaborations to ensure that all public services, enterprises, and assets are owned, organised and governed in the most democratic fashion.

Questions to guide discussions:

- What experiences of democratic public ownership (including public-community, public-public, and public-worker collaborations) are challenging neoliberal paradigms?

- How can governments innovate to open the door towards new ways of community, worker, and user engagement with, and control of, public services, enterprises, and assets?
- What has changed/what have we learned about democratising public ownership and services since 2019 (especially with regards to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic)?
- What is the current status of key examples and cases from around the world? Are there any new and exciting models or experiments that have not received much attention so far?
- What can we learn from Chilean history and contemporary experience with regards to democratising public ownership and services?