



A WILPF
GUIDE TO

**FEMINIST
POLITICAL
ECONOMY**

WOMEN'S INTERNATIONAL LEAGUE FOR
PEACE & FREEDOM



Table of Contents

Advancing Feminist Approach to Peace	2
Political Economy as a Tool	4
A Feminist Twist to Understanding Political Economy	4
Feminist Political Economy in the Context of Neoliberal Policies	6
Gendered Economy of Investments	7
How does WILPF do it?	9
Case Study	10
Feminist Political Economy Analysis – What Questions do We Need to Ask?	12

© 2018 Women's International League for Peace and Freedom

August 2018

A User Guide to Feminist Political Economy

3rd Edition

16 pp.

Authors: Nela Porobić Isaković

Design: Nadia Joubert

Cover photo: Brick wall painting of faces by Oliver Cole (@oliver_photographer) from Unsplash.com

www.wilpf.org

Advancing Feminist Approach to Peace

HOW CAN FEMINIST UNDERSTANDING OF POLITICAL ECONOMY IN CONFLICT OR POST-CONFLICT CONTEXT HELP ADVANCE PEACE-BUILDING PROCESSES?

Political economy makes explicit linkages between political, economic and social factors. It is concerned with how politics can influence the economy. It looks at the access to, and distribution of wealth and power in order to understand why, by whom, and for whom certain decisions are taken, and how they affect societies – politically, economically and socially. It combines different sets of academic disciplines, most notably political science, economy and sociology, but also law, history and other disciplines.

By using feminist political economy, we seek to understand the broader context of war and post-conflict recovery, and to deconstruct seemingly fixed and unchangeable economic, social, and political parameters. We work towards more just and equal societies built on democratic, inclusive, and transparent political and economic policies that promote social cohesion, equality and solidarity within and across societies.

The sort of economic policies we choose to roll out in conflict and post-conflict societies cannot be separated from lived and highly gendered experiences of war, and from the new, and often more complex and overlapping needs that emerge as a result of that conflict. Understanding how war negatively affects women's and men's ability to access decent work, healthcare, education, natural resources such as water and land, as well as their agency and influence over political and economic decision-making, is a prerequisite to be able to transform current, and formulate new political and economic interventions – interventions that create, rather than destruct, societies.

A feminist political economy analysis puts spotlight on inequalities as root causes of war. It helps us argue that sustainable peace cannot be built without socio economic security, underpinned by justice and equality. Feminist political economy enables us to understand **who, what and how** in the relationship between social, political and economic structures of power, resources and access to them. In understanding the interconnections between who, what and how we need to look at both national, regional and international context and actors, focusing on their responsibility, accountability, and transparency.

- In the national context, we should seek to deepen our understanding of the political and economic context and power divisions in the country; the nexus between political elite and economic interests; investment focuses and priorities; legal context for access to human rights, in particular economic and social rights, and so forth.
- Identification and understanding of regional and geopolitical actors and their interests is an important part of understanding the political economy in a given country. Many times, both political and economic decision-making by the national governments is highly influenced by the interest of neighbouring and other countries, and that interest can be expressed through both politics and economy. Their involvement and impact must be analysed.

National actors: governments (and governmental institutions including service providers); civil society (e.g. women's rights organisations, unions, indigenous activist groups, environmental groups, human rights defenders, victim associations, formal and informal groups of activists and so forth); and private actors (economically and politically influential private, national actors such as investment companies, banks and so forth).

International actors can be UN; regional mechanisms such as European or African Union; international finance institutions i.e. regional development banks (e.g. European Bank for Reconstruction and Development), International Monetary Fund, and World Bank international investment companies; international corporations; and countries that have geopolitical and economic interest in the given context.

WILPF's work with the international stakeholders is an essential part of our work. We use the findings and analysis of the national context to strengthen our advocacy towards UN, regional mechanisms and international finance institutions. We also use it to argue for **states' extraterritorial obligations with respect to human rights impacts of their actions** – be it the arms trade or the decisions made by the World Bank or International Monetary Fund on conditionalities they impose on countries.

See for example parts of the WILPF and WILPF Germany (2018) Joint submission to the Universal Periodic Review of Germany, 30th Session – "[A review of Germany's National Action Plan 1325](#)". See for example [WILPF's submission](#) to the UN Independent Expert on foreign debt and human rights on the impact of economic reform policies on women's human rights.

This is a guide on how feminist political economy can strengthen feminist analysis of root-causes to conflict and help envision pathways to sustainable peace. The starting point of this guide is WILPF's work in national context and international arena. However, it targets a broader audience of peacebuilders. It makes a case for why it is important to understand political economy of war and peace, and to use feminist political economy to envision demilitarized societies built on solidarity, justice, and equality.

Our intention is that this brief can help guide practitioners in their discussions and feminist political economy analysis of conflict and post-conflict contexts. With that in mind a series of questions are

outlined at the end of the guide to help carry those conversations forward. The questions can also serve as a supporting tool when looking into how to start doing such an analysis. The questions listed are not exhaustive and they are generic. Subsequently they should, when appropriate, be contextualized and expanded.

For those that seek further information and knowledge about political feminist economy tips on further reading and examples can be found throughout the text.

Political Economy as a Tool

When negotiating peace agreements and during peace building processes economics and politics are usually treated as different sets of questions that give a sense that we are looking at and analysing a set of seemingly autonomous processes. However, looking into **political economy** provides us with a much broader understanding of how different segments of economic and political processes are interconnected. Understanding that connection helps us conduct a better and a more accurate analysis of the processes that take place in a society. It helps us engage in questions of structure, agency, ownership and distribution, and subsequently identify pathways for transformative change of the society from war to peace, but also more generally towards sustainable and **just societies based on feminist values and principles**.

Inequalities easily feed into existing or create new conflicts. Policies and post-conflict interventions must build social, political and economic platforms for justice and recovery, based on principles of gender equality, solidarity, anti-militarisation, human rights and environmental sustainability. It is only then we can hope to truly transform the underlying roots of the conflict and start building a sustainable peace.

A Feminist Twist to Understanding Political Economy

Classical approach to political economy studies the relationship between production, labour, trade, different laws and government policies, and distribution of national income and wealth, but it does so from a gender-blind point of view. It focuses on macroeconomic indicators. Among main economic indicators of The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) are balance of payments, financial data (interest rates, exchange rates), international trade (export/import), consumer price index and so forth¹. This is a very limited, conflict and gender blind approach. Treating all members of the society as if they have the same needs, problems, capacities, access, and power tells us nothing about political and economic mechanisms that lead to (gender) inequalities in the society, nor how to deal with them in conflict affected communities.

Useful reading on political economy and feminist political economy:

Peterson V. Spike 2005. "How (the Meaning of) Gender Matters in Political Economy". *New Political Economy*, 10:4:499-521.

True, Jacqui. *The Political Economy of Violence against Women*. Oxford Studies in Gender and International Relations, 2012. Oxford University Press.

¹ See [OECD website](#).

Feminist political economy is not about “adding” women, it is about equal and just distribution of power and resources!

By using feminist political economy as a tool we can see a broader picture. We can look at social policies, such as health policies or labour rights; look at intra-household labour division; access to and distribution of economic resources; indicators of human well-being; gender pattern in wages; the decency of wages; unpaid care work. By using feminist political economy we can create space to take into consideration the environment and environmental sustainability; we can look at access and control over natural resources and the role natural resources play in sustainable development. Analysing political and economic processes through a feminist lens also allows for an **intersectional analysis** that looks at not just gender, but also how different systems of power, and access to power interact and impact on different groups in the society.

When put in a conflict context feminist political economy analysis can be used as a tool to look at the ratio between resources allocated to security institutions (such as police and military) and those allocated for peacebuilding; the ratio between militarisation and effective demilitarisation and how it plays out. We can also look at war-related violations and harms women and men suffer during conflict, and the needs, as well as gender and power dynamics, that stem from those violations. We can then use the analysis to plan and propose needed levels of investment into different services that enable victims to access gender sensitive services necessary for their rehabilitation and unimpeded and equal participation in society.

Doing an intersectional analysis means that when looking at the impact of different processes, decisions, and politics on the lives of people, we do not stop with gender, but advance and deepen our analysis with looking at how different systems of power, and access to power and resources interacts and impacts on different groups in the society. In other words, we should not treat women as a homogenous group. Women's experiences can look very different based on e.g race, class, age, ethnicity, sexual orientation and alike. For example, the impact of austerity measures will affect women with lower income or no income much more than those with well paid jobs; a migrant woman can be far more disadvantaged in the labour market or experience racism at many different levels of the society than other groups of women; women with disabilities can experience different types of discrimination than any other women and so forth.

Useful statistic and toolkits on financing for peace can be found at WILPF's initiative [Move the Money](#).

Feminist Political Economy in the Context of Neoliberal Policies

Countries, including those recovering from conflicts and wars, are often faced with imposition of “structural adjustment” or “fiscal consolidation” – also called austerity measures. According to recent projections austerity measures will affect approximately 5.8 billion people by 2021. That is about 75 per cent of the global population². At the same time the richest 1% in the world own double as much as 6.9 billion people³. Economic policies that are not based on solidarity and equality can be harmful for societies as growing inequalities are one of the root causes of war. In addition, in countries recovering from conflicts such policies can put them at risk of regression to violence.

Austerity measures typically consist of public expenditure cuts: less money for health, education, pensions, social welfare, and everything else that is typically funded through public budgets, and more so, what is typically needed in a society recovering from conflict. Within the “package” of these measures economic growth is often understood to take place through freeing the economy from state imposed restriction. This often translates into flexibilisation of labour laws, deregulations and privatisation that directly influences public ownership and control over resources, and subsequently also the distribution of those resources. Feminist political economy can be used to challenge the assumption of economic growth happening through minimal state and minimal public intervention. Feminist analysis can be used to deconstruct the unequal and gendered social context and power-relations that are in place, and the inability of neoliberal policies to challenge such environment and create gender just and environmentally sustainable growth for everybody.

Neoliberalism is an ideology arising from an economic model developed in 19th century but brought to global prominence by Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan. In the era of the post-Cold war it was presented as the only viable *modus operandi* for the global development. It is still widely applied today, even though it has been recognised that its extreme application is creating great inequalities and insecurities throughout the world. The ideology is based on the idea of “markets free from various forms of state interventions” i.e. economic system organised around individual lines, in which transactions between private parties are free from government interventions. The building principles of neoliberal economic model are: shift from public ownership to privatisation, free trade, and drastic reduction of government spending in order to increase the role of the private sector in the economy and society. The reduction of spending is often imposed through austerity measures that are rigorously applied for the detriment of the wider population. As the public sector shrinks corporations and other private actors are encouraged to pick up the slack left by crumbling state structures.

Neoliberalism is a term often used by the critics of such policies and approaches, and much less so from the advocates themselves. However, in an article from 2016 International Monetary Fund's (IMF) own research department published a critical review of neoliberal policies and approaches used and propagated for by IMF itself. Read the article [“Neoliberalism: Oversold”](#).

Suggested reading on austerity measures and economic and social rights in general: [OHCHR, Report on Austerity Measures and Economic and Social Rights](#)

² See Isabel Ortiz and Matthew Cummings, 2019. [Austerity: the New Normal. A renewed Washington Consensus Working Paper](#).

³ See Oxfam, 2020. [Time to Care – Unpaid and underpaid care work and the global inequality crisis](#).

We can see examples of that in various conflict and post-conflict countries. In Bosnia and Herzegovina for example, the investment approaches and economic reconstruction models have completely disregarded the socio-economic constraints produced by the war on both women's and men's abilities (which sometimes are similar and sometimes different) to fully and equally participate in political, social and economic processes.

Learn more about the dangers of gender and conflict-blind approaches to post-conflict recovery through case studies of [Bosnia and Herzegovina](#) and [Ukraine](#).

Gendered Economy of Investments

What is invested in and what the societies save money on is highly gendered. Most of economic policies, be it from the local government or from international financial institutions, lack proper gender impact assessment that can help understand how economic policies will affect gender equality in the country. On top of it, most economic interventions, in conflict or post-conflict countries lack critical conflict analysis. Instead, "conflict" and "economic policies" are often seen as not interrelated. The "reform packages" are often represented as gender and conflict neutral and economically (and politically) necessary. However, without the additional information and baselines collected through conflict and gender analysis it is not possible to foresee and track the impact of economic interventions on the society. For a society coming out of a conflict economic policies must also be part of dealing with the remnants of war or otherwise they risk feeding into new aggravations.

"In accordance with IMF requirements, during 2014-2015, 165,000 civil service jobs were cut, with overall plans of a 20% reduction in the civil service workforce. This reduction has been undertaken through, inter alia, the reorganisation of ten and closing of eight government agencies. There are plans for further downsizing of the public sector with the goal of lowering the overall spending on salary for civil servants to around 9% of Gross Domestic Product in the medium term. Women comprise more than 75% of the civil service, predominately in non-managerial positions, and, therefore, have been disproportionately impacted – and will continue to be – by these cuts. Again, no effective social protection programs have been developed or implemented to compensate or ensure sustainable job creation for women." – excerpt from WILPF's UPR submission [Obstacles to Women's Meaningful Participation in Peace Efforts in Ukraine, 2017](#).

The uneven and gendered distribution of investments in post-conflict countries is especially visible in favouring of big infrastructural investments (that are more focused on the needs of the market) over investments into eradication of poverty, health and educational infrastructure (that would benefit wider society and support overcoming gender inequality).

This has real implications for peace as well as for women's access to rights and meaningful participation in peacebuilding processes. The ability to participate in peacebuilding, or one's participation in public space in general, is seriously circumscribed if one is focused on surviving, putting food on the table, finding means to educate your children, not being able to take care of one's health because there is no affordable health care, not being able to participate in formal labour because of the lack of accessible and affordable child care etc. If then on top of it, there is

no conscious investment in gender equality as part of the overall economic investments as well as more targeted investments in peace, the burden of picking up the slack of the state will not only fall on women, but women will also most likely remain trapped within the domain of the private, balancing between informal economy (as a means of survival) and unpaid care work.

This blindness to gendered economic interventions is unfortunately still mainstreamed. That puts an even greater urgency on peace organisations to understand political economy of conflict and post-conflict reconstruction and recovery, including the gendered economy of investments. That understanding will provide us with a platform to advocate for conceptualisation of peace agreements and post-conflict reconstruction as an opportunity to establish new institutional rules and norms that redress inequalities in the society, including gender inequalities.

“A feminist political economy approach contests the gendered structure of war and peace by arguing that stability without justice is not possible. The prioritisation of national security and electoral machinery by governments over the social and economic security of citizens after war or armed conflict is usually destabilising in the long run. Insofar as women are unable to gain access to physical security, social services, justice, and economic opportunities due, in part, to the military build-up and privileging of militarised masculinities, their particular vulnerability to violence continues in peace time.”

True, Jacqui. *The Political Economy of Violence against Women*. Oxford Studies in Gender and International Relationship, 2012. Oxford University Press. Kindle edition, p. 32

How does WILPF do it?

Our departure point are women's lives – their lived experiences, their identification of problems and needs and their perspectives on what constitutes solutions to identified problems. However, having the understanding that women are not a fixed and homogeneous category our selection of "women's perspectives" must be representative of various groups of women, based on e.g. race, sexual orientation, class, ethnicity, age, urban/rural and so forth.

What methods we use vary from context to context and are best decided upon by the activists in the country. However, as feminists, we must always be ethical and responsible in the way we collect information and do our analysis. Our collection of information should strive towards being based in continuous relationships of trust and mutual benefit between WILPF and our informants.

"Collecting of information" can be done through traditional methods, such as interviews or workshops but also through so called participatory research that emphasizes our own participation and action. It shifts the focus from "only" researching to actively trying to change the defined problems and challenges. For example, involvement of civilian victims of war in WILPF's work in Bosnia has always been grounded in a long-standing relationship of trust and support. Women WILPF works with in Bosnia know that they can turn to us for advice, support or other more concrete measures of assistance. In that way, we avoid women feeling "used" and "objectised" for purposes of research, or advocacy.

Different groups (and depending on context) may require a safe space to be created in order to freely address their problems and needs. In some context that safe space can be a matter of ensuring a de facto physical safe space, and in other situation it might be a question of ensuring anonymity and protection of identity. We must ensure that the open space is created but be open minded about who might need it. It can be so that a victim of gender-based violence is willing to speak openly about her lived experiences and harms, while a person suffering from e.g. discrimination and/or other injustices at her work place might be much less willing to speak up (for the fear of losing her job for example), or of course, vice versa. We should not assume anything, and be open for everything.

Case Study

Methods used by WILPF in Bosnia and Herzegovina when doing a feminist political economy analysis of proposed reforms and other post-conflict interventions in the country:

Since 2015 WILPF has closely been working with local feminists in understanding and tracking the full implications and consequences of Bosnia's Reform Agenda, researching its effects and discussing other potential approaches to post-conflict recovery and reconstruction beyond the neoliberal solutions of austerity measures and stabilization policies.

Baseline information was gathered through **1) monitoring** of new and/or reformed laws; developments of the general political, economic and social situation in the country; the position of the international community with respect to those developments (including the position of international financial institutions); **2) in-person contacts** with formal and informal activist groups such as environmentalist, workers, local community activist; **3) formal and informal interviews and continuous relationships** with civilian victims of war; and **4) occasional workshops** with civil society organizations (primarily women's organisations). Crucial aspect of information gathering was that it was never considered as one-off activity, but as a continuous effort complementing everything WILPF did in Bosnia.

Methods used:

- Individual interviews or simply just talks and discussions with representatives of formal as well as informal groups (particular focus was put on women victims' association, informal groups of women workers, and women in rural areas);
- Group meetings, focus- and discussion groups with a broader group of civil society organisations and individual activists;
- "Formal" interviews and/or discussions with power-holders, such as country representatives of World Bank, IMF, representatives of European Union but also individual member states to EU, UN representatives, and so forth;
- Analysis of laws and policies in various areas: welfare, labour laws, education, health, civilian victims of war, refugees/returnees/internally displaced persons, environment, public service etc.;
- Analyses of proposed and ongoing reforms, i.e. analyses of written documents, implementation reports, impact analyses etc.;
- Looking into the projects and activities of the international financial institutions in order to understand their focuses and priorities;
- Review of national budgets; development and other strategies; relevant action plans etc.

Analysing and compiling the gathered information was done in coordination with local activists and with the support from feminist academics that are part of WILPF's academic network.

The research, the findings, and the suggested ways forward were validated through individual discussions with key civil society actors, "validation" workshop and targeted field visits.

The analysis was compiled into a report that was then presented **1) in-country** to representatives of international community in Bosnia that were identified as particularly important to talk to because of their role as financial and political facilitators of the reforms; **2) internationally**, to representative of various European Union institutions (European Union was identified as a particularly powerful actor and facilitator of the current approach and hence an important actor to influence). The analysis can be read in WILPF's report **A Feminist Perspective to Post-conflict Restructuring and Recovery – the Case of Bosnia and Herzegovina**.

Moving forward

WILPF continues to build its work on the findings from the analysis of the current reforms and interventions in Bosnia. The findings serve as an evidence based advocacy tool, putting spotlight on the negative effects of the current approaches with respect to both equality and peace in the country. The findings also serve WILPF as a starting point in development of an "alternative" reform agenda for Bosnia that is forward looking and engages in the discussion on where and how investments need to be made in order for Bosnia and Herzegovina to have a future as a just and equal society, built on democratic, inclusive, and transparent political and economic policies that promote social cohesion, equality and solidarity within and across the society.

Feminist Political Economy Analysis – What Questions do We Need to Ask?

Feminist political economy analysis is built on specific feminist questions. Exactly what questions we ask will of course depend on each given context. The list of questions provided below is thus not exhaustive and should be used as inspiration.

- What does the overall context for women's rights, equality and participation look like in the society?
- Who are the main political and economic actors? Who sets the agenda? Whose priorities and needs are catered for? Whose are not? In your analysis do not look just at gender, but try to do an intersectional analysis in order to understand how the priorities and decision affect different groups in the society. Look at the intersections between gender and race, class, migration, age (young/old), ethnicity or nationality, sexual orientation, geographical location (rural/urban) etc.
- How do social and economic realities look like for women and men? What role(s) do they play in that reality, and how do economic and political decisions/reforms affect them? Can they participate in the decision-making (both political and economic) process? Can they influence planned (whether economic and/or political) reforms? But ask also which women can influence.
- What are the constraints (both in private and public sphere) for women and men to engage in formal economy? What circumstances (family relations, laws, regulations, mechanisms etc.) would be conducive for their equal and just participation in the economy and overall realisation of their right?
- How does the division between the formal/informal and productive/reproductive economy look like?
- What is being produced? How? By and for whom?
- What is being invested in (this needs to include investments in social capital)? How? By and for whom? Is there a preference for certain types of investments? How do those investments play into gender (in)equalities?
- Where are women primarily employed? How does the investment in those sectors look like?
- How does the access to resources look like? Who owns them and who controls them? (This has to be an intersectional analysis).
- How does the access to social, economic and cultural rights look like for women and men? Is the access gendered? In what way? Is there a strategy for further development of socio-economic rights? Is it gendered?

- What is the ratio between resources allocated to security (such as police and military) and public services such as health care, education, day-care (human security)? How does this play with regards to power and gender relations?
- How does the local community understand security? Is it through militarised responses of various security forces (i.e. physical security) or is there a broader understanding of what security is? Is there a difference between individual and collective security? What does security for women in the given context mean? How can that security be achieved?

In conflict and post-conflict countries we also want to dig deeper...

- What constitutes “economic activity” in a conflict/post-conflict country (care work and remittances often get left out of the official analyses, for example)?
- Which rights do we deem particularly important to ensure in a conflict or post-conflict context? How are those rights safe-guarded?
- Is there analysis over violations and harms suffered by the population? Are those analyses gendered? How can the identified violations and harms be redressed? Is there a nexus between redressing of conflict-specific violations and harms and the overall access to economic and social rights? Is there an understanding of the gendered aspects and the effects of the war on people’s ability to engage in labour market, access healthcare, education etc.? How can that nexus be addressed?
- How do conflict and post-conflict interventions (militarised interventions, demilitarisation, political interventions – including but not limited to peace negotiations and agreements, exploitation of resources, direct foreign investments, loans from international financial institutions, development aid, humanitarian aid, national government’s own investments etc.) interfere with (or advance) enjoyment of human rights, in particular economic and social rights?
- How does the nexus between austerity measures and conflict look like in that particular context? How is it gendered?
- Is unpaid care economy part of the overall economic analysis by the government or international financial institutions? What does it look like? In a post-conflict context, it is inevitable that the care-economy is massive – are there specific caring needs that are filled by women rather than by the state? How can that change? What does the country need to invest in, in order to free the women from the burden of the unpaid care?
- How and for what does the country borrow money? What sort of conditionalities do the international financial institutions have for the national government in the given context? Are they conducive or are they hindering access to human rights, especially socio-economic rights?
- Who can we approach with our analyses? Can you map the local, national, regional, international influencers? Who are the “friendly” institutions/states? How do we move our analyses into more formal/public space?

This is a guide on how feminist political economy can strengthen feminist analysis of root causes to conflict and help envision pathways to sustainable peace. The starting point of this guide is WILPF's work in national context and international arena. However, it targets a broader audience of peacebuilders. It makes a case for why it is important to understand political economy of war and peace, and to use feminist political economy to envision demilitarised societies built on solidarity, justice, and equality.

Our intention is that this publication can help guide practitioners in their discussions and feminist political economy analysis of conflict and post-conflict contexts.

WILPF Geneva

Rue de Varembé 1
Case Postale 28
1211 Geneva 20
Switzerland

T: +41 (0)22 919 70 80

E: info@wilpf.org

WILPF New York

777 UN Plaza, New York
NY 10017 USA

T: +1 212 682 1265

