

Building back better through feminist entrepreneurship policy

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Received 29 May 2022
Revised 2 August 2022
Accepted 14 August 2022

Abstract

Purpose – Most feminists policies are aspirational. Deficiencies include vague terms of what constitutes ‘feminist’ within policy, ambiguous investment criteria, lack of consultation and the use of the binary definition of gender negating gender-diverse people (Tiessen, 2019). The purpose of this study is to identify parameters that characterize feminist entrepreneurship policies and to advance recommendations to operationalize these policies.

Design/methodology/approach – The COVID-19 pandemic has unveiled fragilities in the socio-economic gains that women entrepreneurs have achieved. Gender-regression is, in part, the product of entrepreneurship policies that fail to recognize the nature and needs of women entrepreneurs. To inform recovery measures, this article considers two research questions: what are the parameters of feminist entrepreneurship policies? and how can parameters of feminist entrepreneurship policy be operationalized in pandemic recovery measures? To inform the questions, the study draws on the academic literature and thematic analysis of three collective feminist action plans to operationalize ten parameters that characterize feminist entrepreneurship policy.

Findings – Supplanting ‘feminist’ for women in the construction of entrepreneurship policies, without specifications of how parameters differ dilutes government’s efforts to achieve gender quality and women’s economic empowerment. To inform policy, recommendations of three feminist recovery policies clustered under seven themes: importance of addressing root causes of inequality; need to invest in social and economic outcomes; economic security; enhancing access to economic resources; investment in infrastructure; inclusive decision-making; and need for gender disaggregated data to inform policy. Differences in policy priorities between collective feminist recovery plans and the academic literature are reported.

Research limitations/implications – The parameters of feminist entrepreneurial policy require further interpretation and adaptation in different policy, cultural and geo-political contexts. Scholarly attention might focus on advisory processes that inform feminist policies, such as measures to address gender-regressive impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. Research is also needed to understand the impacts of feminist policies on the lived experiences of diverse women entrepreneurs. Limitations: The study design did not incorporate viewpoints of policymakers or capture bureaucratic boundary patrolling practices that stymie feminist policies. Thematic analysis was limited to three feminist recovery plans from two countries.

Practical implications – Recommendations to operationalize feminist entrepreneurship policies in the context of pandemic recovery are described.

Originality/value – Ten parameters of feminist entrepreneurship policy are explored. The conceptual study also advances a framework of feminist entrepreneurship policy and considers boundary conditions for when and how the parameters are applicable.

Keywords Self-employment, Gender theory, Womens entrepreneurship, Feminist economics

Paper type Conceptual paper

1. Introduction

The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and European Commission (EC) report that if women were as active in business creation as a group of 30–49 year old men, an additional 26 million people would be engaged in early-stage entrepreneurship within the OECD member economies (OECD and EC, 2021). These intergovernmental organizations attribute gender gaps in entrepreneurial engagement to challenges that women experience in accessing financial markets, acquiring skills and



operating businesses. The report concludes that sexism permeates entrepreneurial ecosystems, structural challenges that are exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. The McKinsey Global Institute estimates that a gender-regressive scenario in which no action is taken to counter the impacts of the pandemic will dilute \$1 trillion in global GDP, while advancing gender equality will contribute \$13 trillion to global GDP by 2030 (Albaz *et al.*, 2020). Fragility in gains that women entrepreneurs are achieving are, in part, due to weak policies across institutions, including governments. Most countries lack women entrepreneurship strategies (Global Women's Enterprise Policy Research Group (GWEP) and Organization for Economic Coordination and Development (OECD), 2021; Women 20(W20), 2022).

Resolving structural inequalities requires policies that support *all* entrepreneurs. According to activist entrepreneur Dr. Kristen Liesch (2022), building equitable ecosystems requires consciousness raising and double-crossing the system. Conscious raising implies sharing lived experiences about inequity and inequality. Double-crossing the system refers to making changes from within. Entrepreneurship scholars are well positioned to document the lived experiences of diverse women and to advise policymakers about gendered knowledge systems and inclusive entrepreneurship policies. Yet, few studies examine gender biases in entrepreneurship policies (GWEP and OECD, 2021) or policy consultation processes. In response, this inaugural IJGE Ambassador article considers two research questions: 1) what are the parameters of feminist entrepreneurship policies? and 2) how can parameters of feminist entrepreneurship policy be operationalized in pandemic recovery measures? The rationale for this study is supported by calls for theory and policy frameworks that address the needs of women-owned micro-, small- and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) (Henry *et al.*, 2022; Orser, 2017; Pettersson *et al.*, 2017). Calás *et al.* (2009, p. 554) write, for example, "more rather than fewer theoretical frameworks are needed for exploring the varieties of social change that entrepreneurship".

To inform the literature, this article expands on the theoretical concept of entrepreneurial feminism (Orser and Elliott, 2015) by drawing on a portfolio of studies that explore policy, gender, feminism and entrepreneurship policy. Thematic analysis of three feminist pandemic recovery plans (FRPs) published in the United States and Canada incorporates practitioners' viewpoints and illustrates ways to action feminist entrepreneurship policy in the context of pandemic recovery. The article concludes with a description of a framework of feminist entrepreneurship policy. Boundary conditions for when and how insights are applicable, as well as implications for future research are considered. This study also identifies differences in the priorities between entrepreneurship scholars and community-based feminist practitioners. The latter were seen to prioritize social models of entrepreneurship with little focus on self-employed or growth-oriented women entrepreneurs.

2. Literature review

For over 30 years, entrepreneurship policies have been framed primarily through the experiences and expectations of men (Campbell, 1988; Walker and Joyner, 1999; Alsos *et al.*, 2013). Policy reforms that are attuned to intersectional influences in venture creation are needed (Coleman *et al.*, 2019; W20, 2022) [1]. An assessment of women's enterprise policies in 27 economies, for example, concluded that most entrepreneurship policies and programs, where available, miss the mark in responding to differentiated needs in and among groups of women founders (GWEP and OECD, 2021). Women are typically assumed to be a homogenous group (Mirchandani, 1999; Ahl and Marlowe, 2012; Hughes *et al.*, 2012), an oversight that has been exposed through pandemic relief measures (OECD, 2020a; 2020b; UN Women, 2020). Most women's enterprise policies and programs are premised on addressing entrepreneurial deficits or supporting job-creating firms (Foss *et al.*, 2019;

Henry *et al.*, 2017, 2022) without consideration of structural inequalities in the ecosystem, including within publicly funded support intermediaries (e.g. industry associations, development organizations, training programs).

Global movements, such as #MeToo and Black Lives Matter, calls for decolonization and the need for inclusive measures to 'build back better' are pressing governments to reform entrepreneurship policies. This includes measures that readdress the historical privileging of some entrepreneurs at the expense of underrepresented, marginalized and underestimated women founders. Compared to men, for example, women were less likely to qualify for emergency relief funding due to eligibility criteria (e.g. arbitrary revenue thresholds, limits on contractors, solo and self-employed workers) (Isele and Dubois, 2020; GWEP and OECD, 2021). At the same time, many women continue to juggle caregiving and homemaking "while they are scrambling to save their businesses" (Manolova *et al.*, 2020, p. 384).

To inform *feminist entrepreneurship policies*, this study incorporates identities of gender-diverse women, as specified by Sultana and Ravanera (2020), including Two-Spirit, non-binary people, Indigenous peoples, women who are Black, aging out of foster care or have a disability, or who are an immigrant, migrant, refugee, transgender, lesbian, low income, young or a senior or who is a student. While the focus is gender and feminist entrepreneurship policy, it is understood that gender is only one identity attribute and that other intersectional influences are reflected in the experiences of entrepreneurs. The next section describes the theoretical underpinning of entrepreneurial feminism and policy.

2.1 Theoretical considerations

Feminist perspectives are helpful in challenging assumed objectivity and unearthing biases that disadvantage women (Ahl and Nelson, 2015; Pettersson *et al.*, 2017; Orser, 2017). In the context of this study, Calás *et al.* (2009) categorize feminist perspectives into two paradigms: *entrepreneurship as positive economic activity* and *entrepreneurship as social change*. The first incorporates neo-liberal, psychoanalytic and radical feminist theories (Calás *et al.*, 2009). Within entrepreneurship as a positive economic activity, policy mandates are made typically to enhance productivity and stimulate economic growth. Governments often do so by introducing measures to increase the number of women-owned start-ups, favoring scalable, innovative and technology-based SMEs (Coleman *et al.*, 2019; Foss *et al.*, 2019). McKinsey & Company captures this paradigm by characterizing "well-performing" entrepreneurship ecosystems as "... boosting the business confidence of SMEs, enabling the growth of SMEs—in general and for high performers—and increasing the competitiveness of SMEs" (Albaz *et al.*, 2020, n.p.). In the context of pandemic recovery measures, for example, public expenditures are rationalized through anticipated economic outcomes (e.g. revenue stability, employment) while cognitive (e.g. personal agency, entrepreneurial mindset), non-cognitive (e.g. enhanced skills and competencies) and social outcomes (e.g. health and wellbeing, community) are of little or secondary importance.

The second paradigm—entrepreneurship as social change—encompasses socialist, post-structuralist and transnational feminist perspectives (Calás *et al.*, 2009). Entrepreneurship policies are predicated on the objective of transforming social norms, stereotypes, cultural conditions, institutions and economic structures that perpetuate the subordination of women and girls (Pettersson *et al.*, 2017). This perspective infers that policy should support the empowerment and well-being of women and not merely economic outputs. In the context of Aboriginal and Indigenous feminist policies, for example, measures must consider gender and self-determination, sovereignty, nationhood and community.

Both paradigms implicitly assume economic outcomes, but in different ways. Entrepreneurship as positive economic activity emphasizes the role of individual firms within economies. Entrepreneurship as social change emphasizes macro institutional and structural factors that impede women's economic empowerment. Overlaps between these

perspectives provide a gateway for *entrepreneurial feminism*, a theoretical paradigm that focuses on enacting socio-economic change *through* entrepreneurship. In doing so, women act as change agents to create social, economic, cultural and other benefits for girls, women and others. This third perspective is now described.

2.2 Entrepreneurial feminism [2]

Feminism assumes that the goals of equality and economic empowerment must underlie policies. Entrepreneurial feminism differs from neo-liberal, psychoanalytic and radical feminist theories by focusing on *enacting socio-economic change*. Entrepreneurial feminism views founders as proponents of change within gendered entrepreneurial ecosystems. Women are re-creating and redefining rules of the marketplace through firm governance, resource acquisition, relationship building and market positioning (Orser *et al.*, 2011; Elliott and Orser, 2018). Entrepreneurial feminism challenges idealized masculine or feminized role models for entrepreneurs (Lewis, 2014). Policy frameworks predicated on entrepreneurial feminism lend to multiple social, economic and perceptual changes. Building on these initial properties, the next section considers the related domain of feminist policies.

2.3 International feminist policies

To date, feminist policies have focused on *international assistance* and *trade*. Enacted by Sweden (in 2014), Canada (in 2017) and Mexico (in 2020), feminist international assistance targets funding to explicitly benefit girls and women (Thompson and Clement, 2019). This includes self-employed women and women-owned SMEs. The objective of addressing gender inequalities within households, communities, institutions, legal systems and markets underscores most feminist international assistance measures (Thomson, 2020). Canadian international assistance policy, for example, is based on principles of treating women's economic empowerment as an end in itself by supporting women's agencies (such as, feminist collective organizations) recognizing intersectionality within inequality, supporting data collection and organizational accountability (Tiessen, 2019). Under current provisions, 95% of Canadian 'feminist' international assistance investments are mandated to integrate gender equality and empowerment of women and girls in programming.

Feminist trade policies, enacted by Sweden (in 2019) and Canada (2021), seek to enhance market access, adjust tariffs that tend to be disproportionately higher on goods consumed by women compared to those consumed by men, create gender-balanced trade activities (e.g. export promotion and delegations) and to mandate gender-based assessment of trade agreements.

To date, however, most feminist assistance and trade policies are aspirational. Deficiencies include vague terms of what constitutes 'feminist' within policy, ambiguous investment parameters or funding adjudication criteria and the use of the binary definition of gender negating gender-diverse people (Tiessen, 2019). Lack of consultation is also reported (Tiessen, 2019). To inform policy design, the next section describes the approach employed to demarcate parameters that characterize feminist policies.

2.4 Parameters of feminist policy

To strengthen interventions, Kilty (2014) argues that feminist research should incorporate three elements: *positionality* defined as recognizing differences among women and the situatedness or contexts of their oppressions; *politics* defined as politicizing social, economic, scientific and legal issues through deliberate action; and *praxis* defined as working to enact social change regarding the politicized social, economic, scientific and legal issues. To demonstrate relevance to policy design, this section presents illustrative content drawn from the entrepreneurship literature that align with each of these elements or themes.

Positionality identifies intersectional influences among genders, gendered processes of business ownership (Calás *et al.*, 2009) and the masculinization and feminization of venture creation processes (Bird and Brush, 2002; Bruni *et al.*, 2004). Positionality infers centering equality, economic empowerment and LGBTQ2+ rights as underlying elements of entrepreneurship, acknowledging influences that further situate subordination, such as geography (rural, remote, or urban settings), citizenship status (newcomers, immigrants), race, age, persons with disabilities, settlers versus Indigenous peoples and education (Ahl and Nelson, 2015; Pettersson *et al.*, 2017; El-Ahmed and Nabris, 2019). This requires positioning or embedding gender in the design of policy to “get back the political project” within multiple policy domains (Mukhopadhyay, 2016, p. 86). In the context of women’s entrepreneurship, this includes trade, finance, broadband, procurement, education, health, social services, digital infrastructure, education, training, among other policy domains (Ljunggren *et al.*, 2010; Rowe, 2018; W20, 2022) [3].

Informing feminist entrepreneurship policies necessitates acknowledging power differentials (Harquail, 2019; Manolova *et al.*, 2020) to construct strategies to redress imbalances evidenced in entrepreneurial ecosystems, including patriarchal policy norms that perpetuate inequalities (Harcourt, 2016; Institute for Competitiveness and Prosperity, 2019; International Finance Corporation (IFC), 2020; GWEP and OECD, 2021). To design feminist entrepreneurship policy, decision makers must understand the ways in which gender influences are embedded in venture creation processes, including in markets, money, management, motherhood and meso-/macro-environments (Bird and Brush, 2002; Brush *et al.*, 2009, 2010; Lewis, 2014). Understanding extends to the influence of policy on material, perceptual, contextual and relational outcomes (Mayoux, 2000; Ahl and Nelson, 2010; El-Ahmed and Nabris, 2019).

Politics is echoed in the assertion of “Nothing about us without us” (Weber, 2016; Herbert, 2017). Politics reflects the politicizing of social, economic, scientific and legal issues through deliberate action. This element is consistent with the hallmarks of entrepreneurial feminism, that actions must lever women’s experiences as valid knowledge “in its own right” (Calás and Smircich, 1989, p. 7) and respond to *policy* recommendations advanced through advocacy. Politics calls for transparent and inclusive consultation processes to inform policy (Cirera and Qasim, 2014). Parameters include policies and regulations to promote equality and empowerment of women and girls, such as mandated reporting using gender and sex-disaggregated data (W20, 2022). This is because such reporting enables advocates to hold government leaders accountable for the inclusion of women entrepreneurs (Marlow *et al.*, 2008; Tiessen, 2019; UN Women, 2018). Actions benefit from entrepreneurship policy frameworks that cut across public policy domains that impact women (W20, 2022) including income protection, sexual and reproductive health, gender-based violence and caregiving (El-Ahmed and Nabris, 2019; Isele and Dubois, 2020).

Praxis is defined as working to *enact* social change. Social change is a product of advocacy and building of communities (e.g. women-focused capital fund or mentoring programs). Two key parameters identified in the entrepreneurship literature that align with this element are: the need to fund women-focused intermediaries (e.g. sector, feminist, grassroots, collective, co-operative and social enterprise organizations) (Rao and Sander, 2016; Henry *et al.*, 2017; Coleman *et al.*, 2019); and the need to create mechanisms that enable women to act as effective change agents to re-create practices and rules of marketplaces (e.g. exchanges predicated on social and utilitarian outcomes, such as co-operatives, non-profits and hybrid enterprises versus prioritizing personal wealth creation through for-profit ventures) (Orser and Elliott, 2015; Lewis, 2014; Harquail, 2019).

Building on these insights, Table 1 summarizes the parameters that characterize feminist entrepreneurship policy. The descriptive attributes are structured using the elements of feminist research advanced by Kilty (2014). Given space limitations, illustrative sources that inform the

ten parameters identified in the literature are specified in the left column. The findings inform the first research question, “What are the parameters of feminist entrepreneurship policies?” The next section explores the question, “How can the parameters of feminist entrepreneurship policy be operationalized in pandemic recovery measures?”

To consider ways to operationalize feminist entrepreneurship policy, thematic assessment of three feminist pandemic recovery plans (FRP) was undertaken. Recommendations are timely, given women are disproportionately impacted by the pandemic compared to men. *Global Entrepreneurship Monitor*, for example, reports that women were 20% more likely than men to report a business closure due to the pandemic (Elam, 2021). *GWEP and OECD* (2021, p. 11) reports that “. . . emergency policy support measures for entrepreneurs and small business owners were gender biased, such that women had greater difficulties accessing relief. The combination of greater impacts on women-owned businesses and uneven access to COVID-19 support measures may result in the pandemic erasing much of the progress made in strengthening women’s entrepreneurship over recent years”. Self-described feminist recovery plans offer the opportunity to consider policy priorities advanced by multiple, collective feminist organizations, recommendations focused explicitly on gender biases in policy and policies to address gender-regressive impacts of the pandemic.

3. Methodology

The proceeding sections summarized the theoretical underpinnings and parameters of feminist entrepreneurial policy. This section focuses on recommendations to *operationalize* those parameters in the context of pandemic recovery. FRPs were identified using Google search terms “feminist”, “small business” “entrepreneurship” “pandemic”, “recovery” and “policy”. All plans were published between 2020 and 2021. Consistent with the methodology employed by Henry *et al.* (2017, 2021) to assess women enterprise policies the researcher examined the document texts according to type, focus, themes, recommendations and contributions. Four FRPs were identified, indicating a lack of *feminist entrepreneurship* policy studies. One document, *Northern Island (NI) Feminist Recovery Plan* [4], was reviewed and consequently rejected. While the document emphasized economic justice, health, equality, Brexit and international good practices, it advanced few policy recommendations to support entrepreneurs. This was surprising given the plan cited United Kingdom labor force survey data, stating that “self-employed people have been hardest hit and levels of self-employed people in Northern Ireland have reduced to 11% of all workers, compared to 26% pre-pandemic” (p. 29). The plan cautioned that “Given the drastic reduction in people being self-employed due to the pandemic, there is a risk of having very few women entrepreneurs in Northern Ireland as we recover from COVID-19” (p. 31) and advised the government to “support entrepreneurship development.” No details were provided. Descriptions of the three feminist recovery plans (FRPs) incorporated in this study follow.

3.1 Feminist recovery planning

All FRPs were situated in North America (United States and Canada) and focused on measures to support women due to generalized impacts of the pandemic. FRP1 was published by the United States Hawai’i State Commission on the Status of Women (2020): *Building Bridges, not Walking on Backs: A Feminist Economic Recovery Plan for COVID-19*. The plan’s purpose was to “prioritize greater social well-being as key to the economy” and present the “voices of those most impacted by COVID-19, including women, girls, femme-identified and nonbinary people, racialized women/women of color and Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander and immigrant women in Hawai’i which were seen as missing in discussions about recovery planning (pp. 1–2). FRP1 prioritized investment in economic supports, funds and infrastructure for high-risk groups, parents and caregivers, health and healthcare programs, institutions, providers and caregivers,

Elements of feminist policy*	Parameters of feminist entrepreneurship policies	Illustrative references
<i>Positionality</i> Recognise gendered contexts of oppression	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Center gender equality, women's economic empowerment and LGBTQ2+ rights as underlying elements of entrepreneurship policy, acknowledging intersectional influences that situate subordination Redress power differentials within entrepreneurial ecosystems, including social norms, political and economic structures and cultural conditions that perpetuate inequalities Acknowledge gendered processes within venture creation and occupational stereotypes that impact opportunity recognition and enterprise performance Employ broad and inclusive definitions of innovation, honoring innovations important to women and women's innovative contributions Leverage opportunities to influence multiple impacts of policy, including individual, material, perceptual, contextual and relational outcomes, recognising women's economic empowerment is an end in itself 	<p>Ahl and Nelson (2015), Pettersson <i>et al.</i> (2017)</p> <p>International Finance Corporation (2020), Institute for Competitiveness and Prosperity (2019)</p> <p>Bird and Brush (2002), Brush <i>et al.</i> (2009, 2010), GWEP and OECD (2021), Lewis (2014)</p> <p>Ljunggren <i>et al.</i> (2010), Rowe (2018)</p>
<i>Politics</i> Politicking through deliberate actions to drive policy reform	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Mandate gender/sex-disaggregated data to enable reporting on access to resources, including social and financial capital, talent and digital technologies, holding intermediaries accountable for engaging diverse women entrepreneurs Construct integrated policy strategies that incorporate multiple policy domains (government agencies) that impact women entrepreneurs, including small business, self-employment, innovation, trade, income protection, healthcare, gender-based violence, financial/digital literacy, procurement and caregiving 	<p>Ahl and Nelson (2015), Mayoux (2000), Nelson (1995), El-Ahmed and Nabris (2019)</p> <p>GWEP and OECD (2021), Marlow <i>et al.</i> (2008), Tiessen (2019), W20 (2022)</p> <p>El-Ahmed and Nabris (2019), Isele and Dubois (2020), GWEP and OECD (2021)</p>
<i>Praxis</i> Work to enact social change regarding the politicizing of issues	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Facilitate broad consultations: reform must be a collective process to understand multiple contexts of subordination. Leverage feminist, gender, women's enterprise and policy expertise in policy design and associated funding decisions Fund ecosystem intermediaries, including women-focused or targeted small business support services (e.g. feminist, grassroots, collective, co-operative and social enterprise support organizations) Create mechanisms to enable women entrepreneurs to be change agents in re-creating rules of marketplaces. Support market exchanges predicated on economic, social and utilitarian outcomes (e.g. co-operatives, social enterprises) 	<p>Cirera and Qasim (2014), GWEP and OECD (2021), Herbert (2017), Weber (2016)</p> <p>El-Ahmed and Nabris (2019), Henry <i>et al.</i> (2017), Rao and Sander (2016)</p> <p>Harquail (2019), Lewis (2014), Nelson (1995), Orser and Elliott (2015)</p>

Table 1.
Elements and parameters of feminist entrepreneurship policies

*Source(s): Kilty (2014)

prison release programs, housing, shelter and public services, access to digital and ICT technologies and support needs of Native Hawaiians.”

FRP2, *A feminist Economic Recovery Plan for Canada: Making the Economy Work for Everyone* (Sultana and Ravanera, 2020), was published by the Young Women’s Christian’s Association (YMCA) and Institute for Gender and the Economy (GATE) at the University of Toronto [5]. The plan’s mandate was to “realign” the economy: “As Canada rebuilds, we can realign the economy around equity for all Canadians. . . . offering an intersection perspective on recovery, “while ensuring the needs of all people in Canada are considered in the formation of policy” (Forward, n.p.). The plan identified eight pillars of policy reform, categorized as: intersectionality, understanding power, addressing root causes of systemic racism, care work is essential work, investing in good jobs, fighting the shadow (mental health) pandemic, bolstering small business, strengthening infrastructure and diverse voices in decision-making.

FRP3, *This Economic Labour Hurts the Arch of Our Backs: A Feminist Economic Recovery Plan for COVID-19* (Feminists Deliver, 2020), was published by a grassroots coalition of feminist organizations in British Columbia, Canada. Inspired by FRP1, FRP3 differed from FRP2 in emphasizing regional (provincial) versus national policy recommendations. Priorities were summarized as support for community-led, gender-based violence prevention, reorientation towards a caring economy, promoting women’s financial independence, increasing living wages and supports for displaced workers, funding social entrepreneurship, investing in social infrastructure (e.g. childcare, housing, public transit), providing free, universally, accessible contraceptive of choice and providing stable funding to community services. To inform the second research question, the three plans were reviewed with consideration of the parameters of feminist entrepreneurship policy.

3.2 Data analysis

Thematic analysis entailed dividing the data into codes to identify and label recurrent words, themes and concepts: “scanning paragraphs for units of meaning relevant to answering the research question which are then denoted (or abstracted) into descriptive codes” (Harding and Whitehead, 2013, p. 133). The analytical technique employed is deemed “particularly useful for certain specific approaches, such as phenomenology” where the researcher is encouraged to use this style ‘free-form’ to guide analysis (Harding and Whitehead, 2013). The parameters of feminist entrepreneurship policy (Table 1) provided the initial categories for the analysis. A manual first cycle coding process included coding phrases, full sentences and single paragraph blocks of text. Following line-by-line coding and scanning of paragraphs, abstracted codes were grouped or categorized and a tentative label allocated. Subsequent coding cycles broke down content into smaller bodies of texts. Keywords of text content were used to compare alignment with the ten parameters identified earlier in the broader entrepreneurship literature. Third-order domains, second-order themes and first order and illustrative verbatim statements were identified. Refinement of the principles was ongoing. Having completed this phase of the analysis, cross-case comparisons were undertaken to identify differences and similarities among the plans.

4. Findings

Policy recommendations are clustered under seven themes: importance of addressing root causes of inequality; need to invest in social and economic outcomes; economic security; enhancing access to economic resources; investment in infrastructure; inclusive decision-making; and need for gender disaggregated data to inform policy. A description of findings categorized by the parameters of feminist entrepreneurship policy specified in Table 2 follows.

First order: Verbatim statements	2nd order: Subthemes	3rd order: Domains
Implement recovery strategies rooted in intersectional feminism, anti-oppression and decolonisation (FRP3)	Causes of oppression	Intersectional influences
Increase awareness of different business models such as co-operative enterprises which privilege voluntary and open membership, democratic member control and member economic participation. (FRP1)	Alternative business models	Invest in social and economic outcomes
Increased support and investment in social entrepreneurs, social cooperatives and social enterprises (FRP3)	Shared value enterprises	
Lower the uniform national eligibility requirement of Employment Insurance to 360 h and increase the benefit rate from 55% to 85% of earnings for low-income earners. (FRP1)	Criteria for unemployment insurance eligibility	Economic security
Raise the minimum wage . . . improve income assistance rates; respond to the demands for migrants' rights including recognising foreign credentials, full status for all, providing paid sick days and paid family leave	Wages, credentials	
Target support to business owners from underrepresented groups . . . in the form of emergency funding, as well as skills training and mentorship. (FRP1)	Targeted funding	
Legislate at least 14 paid sick days and paid family leave for all workers. (FRP1)	Sick days, parental leave	
Direct funding to businesses in women-majority sectors. (FRP1)	Targeted sector funding	
Legislate job protection for individuals with disabilities who are unable to fulfill job duties due to the risk of contracting COVID-19 as well as systemic barriers such as lack of access to accessible transportation. (FRP1)	Job protection for disabled	
Create minimum set-asides in public procurement spending (e.g. 15%) towards businesses led by women . . .	Access to markets	Economic resources
Ensure equitable access to jobs, training and education opportunities to gain long-term sustainable benefits from economic development projects. (FRP1)	Access to jobs, training and education	
Pay for retraining and professional development across sectors for those who have experienced job loss through employment insurance (EI). For people who are not eligible for EI, create other pathways to financially support re-skilling and re-training with greater incentives for workers in care-economy based sectors such as childcare and elder care (FRP1)	Reskilling, professional development	
Address the digital divide in Canada with meaningful subsidies and commit to realizing 100% national broadband access, especially in rural, remote and Northern communities. (FRP1)	Access to Internet	

Table 2.
Thematic analysis of
feminist pandemic
recovery plans

(continued)

First order: Verbatim statements	2nd order: Subthemes	3rd order: Domains
Enhance women, sexual and gender minorities' access to capital outside the commercial sex industry and women's access to jobs in male-dominated industries: green-technologies and trade jobs. (FRP3)	Access to financial capital	
Invest in organizations that advance gender equity, intersectional feminism and women's rights in Canada through investments in core multi-year funding. (FRP1)	Capacity building among women's organizations	Infrastructure support
An investment in care supports not only children and families, but also economic development overall	Support for caregiving	
Shifting and adjusting funds for re-training in sustainable sectors such as green jobs, trades and self-entrepreneurship. (FRP3)	Investment in retraining	
Core funding needs to be allocated to community-based organizations which play a crucial role in the prevention and intervention of ending violence. (FRP3)	Address gender-based violence	
No cuts to social services, including services for domestic violence and for maternal, sexual, reproductive, mental health and childcare. (FRP3)	Sustain social, child and healthcare services	
Restructuring domestic tax rates and tax paying units. (FRP1)	Restructure tax regimes	
Increase awareness of co-operative business models and create tools to support businesses that want to convert to this model including empowering the Business Development Bank of Canada to support co-operative conversions. (FRP1)	Mandate development bank to support collective and social enterprises	
Gender balance in national COVID-19 economic recovery task forces and establishing a Gender Advisory Council. (FRP1)	Engage women in consultation	Inclusive decision-making

Table 2.

4.1 Center policy on equity, inclusion and empowerment

Consistent with the academic literature, all three feminist recovery plans articulated the need to 're-value' women's work and to prioritize economic and social outcomes. FRP1 sought to address gendered omissions in economic recovery plans. A motive of FRP2 was to "support policies that enable the decolonization and indigenizing of recovery efforts". Rationales for policy reform differed somewhat. The causes of inequalities were expansive, with attribution to colonization, sexism, ableism, patriarchy, homophobia, bi phobia, queer phobia, White supremacy, systemic racism, colonialism, capitalism, heteronormativity and forms of structural discrimination and violence.

4.2 Redress power differentials

Disproportionate effects of the pandemic on women were attributed to high rates of employment in essential services, such as, the "5Cs: caring, cashiering, catering, cleaning and clerical functions" (Sultana and Ravanera, 2020, p. 1); employment in sectors characterized by mass layoffs and job loss; increase incidences of gender-based violence, sex trafficking, sexual harassment and coercion by landlords; and limited access to shelter and healthcare

(e.g. maternal, neo-natal, family planning) and safe housing due to gender-based violence, healthy food and clean water.

4.3 Recognize gendered processes in venture creation

All three feminist recovery plans emphasized need for consultations and funding programs to support Indigenous or Aboriginal peoples, with emphasis on decolonization policies. Recommendations associated with self-employment and small businesses focused on provision of relief funding, education, training and skills development, investment in “women-majority” sectors (e.g. caregiving, essential work) and social value ventures and strategic procurement. FRP2, for example, recommended “minimum set-asides in public procurement spending (e.g. 15%) towards businesses led by women, racialized people and other equity-seeking groups” (Sultana and Ravanera, 2020, p. 24). FRP1 recommended 20% pro rata share of the COVID-19 response funds targeted at Native Hawaiian women.

4.4 Honor innovations important to women

Priorities reflected country differences. FRP1 (State of Hawaii, United States) emphasized divesting away from military, tourism and luxury accommodations and increasing investment in childhood education, healthcare (e.g. midwifery, maternal and neonatal care), eldercare, shelter and access to digital technology. FRP2 (Canada) emphasized investment in essential and care work, funding to address gender-based violence and a need to bolster small businesses and strengthen social infrastructure (Sultana and Ravanera, 2020). FRP3 focused on energy and trade and key sectors of Western Canada (Feminists Deliver, 2020). Only one FRP referenced innovation: “Many innovations have been led by women and by Black, Indigenous and People of Colour, who have been demonstrating sustainable models for a more inclusive economy for many years” (Feminists Deliver, 2020, p. 6).

4.5 Focus on social (non-economic) impacts of policy

All three feminist recovery plans sought social change through policy reform, reflected in perceptual, contextual and relational outcomes. The regional contexts of entrepreneurship (Welter, 2011) including temporal, historical (e.g. colonization) and regulatory influences were evidenced in social (non-economic) impacts. For example, FRP1 emphasized the presence of military, tourism and luxury real estate and access to affordable healthcare (e.g. midwifery, maternal and neonatal) (State of Hawaii, 2020). FRP3 emphasized energy and trade, both leading sectors in Western Canada (Feminists Deliver, 2020). FRP2 referenced Indigenous Services Canada water advisories notifications on Indigenous peoples’ reserves, noting issues of sanitation and housing insecurity that have become particularly acute during the pandemic. Fewer references to healthcare were cited in FRP2 and FRP3 compared to FRP1. This may be a function of the provision of universal healthcare in Canada versus the United States.

4.6 Monitor policy using gender-disaggregated data

The feminist recovery plans called for gender disaggregated data, including “intersectional social identities” (Sultana and Ravanera, 2020). To guide data collection and reporting, commissions and advisory bodies were referenced. FRP1 cited state obligations to Native Hawaiians, known as the kānaka maoli (public land trust revenue guidelines). FRP2 cited associated obligations under *Reclaiming Power and Place: The Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls* (2015) and United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People (UNDRIP).

4.7 Construct coherent and integrated policy frameworks

Recommendations incorporated policies associated with education, health, ecology, health, childcare, employment insurance, sick days and family leave and skills development and training. Interestingly, no reference was made to feminist international assistance or feminist trade policies. It was also notable that while the plans emphasized economic and social security within paid employment, surprisingly few recommendations were directed at addressing loss of self-employment earnings, particularly among women who operate for-profit enterprises.

4.8 Facilitate change as a collective process

Lack of consultation with marginalized and disadvantaged groups in the provision of relief measures was described as inequitable and discriminatory. FRP1 called for gender balance in economic recovery task forces and the need to establish a Gender Advisory Council.

4.9 Leverage feminist, gender and women's enterprise policy expertise

Legitimacy to speak on behalf of women was signaled in the description of the consultation processes, the size and scope of the commissioning agency (FRP1, FRP2) and lists of plan contributors (FRP3). Government funding recommendations targeted organizations that advance gender equity, intersectional feminism, women's rights, gender-based violence, child/eldercare and mental and maternal healthcare.

4.10 Create mechanisms for women to be change agents

Enhancing economic security was associated with access to unemployment relief, accepting credentials of newcomers and migrant workers and tax schemes that amortize personal and household earnings. Recommendations included lowering employment insurance eligibility criteria, job protection for disabled workers, increasing minimum wage rates, recognition of migrants' foreign credentials and employment benefits, such as paid sick days and family leave. Tax regulations focused on adjust after-tax earnings, as schedules were deemed to be discriminatory to women and particularly, low-income earners (e.g. restructuring tax rates to adjust for after-tax income "for all but the richest 10%") (Sultana and Ravanera, 2020, p. 19).

All three feminist recovery plans emphasized business and market exchange models predicated on social value, such as cooperatives, social value enterprises, non-profits and hybrid enterprises. FRP1 recommended that displaced workers be reemployed in "worker-owned cooperatives and other methods to share income generated more equitably" (State of Hawai'i, 2020, p. 3). FRP2 recommended funding to increase awareness of cooperative business models, create tools to convert businesses (assumed for-profit) to cooperatives and to empower the Business Development Bank of Canada (a crown corporation focused solely on SMEs) to "support co-operative conversions" (Sultana and Ravanera, 2020, p. 24). FRP3 recommended investment in self-entrepreneurship, social entrepreneurs and cooperative enterprises.

5. Discussion of findings

This study explores the parameters of feminist entrepreneurship policies. The study also observes priorities and differences in the recommendations advanced by entrepreneurship scholars and feminist collectives. The three feminist recovery plans examined emphasized social value models of enterprise. FRP1, for example, states "Social capital of interpersonal relationships, a shared sense of identity, a shared understanding, shared norms, shared values, trust, cooperation and reciprocity must form the heart of our new economic system beyond capitalism". Potential explanations for the emphasis on social and community ventures may reflect perceptions that entrepreneurship undermines gender equality. Some may assume that entrepreneurship is predicated solely on neo-liberal agendas versus other feminist

viewpoints (e.g. entrepreneurship as a mechanism for social change, women entrepreneurs as change agents). Recommendations were limited about *how* recovery policies can support self-employed women and for-profit, growth-oriented women-owned SMEs. The absence of the latter recovery measure recommendations may be a consequence of the consultation processes. There appeared to be limited engagement of women entrepreneurs in the representation of voices to inform recovery measures. Diverse entrepreneurs need seats at *all* tables in formulating recovery policies that impact the well-being of girls and women.

Omission of recommendations to support MSMEs is consequential. The emphasis on social enterprises overlooks a large group of women who have been affected disproportionately by the pandemic. Furthermore, feminist collective recommendations to encourage business start-ups and transform for-profits to cooperative or social enterprises are debatable. This directive fails to acknowledge the relatively precarious tenure of social enterprise start-ups, particularly among vulnerable groups of people. Research suggests, for example, that the ideas of individuals with prosocial motivations are less likely to evolve to operational status compared to conventional, for-profit entrepreneurs (Renko, 2013). Moreover, policies that encourage women to transform businesses from for-profit to non-profit are inconsistent with criticisms of 'warehousing' of women in non-profit services while leaving for-profit sectors to men. Caution is also warranted in driving recovery through policies predicated on increasing the number of self-employed women or investing in social enterprises, without recognition of the liabilities of newness and high rates of failure among young, small, service-oriented enterprises.

Not surprisingly, the FRPs called for funding to support women-focused organizations, citing historic devaluation of women's work and community, including the need for caregiving and quality and affordable daycare, eldercare, sick days and maternal healthcare. Recommendations to embed motherhood (e.g. maternal, neonatal healthcare); parenting (e.g. leave, home schooling); and family (e.g. child, eldercare) within entrepreneurship policies mirror longstanding recommendations of numerous non-governmental organizations (e.g. W20, 2021) and academics (Bird and Brush, 2002; Aldrich and Cliff, 2003; Brush *et al.*, 2009, 2010) and studies that have reported on the impacts of the pandemic on women entrepreneurs (Manolova *et al.*, 2020). Observations about the academic literature and thematic analysis present evidence that there remains a need to increase solidarity, clarify domains of gender expertise, integrate policy jurisdictions and enhance understanding about the contributions of women entrepreneurs, women's enterprise advocates and entrepreneurship scholars in informing pandemic recovery measures.

Finally, all FRPs emphasized anti-colonization measures and the need to support Aboriginal and Indigenous women. Recommendations reflected geo-specific contexts, including historical, cultural and social practices that perpetuate heteronormative, hierarchical and colonial practices. Recommendations also demonstrate the dynamic and evolving nature of feminist critique, evidenced in the engagement of Aboriginal and Indigenous women considering feminism and policy within gendered power relations and colonial patriarchy.

6. Conclusions

This study explores two research questions: what are the parameters of feminist entrepreneurship policies? and how can the parameters of feminist entrepreneurship policy be operationalized in pandemic recovery measures? The work offers an inventory of parameters to inform consultation processes, policy design and the assessment of entrepreneurship policies. The parameters of feminist entrepreneurship policy serve to operationalize recommendations specified by GWEP and OECD (2021). Recommendations of this 27-economy report include fostering an inclusive entrepreneurial culture, strengthening design and delivery of women entrepreneurship supports, building entrepreneurship skills and capacities for women entrepreneurs, facilitating access to finance for women entrepreneurs, expanding networks

for women entrepreneurs and building a supportive regulatory environment. The current study considers multiple ways to do so from an entrepreneurial feminist perspective. The study also summarizes recommendations to move COVID-19 recovery measures predicated on entrepreneurship as positive economic activity (Calás *et al.*, 2019) to a broader spectrum of social, economic, material and perceptual outcomes to support diverse women entrepreneurs.

Insights drawn from the academic literature and thematic analysis inform the conceptualization of a feminist entrepreneurship policy framework described in Figure 1. The parameters of feminist entrepreneurship policy are listed as policy priorities. Outcomes (impacts) of policy incorporate entrepreneurship as progressive economic activity, entrepreneurship as social change (Calás *et al.*, 2009) and entrepreneurs as change agents (Orser and Elliott, 2015). Aligned with recommendations to position women’s economic lives and well-being at the center of pandemic recovery, the framework depicts overlapping factors

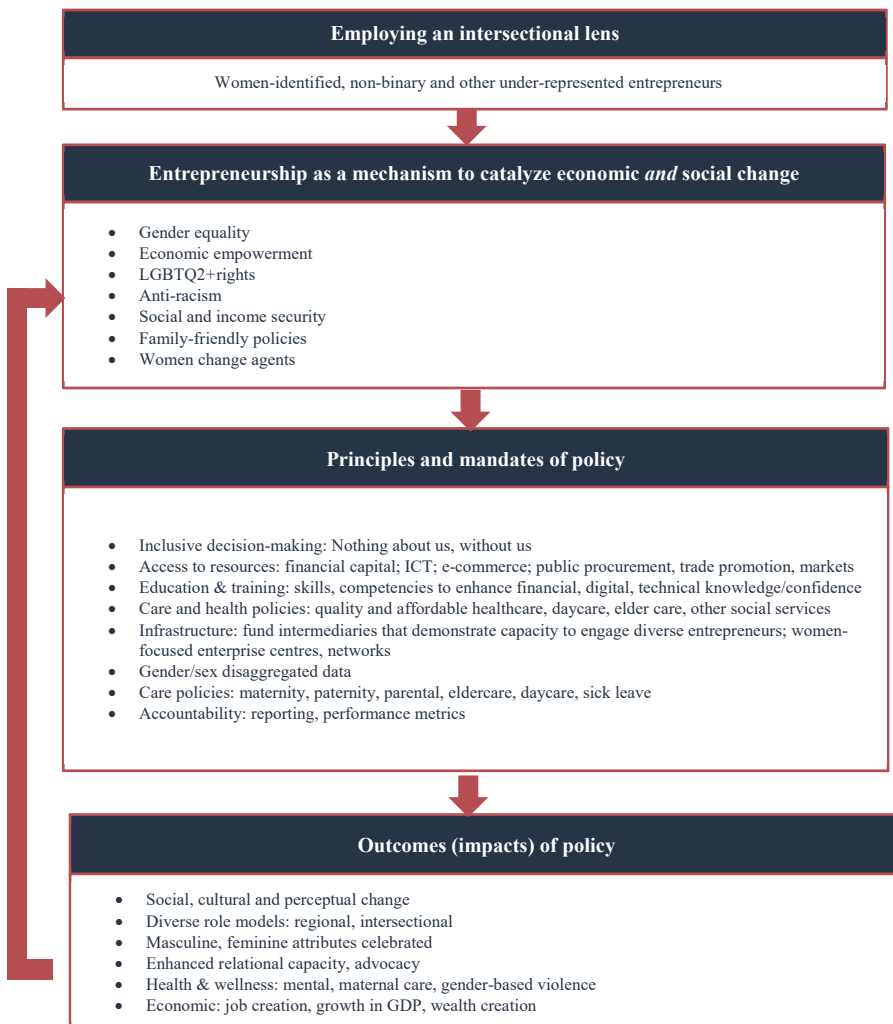


Figure 1.
Feminist entrepreneurship policy framework

that constrain women entrepreneurs. Intersectional considerations are positioned at the forefront of policy design. Outcomes are reflective of the tenets of entrepreneurial feminism, capturing individual, firm, institutional, regulatory and structural impacts, elements of policy consistent with good practices (Henry *et al.*, 2022).

Boundaries of the conceptual framework are notable. While the themes of *positionality* (recognizing gendered contexts of oppression), *politics* (change through deliberate actions to drive policy reforms) and *praxis* (enacting social change) have universal relevance to calls for gender-responsive entrepreneurship policies (GWEP and OECD, 2021), policies will differ across cultural and social contexts and among heterogeneous women entrepreneurs. For example, the perceived value of publicly funded childcare programs differs across cultural contexts. In some societies, caregiving is a family rather than government responsibility. The perceived value of strategic procurement policies is dependent on the level of government corruption. Types of enterprises supported and scale of investments will also differ, from sole traders who require micro-finance measures to support for women who operate globally oriented firms. Decolonization entrepreneurship policies differ based on historical and geo-political contexts.

The parameters of feminist entrepreneurship policy described in Table 1 and operationalized in Table 2 are depicted in Figure 1. The conceptual framework extends recovery measures to broader entrepreneurship policy, criteria that policymakers and advocates can reference to design entrepreneurship strategies. Scholars can employ the criteria to assess the status of equity, diversity and inclusion within existing entrepreneurship policies. Women's enterprise policy advocates can draw on the criteria to construct scorecards to report on policy platforms and to formulate plans to address policy gaps. Feminist advocacy groups can employ the criteria to revise recovery plans to incorporate the needs of entrepreneurs.

6.1 Study limitations

Several limitations are noted. First, the study does not incorporate viewpoints of policymakers nor capture bureaucratic boundary patrolling practices that stymie feminist policies (Lamont and Molnár, 2002). Such practices include an absence of government accountability and gender-based analysis of policies and investments and consultation to identify intersectional influences within and impacts of public policies. Second, the academic literature tended to position women against men, where men are the dominant group. Such comparisons subjugate women to secondary status, thereby "othering" women within policy (Richard, 2020) and leading to "boundary maintenance" where "durable inequality most often results from cumulative, individual and often unnoticed organizational processes" (Lamont and Molnár, 2002, p. 176). Third, the thematic analysis was limited to three FRPs published in two countries. Policy support for women entrepreneurs in Canada and the United States is high (GWEP and OECD, 2021). *Global Entrepreneurship Monitor* reports in *Women's Entrepreneurship 2020/21: Thriving through Crisis*, that rates of total early-stage entrepreneurial activity (TEA) among women compared to men are higher than global averages (Elam, 2021). Caution is warranted in assuming this study's findings are replicable in other geographic contexts. Finally, this study is informed from the perspective of a White, settler and feminist entrepreneurship scholar. Interpreter bias cannot be ruled out (Van de Ven and Johnson, 2006).

6.2 Implications for research

Scholarship focusing on feminism and entrepreneurship policies are emergent area of academic inquiry (Henry *et al.*, 2017, 2022; Foss *et al.*, 2019; Coleman *et al.*, 2019). Scholarly interests reflect the need for system-level reforms. This study offers several topic domains for future consideration. The parameters of feminist entrepreneurial policy require interpretation in different historical, cultural and geo-political contexts. Policy research is needed to explore the associations among investment in well-being, caregiving and enterprise performance—

gendered associations evidenced in the disproportionate impacts of pandemic on women entrepreneurs. Scholarly attention might also focus on advisory processes that inform policies, particularly measures that seek to address gender-regressive impacts of the pandemic on women entrepreneurs. The literature found that research is also warranted to understand the relevance and impacts of existing feminist policies, such as feminist international assistance and feminist trade policies, on women entrepreneurs. Finally, the findings demonstrate that supplanting ‘feminist’ for ‘women’ in constructing entrepreneurship policies, without specifications of *how* parameters might differ, dilutes efforts to achieve equality and women’s economic empowerment.

Women entrepreneurs are the canaries in a coal mine within government mandates to ‘build back better.’ Purpose-built policies that (re)position gender equality, economic empowerment and LGBTQ2+ and Indigenous and Aboriginal peoples’ rights were at the heart of all three recovery measures. These too are litmus tests of the government’s abilities to move beyond traditional economic measures that privilege some at the expense of underrepresented, marginalized and underestimated groups of women entrepreneurs. The parameters of feminist entrepreneurship policy therefore challenge the epistemological orientation of early pandemic relief measures. Policymakers, scholars and feminist advocates are encouraged to incorporate the parameters of feminist entrepreneurship policy in designing policy platforms and research program. It is my hope that this article serves to inform women’s entrepreneurship policy frameworks and measures to construct more inclusive entrepreneurial ecosystems.

Notes

1. *Intersectional* refers to identities, structures and context that lead to discrimination, a metaphor to enhance understanding about how aspects of a person’s social and political identities create unique modes of discrimination, oppression and privilege (Crenshaw, 2016). Intersectionality is used to describe the ways in which women who are Black were segregated from employment in what was presented as Black men’s jobs and white women’s jobs and then excluded as plaintiffs that sought to broaden race and gender employment claims. The metaphor has been adapted to discussions about feminism, anti-poverty, anti-aggression, gender-based violence, social justice, etc.
2. The term *entrepreneurial feminism* was coined by Orser *et al.* (2011) and expanded on by Orser and Elliott (2015). The foundational case is Dr. Elaine Jolly, Professor of Obstetrics and Gynecology, University of Ottawa and Founding Director of the Shirley E. Greenberg Women’s Health Centre, The Ottawa Hospital, Canada. It is fitting that the theoretical underpinnings of this study are predicated on an exemplary feminist role model (Orser and Leck, 2010).
3. For example, to better support women-led micro-, small- and medium-sized enterprises, Women20 (W20) (2022), an official engagement group of G20, advances that member countries: allocate a minimum of 1% of the global minimum tax of 15% on corporations to fund women-owned MSMEs and scale-ups (e.g. corporate tax policy); commit \$350 million USD of additional funding to the World Bank ‘Women Entrepreneurs Finance Initiative’ (We-Fi) (e.g. international assistance policy) and establish gender-responsive public procurement (GRPP) programs and targets for women-owned and led MSMEs to a minimum of 10% by 2032 (e.g. supply chain, procurement policy).
4. Published by The Women’s Policy Group NI, the organization is composed of women working in policy and advocacy roles who seek to speak with a collective voice on key issues. Members include women from “trade unions, grassroots women’s organizations, women’s networks, feminist campaigning organizations, LGBT+ organizations, migrant groups, support service providers, NGOs, human rights and equality organizations and individuals”. It is notable that there is no representation of women founders, women SME owners or self-employed women.
5. Statistics Canada reports more similarities than differences among businesses owned by women and men. However, women were more likely to lay off a larger proportion of their workforce, rehire 50% or more of their laid-off employees and have more of their workforce working remotely during the pandemic (Znaty *et al.*, 2020).

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