



Our Message on International Women's Day March 8, 2021

We call for a new social compact that guarantees social protection, labour rights and women's human rights for all women in migration

On this International Women's Day, the Women in Migration Network (WIMN) once more calls on states to take bold, transformative action as worldwide, we seek a safe, equitable and just recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic and the social and economic crises it has further fueled. ***Now is not the time to "return" to an unjust "normal"***.

WIMN is a global, intersectional feminist human rights network that promotes women's human rights at the center of all migration and development policy and migrants' rights in feminist advocacy. We prioritize the interests of women in all their diversity and those of their families, in their various forms, who are affected by migration around the world.

More than a year into a global pandemic, the vaccine and a post-pandemic future are on the agenda. The crisis has exposed numerous systemic problems—including the informality in our economies, weak health care systems, lack of a social safety net, structural racism, gender discrimination, inhumane migration regimes and gaping inequalities between nations.

For migrant women, the past year's crisis has exacerbated the trauma, instability and uncertainty in their lives and those of their families—and longterm consequences are yet to be seen.

More than ever, we need inclusive, rights-based and gender-responsive approaches including durable social protections in countries of origin, transit and destination; robust labor protection frameworks; gender sensitive, rights-based immigration systems; emergency responses that contribute to regenerative, sustainable economies, clear checks on corporate power; and stronger democratic institutions. As we begin to also turn our attention to addressing the world's climate crisis, these commitments are also critical.

Migrant women are concentrated in both “essential workers” and “disposable workers” groups impacted by the pandemic. While professionals may have moved into their homes and continued to work on-line (with women doing triple duty as workers, care-providers and educators), “essential workers” found themselves in dramatically different circumstances. Jobs in health care, cleaning, elder care, farm labour, transit, shipping warehouses and more may have continued, but often without decent wages, paid sick or medical leave, access to health care or adequate protective gear. As restaurants, markets and retail stores shut down, low wage service workers, many of them migrant women of color, found themselves without jobs and with no safety net.

In some countries, migrant women work with bi-lateral labor contracts, such as domestic workers in the MENA region. When COVID-19 hit, they were suddenly without jobs, scrambling to return home even as borders were closed. Many were evicted from employers’ homes and left to fend for themselves without support; wage theft has been rampant.

The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the many systemic problems that have hit especially hard on groups most marginalized by race, ethnicity and migration status. Public health systems have been gutted by years of austerity programmes, privatized health care is rarely accessible to these marginalized populations. The lack of health care, environmental racism, overcrowded housing and work in unhealthy and often dangerous jobs has long put communities of color and migrant communities at higher risk—and higher COVID-19 death rates in some nations give testimony to the effect of these inequities.

On a global level, the gaping North/South divide and unequal global financial rules have left poorer nations scrambling to meet needs with limited external support. An early call for debt forgiveness to low-income countries was met with debt postponement, merely delaying a deeper crisis. This has meant little fiscal space for poor nations to offer stimulus packages and provide much-needed assistance—and too often, such assistance is out of reach for migrants, especially the undocumented.

While the roll-out of vaccines is opening a window to the decline of the coronavirus pandemic, the production, distribution and access issues have starkly highlighted existing inequalities within and between nations. As of mid-February, there were [4.2 billion doses of vaccine for 16% of the world population and only 2.5 billion doses for 84% of the world population](#). And within developed nations, race, class and migration-status disparities are gravely apparent. In New York City, for example, some white neighborhoods reportedly had up to 8 times the vaccination rate of predominantly Black neighborhoods in early 2021.

WIMN supports the United Nations Network on Migration call for States to “guarantee rapid, fair, and equitable access to vaccines for all and the inclusion of migrants, regardless of their status in their national COVID-19 vaccination programmes and other public health interventions”.

On International Women’s Day and beyond, we need permanent solutions that provide support and services to all, regardless of migration status, and that will close the gaps in protections that continue to exclude millions of migrants and undocumented migrants in particular.

Specifically, we call for a new social compact that guarantees social protection, labour rights and women’s human rights for all women in migration, regardless of status.

- **Vaccines** must be made available for all, regardless of status or ability to pay. Women, in particular, need permanent access to healthcare regardless of status or ability to pay, with strong investments in quality public health systems.
- **Labour rights** and protections including decent pay, sick pay, and long-term medical leave must be assured for all, regardless of status, and particularly for so-called “essential” workers. Work that is disproportionately performed by migrant women requires robust labour and health protections.
- Government at all levels must **address racism and xenophobia**, including social exclusion, violence against migrants and stigmatization of returned migrants, which has increased during the pandemic. This must go beyond “messaging” campaigns to include police training, legal accountability for hate crimes and investing in jobs, social protection and infrastructure. This includes addressing the digital divide experienced by migrant women and their families, as well as online digital harassment and violence.
- The **intersecting realities** of migrant women—who experience racism, exclusion as a migrant, religious intolerance, rejection due to sexual orientation or identity—must be addressed in policies and practice to ensure that rights can be claimed by ALL women in migration.
- We want programs and policies to address **gender-based violence** in all areas of migrant women’s lives, including institutional violence.
- The pandemic border closures that have stranded migrants or forced returns must be ended just as we urge the **regularization** of status of migrants working in destination countries and increased pathways for regular migration. We oppose “vaccine passports” that will further institutionalize inequalities across nation, gender, race and migratory status.
- Migrants must urgently be released from detention in the context of the pandemic, and states must **end policies of criminalization, detention and deportation of migrants, securitization and barring of asylum and refugees.**
- Migrant women are vital change agents and we can **learn from and financially support** the models of mutual aid and solidarity they have built during the pandemic.

- **Women must be at the center of decision-making—with their diverse roles** as providers, care givers, home keepers, and essential workers in both the formal and informal economy, women, including LGBTQI women, understand how the crisis impacts their diverse families, community and workplace and must be heard.

As the world enters the second year of the global health crisis and we begin to see glimpses of an end to the pandemic, we can draw on lessons learned, on the many acts of solidarity and goodwill, to defeat the scourge of hate, fear and divisiveness and commit to a better, more inclusive and transformed world.

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