



International Day of Care and Support 2023 Statement

Putting care work at the center of society and economy. Let's value it!

Care work provides critical support and services for individuals and communities, enabling the daily lives and functions of our social and economic systems. Yet, this essential work is defined by racial, gender, class, and geographic hierarchies within global care chains. Care work is generally characterized by low wages or no compensation, a lack of benefits and social protections, poor working conditions, and too often, gender-based violence and sexual harassment.

The Covid-19 pandemic revealed the longstanding structural inequalities underpinning the care economy and the gendered nature of the labor that fuels it. Furthermore, austerity measures related to debt are exposed in the care economy and inequalities of the realities of women. Much of this work—both paid and unpaid—rests on the shoulders of migrant women in all their diverse forms, both international and internal migrants. Their work in the care economy—including domestic work, childcare, eldercare, and healthcare—is gravely undervalued and frequently carried out under exploitative conditions.

As the [Women in Migration Network](#) marks the first [UN International Day of Care and Support](#):

- **Women all around the world are expected to pick up a disproportionate amount of care work, which is considered gendered and feminized.** The burden of housework and care work falls on both adult and young women, whether they are engaged in paid employment outside of the home or not. Male members of the family are rarely seen as being equal partners in care and housework. When the burden of this work is beyond the ability of a single person, families may rely on the services of poorly paid care workers. Many of these workers are migrants, who may in turn depend on other women in their countries of origin to care for their families. This has become known as the *international division of care work*, in which the global care chains are gendered and racialized. Care chains naturalize the separation of families when women have to leave their sons and daughters behind to take care of the children of other families.

- Domestic workers provide direct and indirect care services, representing 23% of the global care workforce. **It is essential that clear parameters be established to define and classify care work**, in order to ensure the valorization of care workers and the recognition of their labor and human rights. It is a matter of redefining the "what" and the "who" in the care economy, recognizing care work as a central piece of this structure that makes possible all other work as well as prioritizing women's professional development.
- In many countries, **paid care work is unregulated and not considered a part of the formal labor market**. There is a high demand for migrant women's care work, yet an unwillingness to pay living wages or to formalize women's long-term residency and allow them access to labor rights and social security. Circular migration schemes—using temporary work programs—instrumentalize migrant women's work without opening paths to long-term residency or family unity. Migrant women are expected to take care of families in destination countries but have no rights to migrate with their own families. Such temporary labor migration schemes also create barriers to the full exercise of migrant women workers' freedom of association and collective bargaining rights. As unpaid work at home is not valued, there is little to no commitment to extending fair wages and working conditions to care workers. Domestic workers are often excluded from the mainstream labor laws that govern all other work sectors. Work permits and visas for domestic workers are likely to be tied to a specific employer and on a short-term or temporary basis, which greatly hinders their ability to exercise their internationally recognized labor rights.
- **Human rights and labor rights violations take place at all stages of migration**. Migrant women care workers face intersecting forms of discrimination due to their gender, race, class, and immigration status—further limiting access to rights. Migrant care workers are also particularly at risk of exploitation due to the precarious nature of their immigration status. For example, in GCC countries, the Kafala system makes migrant workers reliant on their employers for their legal right to live and work in a country. And temporary migration schemes in places like the United States, Canada and Europe also tie migrant care workers' visas to their employers. As a result, migrant workers are reluctant to report abuses for fear of retaliation, blacklisting and losing their immigration status and right to work—especially after many have paid recruitment fees, which are often exorbitant and lead to debt bondage. Many migrant care workers may also be in an irregular or undocumented status due to restrictive and incoherent migration policies. Their undocumented status makes them even more vulnerable to exploitation. Migrant women care workers also face rights violations upon return home due to the stigmatization of women who migrate overseas for work. For these workers, reintegration, and access to decent work at home is often undermined by this stigma, which can manifest as sexual and gender-based violence and gender discrimination.

- **Care work is often unseen, unpaid and/or undervalued and can lead to increased health risks.** With the informality of much of the care sector, there is also the heightened risk of gender-based violence, labor exploitation, forced labor and human trafficking, due to a lack of labor inspections and regulation. Women care workers may not have access to basic health care including sexual and reproductive health rights; they also may face mental health issues that emerge from isolation from family and community, violence, and exploitative working conditions.
- **Care workers are organizing to fight for their labor rights.** Domestic workers played an instrumental role in the drafting and the adoption of ILO Convention 189 on Domestic Work and continue to campaign for widespread ratification of the treaty. Domestic workers, including when they migrate, are organizing themselves into trade unions and associations—the International Domestic Workers Federation represents 670,000 domestic/household workers in 68 countries—despite limitations on freedom of association imposed in many countries either based on migration status or due to sector-related limitations.
- In the coming decades, **the demand for care workers will increase considerably.** Several countries are already facing a shortage of caregivers as the large generation of baby boomers ages. Added to this is the **impact of climate change:** environmental degradation intensifies both the burden of unpaid care and that of domestic workers. According to the ILO, addressing the existing gaps in care services could generate almost 300 million jobs. Investing in the care sector is essential to ensure more resilient economies and societies in a changing climate.

Care work is work!

The Women in Migration Network calls for:

- Putting care work at the center of our society and economy. We all need it, let's value it!
- The recognition, reduction, and redistribution of unpaid care work. National policies to address the imbalance in unpaid care work hours across genders, including provision of quality, affordable childcare and eldercare that offers labor rights and a living wage to caregivers and paid family and parental leave for all diverse forms of family.
- Recognition of domestic work as work in national labor law. National ratification and implementation of ILO Conventions 189 on Decent Work for Domestic Workers and 190 on Gender Based Violence in the World of Work.
- Full labor rights and human rights for all paid care workers, including for women migrant workers.
- A minimum wage that is a living wage and other social protections and end to service indemnities.

- Inclusion in labor inspections mandate and oversight while ensuring firewalls between these and immigration control authorities.
- The right to freedom of association and collective bargaining regardless of migration status, which are central for all workers--including care workers--to be able to collectively raise their interests and demand their rights. *Organized care workers are powerful!*
- Governments should support to form unions or organizations that can provide for legal representation on labor rights, immigration rights as well as physical abuse or sexual violence.
- Abolishment of employer-tied visas, including the Kafala system of visa sponsorship and within temporary labor migration schemes in the U.S., Canada, Europe and elsewhere.
- Freedom to live outside of the workplace/household of an employer.
- Domestic workers' organizations, through social dialogue and collective bargaining, should play an active role in the development, implementation and monitoring of public policies and regulatory frameworks related to care.
- Integral care systems must contemplate Occupational Health and Safety as a basic labor right of care workers. *Take care of the one who takes care of you!*
- There is an urgent need to ensure that domestic workers have access to affordable, quality care services for themselves, their children, elderly dependents or family members with disabilities. This would alleviate the burden of care that weighs on them and allow them to generate more income, a possibility available to a large percentage of women in other sectors of the economy.
- Governments should prioritize the training and recognition of domestic workers' skills within the care economy. However, this must be addressed with an inclusive approach that does not reproduce hierarchies or segregating categorizations within care systems ('skilled' versus 'unskilled' workers).
- Develop accessible programs so that employers can register domestic workers so that they have social security and social benefits by law.
- Quality, affordable, accessible public services, ensuring firewalls between these and immigration control authorities. Also, access to justice mechanisms for labor violations with a firewall between labor law enforcement and immigration enforcement.
- Fair and humane migration policies, including access to regularization of status for undocumented migrant workers as well gender-responsive and rights-based migration pathways that lead to decent work with full labor protections and provide routes to permanent status, with family unity instead of a reliance on temporary migration programs, which result in precarity.

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