

Global Recognition of Care Work as a Human Right Urged by Feminists and Human Rights Defenders on May 1st

Today, on May 1st, International Workers' Day, feminists, indigenous women, human rights defenders, community and grassroots leaders from diverse regions unite to call for global recognition of care work as central to the sustainability of life and a fundamental human right. The COVID-19 pandemic has made clear the centrality of care for life, for the preservation of the planet, and for the functioning of economies and societies. However, the pandemic has deepened the gaps in the distribution of care and placed an even greater burden on women and girls, leading to a crisis in the global care economy. We urge governments to advance transformative care policies that address the structural injustices underlying the undervaluation of paid and unpaid care work, and to develop comprehensive care systems that redistribute time, unequal power relations and resources. **A comprehensive care system is a human right.**

Historically, women have been forced into patriarchal structures that naturalize care as their sole responsibility and value to society. Moreover, care remains mostly unrecognized, invisible, and increasingly privatized and commodified as a source of profit for corporations.

To address this systemic issue, as part of ESCR-Net, we advocate for a **New Social Pact of Care**. The Network's proposed framework of the **6Rs** values and **redistributes** care work and ensures the **representation** and **recognition** of caregivers, who the majority of them are women. It aims to promote feminist economics and advance policies that **reduce** the care burden, **reformulate** the economy, and fulfill the **rights** of caregivers and recipients. The narratives of domestic workers, including migrant workers and people with disabilities, is also essential, especially informal workers and community care networks.

This May 1st, we reaffirm the need to move away from the current economic model, which relies, among other things, on the exploitation of care workers for profit. The need for systemic change and to challenge corporate power and its flagrant influence in decision-making spaces, or corporate capture, is paramount in building strategies to ensure that all forms of care work is not undervalued or commodified.

We also need to guarantee the rights of paid and inadequately underpaid care workers. This means ensuring fair wages, safe working conditions, and access to healthcare and social security. We demand an end to the exclusion of domestic workers from labor protections and call for the ratification of Convention 189 on Domestic Workers of the International Labour Organization's Domestic Workers Convention, which sets out clear standards for domestic workers.

It's worth noting that many countries in the Global South are burdened with high levels of external debt, which limits their ability to invest in public services such as healthcare and education. As a result, women in these countries are often left to provide care for family members who are sick or elderly without adequate support from the state, perpetuating gender inequality, but also cycles of poverty. Therefore, addressing the issue of care work is not only a matter of gender justice but also a systemic change that requires addressing broader issues, such as improving tax collection from the highest levels of income and wealth, as well as from

large corporations. We also must halt austerity measures, tackle debt crisis and confront the neoliberal economic model that puts profits for a few over the rights of a majority.

As we face the escalating climate crisis, we also underline how climate change impacts disproportionately women in all their diversity, by exacerbating existing inequalities, deepening the burden of care work, and increasing the likelihood of displacement. Overcoming the climate crises and the resulting loss and damage, requires investing in infrastructure resilient to climate change; improving access to green technologies and public services; revalorizing, recognizing, and redistributing household care responsibilities; and prioritizing climate solutions that take into account gender power imbalances. While we acknowledge the significance of the agreement on a loss and damage fund, we are concerned about the slow progress on gender-responsive climate actions. Therefore, it is essential to adopt a feminist, intersectional approach that centers care when addressing loss and damage and a just transition to sustainable economies and societies.

Finally, meaningful participation and representation at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life, promotion of freedom of association, as well as promotion of social dialogue and strengthening the right to collective bargaining in care sectors are essential to advance towards transformative care policies.

As we mark May 1st, it is time to advance towards transformative laws and policies and decent work for all care workers. It is time to recognize care work as a fundamental human right. Let us work towards a New Social Pact on Care.

This statement has been issued by the Care Committee and Steering Committee of ESCR-Net's Women and ESCR Working Group.