

Critical transformations of the labor market and equal redistribution of unpaid care work¹: steps toward gender equality and social justice oriented social protection

Contribution to the Open Working Group on the SDGs on the topic of Social Protection

- Development Alternatives with Women in a New Era (DAWN) -

Social protection systems should be provided for all in order to guarantee that all basic social and economic needs are covered, especially in times of crisis, dependence and vulnerability. The precariousness of the current times requires that social protection be a universal consideration, including both those that are inside and outside the market. This is particularly so, considering the fierce degradation of worker rights and labor standards worldwide as well as interlinked and layered multiple global crises of food, fuel, finance, climate change and more.

The gendered nature of labor markets penalizes care and reproduction, making it difficult for women to access jobs as well as depreciating “feminized” jobs. This brings about vertical and horizontal segregation, assigning certain kind of jobs to women or men, while making it difficult for women to reach leadership positions. This is compounded with the prevailing wage gap present in all societies.

Furthermore, while women and “feminized” activities and jobs such as those in care provision, are discriminated against and undervalued, the economic system heavily relies on the unpaid work provided mainly by women.² Not only does this work sustain the labor force, but it also absorbs the ‘invisible’ costs of poor infrastructure and service provision when governments do not provide them, which is further exacerbated by effects of climate change, ecological damage and extreme weather conditions. On the other hand, paid care work is closely knitted with labor supply lines across boundaries where women migrants are providing care services often for low pay and under questionable labor conditions. These global care chains imply a “care drain” from developing to developed countries.

In this context and building firmly on the human rights/solidarity perspective, , we believe that states have the fundamental responsibility to guarantee social security and social protection for all.

Within this framework, the following **policy recommendations** should be contemplated:

¹ Unpaid care work refers to both the indirect and direct care services provided without pay, mostly at the household level. It includes washing, cleaning cooking, fetching water and collecting wood in as much it contemplates feeding children, tending for the sick and the elderly, among a wide diversity of activities.

² The dimensions of the unpaid economy should not be underestimated, as an increasing number of household satellite accounts continue to prove that it is comparable to the main economic sectors for most societies. For example, in Uruguay in 2007 the value of unpaid work is between 26.6% and 30% of Gross Domestic Product, representing the largest economic sector of the country if measured in monetary terms. See: Salvador, Soledad (2009), en Las bases invisibles del bienestar social El trabajo no remunerado en Uruguay INE, INMUJERES, UDELAR, UNIFEM. Montevideo, Uruguay: Doble clic Editoras.

1. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) should pursue universalism taking into account diversity of needs and constraints based on gender, age, class, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation and abilities, among others.
2. The SDGs should contemplate a goal to implement equitable and ecologically sound trade, investment and financial rules in order to preserve national policy space for governments to fulfill their human rights obligations.
3. The SDGs should contemplate concrete means of implementation that prioritize public financing over public-private partnerships in order to realize states' obligation to allocate the maximum availability of resources.
4. The SDGs should contemplate targets that ensure progress on financial regulation as essential to protect decent work and steer finance towards productive and socially useful activities that create jobs.
5. States should guarantee universal access to public care services for children and adults in situations of dependence.^{3 4}
6. Promote the implementation of public care services that are available at the community level emphasizing rural communities as well as urban communities in poverty.
7. Encourage the implementation of policies that shift patriarchal cultural norms and promote equitable distribution of care work.^{5 6}
8. Promote the regulation of care services to ensure quality and decent working conditions and income for paid care providers.⁷ Take specific measures to make visible and improve the situation of domestic workers, including migrants.
9. Promote the implementation of policies that effectively reduce of the gender pay gap present across the planet.
10. Implement labor regulations specific to the informal market. For example: create contributive systems that facilitate saving and access to credit for informal workers.

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³ Salvador, Soledad (2007). Estudio comparativo de la Economía del cuidado en Argentina, Brasil, Chile, Colombia, México y Uruguay, IDRC y IGTN. Soledad, 2009

⁴ Salvador, Soledad (2009). Configuración social del cuidado en hogares con niños/as y con adultos/as mayores y políticas de corresponsabilidad. Uruguay, Instituto Nacional de las Mujeres.

⁵ Women's Major Group (2013) "We Will Not be Mainstreamed into a Polluted Stream: Feminist Statement on the 2015 Development Agenda", Women's Major Group statement read at the international NGO conference on 'Advancing the Post-2015 Sustainable Development Agenda: Reconfirming Rights - Recognising Limits - Redefining Goals' was held from 20-22 March 2013 in Bonn, Germany. Available at <http://www.dawnnet.org/advocacy-appeals.php?signon=293&id=293>, retrieved on June 10th 2013

⁶ Folbre, Nancy (2006). "Measuring care: Gender, Empowerment and the Care Economy." Journal of Human Development 7(2): 183-199.

⁷ Esquivel, Valeria (2010) "Care workers in Argentina: At the crossroads of labor market institutions and care services." Revista Internacional del Trabajo 149(4).