



**No care
economies**

without

**domestic
workers**

**a
manifesto**

awid



As feminist and labour movements, together in solidarity,

we articulate the following points as a collective vision for **care economies with domestic workers rights at the centre:**



1

We reject an instrumentalist approach to “investing” in the care economy without centering the voices, rights and leadership of domestic workers. The **primary struggle should be for dignity**: no work is low, no work is unclean. We are not slaves, we are workers, we are human and we have rights.

We envision a future where **care is no longer a burden borne by a few, but a collective responsibility shared by all**. The liberation of all workers is intertwined. We call for the societal redistribution of care work and the creation of supportive infrastructures that enables everyone to participate fully in social, political, and economic life, unburdened by the expectation that care should be borne by migrant, Black, Dalit, and all marginalised women.



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We envision **anti-racism and anti-casteism as part and parcel of domestic workers' struggles** for emancipation, cutting across regions and local realities.

We hold the position that **all forms of life-sustaining work is care work**, whether performed inside or outside the home, directly or indirectly, and for public or private employers or benefit.

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We seek to **dismantle the patriarchal hierarchies of skill and value** between care work and other forms of labour valued in the “productive” economy, and between care and domestic work. We challenge the notion that the home is a private sphere devoid of labour rights and fundamental freedoms and rights.

Domestic workers must be able to fully exercise their **right to sexual and reproductive health and well-being, to bodily autonomy**, and to have control over and to make free and informed decisions on all matters related to sexuality, reproduction, free from violence, coercion, and discrimination.

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Domestic workers are also recipients of care, and must have **access to public provisions of care** including childcare to break the cycle of taking on a double burden of care.

We insist that care work must be acknowledged, compensated, and shared collectively within our communities, with the recognition that **care is a human right and a public good**.

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We will fight together to **abolish systems of oppression like the Kafala system** in the Middle East amounting to exploitation and forced labour of domestic migrant workers. It needs to stop. We all deserve to have a free life.

Beyond legal protections on paper, including the global ILO frameworks that define decent work, we need to advance **cultural shifts and attitudinal change** by employers, government and society at large.

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**We call on feminist
and social movements
to join the call to
rethink the economy
with care at its centre
recognising the rights,
agency and leadership
of domestic worker
movements.**



Our manifesto is a response to a complex context

Domestic and care work is in the limelight after the COVID-19 global pandemic as it provided the means to carry the world through multiple intersecting crises at the global scale. The [World Bank](#), the [International Monetary Fund](#), and other multilateral institutions also acknowledge the importance of care and domestic work in sustaining the world's economy. However, it is our analysis that this recognition most often takes an instrumentalist approach (i.e. care work sustains the 'productive' economy) focused on profiteering from care work without recognizing care as a human right and public good, or providing recognition and rights to the workers undertaking the bulk of this labour.

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Domestic workers' labour remains devalued, under-recognized and taken for granted because it is seen as the work of poor and marginalised women. Especially now, when the climate and economic crises are inflating prices and depressing wages, domestic workers are forced to accept exploitative wages and conditions of work with a higher burden of care.

Domestic workers' labour is undervalued precisely because it is feminised. The care economy continues to be shaped by racial, colonial and caste-based histories. Throughout history and today, the burden of care has disproportionately fallen to poor, migrant, black, and Dalit women. The intersectionality of race, caste, class and gender in care & domestic work is mostly absent when recognition is given to the work through policies or legal provisions that aim to regulate the sector, yet it is these intersecting forms of discrimination which are the basis of inequalities.

Within certain countries the legacy of servitude continues for [caste-oppressed domestic workers](#), whose bodies are associated with Brahmanical ideas of impurity. Dominant caste employers restrict Dalit workers to low-paid cleaning jobs, while refusing to treat them with dignity and often subjecting them to violence. Employers also fail to offer workers basic amenities such as access to toilets, water, or food at their workplace.

Organised black domestic workers have long been at the intersection of workers rights and Black liberation movements. Particularly in Latin America, in countries such as [Brazil](#) and [Colombia](#), Black domestic workers unions still face the legacies of slavery that shape current structural racism. Many carry life stories of forced migration as young as 5 or 7 years old to work in white people's houses for no pay but the promise of food, used clothes and a better future that never materialised. These experiences are shared by domestic workers in South Africa where race segregation policies and laws subjugated Black women into the homes of white families while trapping them and their children into inter-generational poverty. Anti-racism struggles are deeply intertwined with domestic workers' struggles for emancipation and their right to decent work.

Workers migrate in search of better conditions of life and ways to support their families and communities, often they are also fleeing from conditions of distress, violence and other forms of harm including those brought about by climate change. [Migrant domestic workers](#) contribute to the economies of both their origin and destination countries, but are treated as inferior workers and unwanted immigrants. The lived realities of [African women migrant domestic workers in the Middle East](#) speak to racist migration regimes that tie workers to employers without freedom of choice or movement. Such regimes compound their vulnerability as migrants and open them up to exploitation and abuse which includes sexual and other forms of gender based violence.



Sending and receiving governments, international institutions, and employers far too often treat domestic workers as unskilled, unworthy of fair compensation, and devoid of dignity and basic human rights.

We reject these dehumanising narratives

Building feminist economies requires breaking this status quo. Our struggle for labour rights in the care economy is inseparable from the larger fight against patriarchal, capitalist systems that perpetuate inequality, exploit our labour and planetary resources.

Neoliberal policies supported and promoted by international financial institutions have dismantled the state's duty of care. There is ever decreasing funding for social security, public health, food security, low-income housing, and all the infrastructure necessary to lead dignified lives. The unspoken assumption behind the dismantling of essential public and social infrastructure is that women's labour will fill these gaps.

The crises created by capitalist extraction are now bearing fruit, with the climate crisis that is destroying livelihoods and communities. Domestic workers are disproportionately affected by this crisis. We see this especially in areas where there is a reliance on access to land for subsistence farming and food secu-

urity where land is no longer available because it is being handed over in favour of mining activities. In rural areas where there is an existing scarcity to clean water, firewood and other natural resources these impact on women specifically who are often tasked with gathering for family use. In urban settlements, workers face heat waves and other extreme conditions whilst not having access to adequate housing and for women especially this presents an increased care burden without any access to social protection.

Domestic & care workers movements have a long history organising around the care agenda on their own terms, long before the ILO adopted the [5R framework](#) (recognize, reduce, redistribute, reward, represent). This manifesto builds on several of these demands articulated for example by [IDWF's members for an inclusive care agenda](#); ESCR-net's [Social Pact on Care](#) that includes a 6th "R" to the former framework to incorporate the need to reframe the economy as a caring economy; or Public Services International (PSI)'s [Manifesto for Rebuilding the Social Organisation of Care](#). These are some among many examples from global, regional and local collectives organising around care and domestic workers rights.

Building feminist economies requires breaking this status quo.

**Our
feminist**

**approach to
economies**

**demands
a radical**

**reimagining
of care.**

The Association for Women’s Rights in Development (AWID) is a global, feminist, membership, movement-support organization.

www.awid.org

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