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Spanish state and pandemic

Household and care workers, forgotten in the Covid-19 crisis

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These days we have been able to read various articles that ask us to think about what is not always obvious: that this health and social crisis is not having the same consequences for everyone, and that, yes, coronavirus does understand social class. To this it should be added that it also understands gender and immigration status. This statement is based in the situation of domestic and care workers, a sector that is especially feminized and covered by migrants - many "without papers" - who, at this intersection of inequalities, face greater vulnerability to the health and social crisis in terms of class, gender and immigration status.

Although this sector performs a fundamental job for the reproduction of social and economic life, it has historically been invisible, precarious and poorly paid. As a group it is forgotten both in terms of the health and social crisis and the measures that the government has proposed to deal with this situation.

Firstly, confining oneself at home or working remotely is not an option for professions such as care and reveals the clear limitations of teleworking as a work option in the midst of the current confinement. The message # *QuédateEnCasa* has a clear bias to the detriment of the most precarious of the working class, not only because it is materially unfeasible, but, with having a greater number of people from a family confined at home, domestic tasks multiply. The situation is aggravated for women who do not have their immigration status regularized and whose mobility capacity is even more limited, as happens with live-in carers, who at this juncture undergo semi-slavery work without any day of rest or recognition of overtime. Meanwhile, those who work as externals must continue to move to their workplace without any protection, putting their health and that of the families, both their own and the families they care for, at risk.

Their exposure is high and not only because of the possibility of being affected by coronavirus, but because the stipulated measures are not an option for them, since they do not have any type of unemployment benefit. For domestic and care workers, ERTE (temporary redundancy) is not an answer because, although this type of measure in itself attacks the rights of the working class, it cannot work when basic employment rights are lacking. This unfair situation calls for the ratification of Convention 189 of the International Labour Organization: equalization of employment rights and the incorporation of the home and care work sector in the general scheme. Here we find another obstacle: the Immigration Law, which stipulates the figure of "arraigo" as a possibility of regularization if the person can demonstrate they have resided for at least three continuous years in the country. Typically, women who are live-in carers choose this figure to regularize their immigration status but, while the required time is over, they are forced to work in the black economy without any rights. We could, here, add institutional racism to that intersection of inequalities faced by female domestic and care workers.

However, the current situation is making the care crisis palpable: How many fathers and mothers, still in confinement, need women caregivers to care for their sons and daughters while they are teleworking? How many families depend on one person, woman and migrant, take care of their elders? How many homes continue to be kept clean and disinfected because a woman, usually a migrant and in many cases living in, does so? And despite this, more than 630,000 women have been excluded from current or future mitigation measures derived from this situation, obviating the historical inequality of their working conditions with respect to the rest of the workers.

Today more than ever it is necessary to continue demanding the ratification of Convention 189, but also urgent measures that are included in an Emergency Plan for the prevention of occupational risks for domestic and care workers against COVID-19 that, minimally, includes:

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- That employers and employers are obliged to provide protective materials such as gloves and masks for commuting and use in the workplace, especially for those who work with the elderly.
- That certificates are issued that certify the need for displacement, regardless of whether or not the worker is in a regulated migratory situation, without a contract.
- Wage compensation for extra work performed in all cases.
- Guarantees that the police or any state force do not request immigration documentation in the midst of this situation

For this reason, this Monday, 23 March, domestic and care workers have launched a campaign calling on the population to forward a standard letter to the Prime Minister, Pedro Sánchez, but also Pablo Iglesias, Yolanda DÃ-az, José Luis Escrivá and Irene Montero.

When minimum care is not guaranteed for those who care in a special condition of social and economic vulnerability, it is necessary to review what it means to “put life at the centre” as the engine of the egalitarian society for which we fight.

23 March 2020

Translated by **International Viewpoint** from **Poder Popular** "[Las trabajadoras del hogar y cuidados, olvidadas en la crisis y sus medidas frente al COVID-19.](#)".

PS:

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