



Challenging gender inequalities in the labour market by valuing care work

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Our paper seeks to better understand the links between the care economy and gender inequalities in the labour market, and proposes actions to contribute towards more just and democratic societies by focusing on the ILO Convention 156 on Workers with Family Responsibilities and the associated Recommendation 165, both from 1981.

Despite the enormous expansion of the female labour supply and women's educational levels, diagnostics of the labour market in Latin America and the Caribbean show that statistically, women continue to dominate the economically inactive part of the workforce as well as unemployment, under-employment and informality. They are concentrated in sectors of medium and low productivity, and gender gaps persist in hours worked and hourly wages. All this is explained mainly by the significant burden of unpaid work that still falls under women's responsibilities, and a labour market that discriminates against women because it maintains the norm of the 'ideal worker' as one without family responsibilities.

Domestic and care tasks have historically been unpaid, carried out by women in the family and community, without social benefits or labour rights. When these tasks are transferred to the market or are taken on by the state, they are still executed by women. Those who devote themselves to domestic work and paid care work remain little valued: they receive low wages, they are often not covered by the same labour standards as other workers, they often do not have the same rights to social security, and they often don't have access to specific training for the work because it is considered that their ability to do it is innate.

Reversing these inequalities is essential to move towards fairer societies, and to achieve this, the involvement of the sectoral players of that labour market, the labour movement at large and society in general, is crucial. In this context, the Trade Union Confederation of Workers of the Americas (CSA) - which has 56 affiliated national organisations from 23 countries in the region - prioritised as one of its objectives gender equality and full participation of women in all levels of the union movement and in all spheres of society.

Not only regulations

We therefore recommended policies that promote responsibility in care work and domestic work between institutional sectors (state, market, family and community) and genders (within those institutions). For this, it is necessary not only to develop regulatory frameworks, services and benefits, but also to

promote cultural change that contributes to make such reorganisation possible. This involves work on deconstructing gender stereotypes and redefining the rules and institutions that currently govern the labour market.

One of the strategies proposed is that countries resume the implementation of the Convention on Workers with Family Responsibilities and Recommendation 165, which have been ratified by 10 countries in Latin America.

The ILO instruments cover 'workers and women workers with responsibilities to dependent children, where such responsibilities restrict their possibilities of preparing for economic activity and enter[ing], participat[ing] and progress[ing] in it'.¹ In addition, the convention makes reference to the demands of care not only of sons and daughters, but also of direct family members such as parents and other relatives.

It also extends measures that promote co-responsibility in care work not only to access jobs or improved job opportunities, but also to the right to professional training.

Then, the convention recommends developing parental leave for mother and father to care for children or another direct relative in case of illness. Also, it recommends developing child-care, family and other community services - public or private - responding to parents' needs, alongside home-help and home-care services which are adequately regulated and supervised. All of these can provide workers who have family responsibilities with qualified assistance, when necessary, at a reasonable charge in accordance with their ability to pay. Finally, it is mentioned that the competent authorities and bodies in each country should promote such public and private action as is necessary to make the provision of services in the community responsive to the needs of workers - for example public transport, water and energy in or near workers' housing and housing with labour-saving layout.

In relation to working conditions it is proposed:

- To reduce progressively the duration of the working day and reduce overtime (see R 165, No. 18a);
- To introduce more flexible arrangements regarding working schedules, rest periods and holidays, taking into account

¹ Article. 1, Paragraph 1, ILO Convention N° 156. ILO Convention.

the stage of development and the particular needs of the country and of different sectors of activity (see R 165, No. 18b);

- Whenever practicable and appropriate, the special needs of workers, including those arising from family responsibilities, should be taken into account in shift work arrangements and assignment of night work (see R 165, No. 19.);

- When transferring workers from one locality to another, family responsibilities of these workers and factors such as the place of employment of the spouse and the possibilities of educating children should be taken into account (see R 165, No. 20).

The options provided by Convention 156 and its Recommendation 165 are important for advancing policies that promote co-responsibility in care, particularly Article 3 of the convention which stipulates that national policy should enable people with family responsibilities to exercise their rights. Article 5(b) of the convention stipulates 'develop[ing] or promot[ing] community services, public or private, such as child-care and family services and facilities'. Recommendation 165 gives further guidance on elements of a national policy in its Part II, and on child-care and family services and facilities in its Part V.

Investing in care policies

The CSA 13th Resolution - on Equity and Gender Equality - of its third congress, in 2016, expressed the need to implement policies to promote the protection of maternity and care tasks. To make progress in this regard, the Committee of Working Women of the Americas, the CMTA, has included in its work plan the issue of the care economy and the need to develop advocacy strategies at national and regional levels. For this, a regional workshop was held in November 2016 in which the topic of the ratification of Convention 156 and its implementation was discussed. Some countries are including the issue in collective bargaining, as in the case of Uruguay.

But, in spite of this significant success, progress is still slow. More concrete actions are required from the states that are promoted and supported by the unions.

And we must also make progress in the cultural change that should be promoted through awareness campaigns about the issue of care and its implications for social and gender inequality, and information campaigns on the contents of these policies and the cultural transformations that are required to overcome gender stereotypes.

To this end, it is suggested that the trade union movement in the region take up the argument that 'investment in care policies

expands democracies' because it increases the opportunities and possibilities for choice of more than half of the population. ²

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² This is a short version of Salvador, S. & de los Santos, D. (2016) 'Care economy, labour relations and international standards' (in Spanish). FES Sindical, Montevideo: Fundacion Friedrich Ebert en el Uruguay. <http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/uruguay/13600.pdf>. Accessed 17 May 2018.

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