

Workers Organizations Call for Quality Public Child Care Services

The absence of quality and gender responsive public care services, including child care, is an obstacle to decent livelihoods for women workers around the world. The costs and time of caring for children continue to be borne mainly by women due to gender norms. The lack of care services combined with a growing youth population in some regions, such as sub-Saharan Africa, puts tremendous pressure on women and girls to take on more care responsibilities. Rapid urbanization and migration are changing family structures that previously helped with child care. Women, in both urban and rural areas, are hit twice as hard as workers and caregivers when governments spend less in public services and working conditions deteriorate.

Women are more likely to find work in the informal economy concentrated in low paid and vulnerable jobs where they do not have access to social protection, such as maternity benefits. They must continue to work when their children are young. Without quality public child care services, they face difficult choices. Street vendors and market traders may have to bring their children with them despite the noise and bustle of crowded markets. For home-based workers, the home is also the work place and there are many hazardous materials used in production that are dangerous for young children's health. Waste pickers and domestic workers often cannot bring their children with them to work and are forced to either leave their child with a relative or pay for unregulated and poor-quality child care services. For some women and men in the formal sector, conditions of work are also deteriorating. For instance, it is increasingly difficult to take leave to care for children due to the growth in poor working conditions, including the use of precarious contracts, in the formal sector. Across both the informal and formal sectors, women workers speak of the guilt, stress and anxiety they feel for neglecting their children due to their working hours and low incomes.

Leaving a child either with a relative or child care service comes at a cost for low income households. The costs of even poor quality unregulated child care services can be so high for workers that it can lead to debts. Taking care of their children while working reduces informal workers' productivity and leads to lower earnings. Women may choose more flexible and low paid work to be able to also undertake child care. So, at a time when women workers need the additional income to care for their children, they have less and more irregular earnings. Over the long-term, the cost to women is reflected in their lower lifelong earnings and savings. For young children, the lack of proper care and nutrition can harm their physical, mental and emotional development. Older siblings, especially girls, may have to care for young children in a household instead of taking the time to learn and attend school.

Protecting women's incomes when they have young children in their care, and supporting child development, requires an investment in quality public child care services. Holistic full-day child care services that address children's nutrition, education and early learning, health care and protection is a public good that benefits not only women workers and their children, but also the broader society in tackling malnutrition and raising healthy and educated children who will later enter the labour force, skilled and confident to contribute to society as equal citizens. It increases women workers' incomes, and helps to redistribute child care responsibilities between women, men and the state. In addition, extending public child care provision and protecting the rights of domestic workers, who also undertake child care, creates new decent work opportunities in the care sector and other sectors of the economy through multiplier effects.

Everyone requires social protection systems that protect them as they work and undertake care responsibilities across their lifecycles. This includes pre-, peri- and post-natal care, maternity benefits, child grants and child care services. Cash or kind transfers for children and their carers have a limited positive effect in the absence of quality public child care services. Gender responsive quality public child care services for all workers is an immediate and necessary investment to promote gender equality, protect women workers' livelihoods and improve the quality of women's work.

**Joint Statement from the WIEGO – FES International Meeting
on Child Care for Informal Workers – 1-3 November 2017**

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