

Every month RESURJ members will collectively share and reflect on some news highlights affecting sexual and reproductive, environmental and economic justice from the different regions and countries we work in... [read online](#)

Eu Empregada Doméstica: Brazil's Black Domestic Workers Face Multiple Oppressions

When [N. B.](#) was 14 years old, she used to follow her mother to work to help her out. She once heard from an employer that “it was great that at that age she was learning how to clean the house well, because that meant that she could have a job when she grew up.” At the house where N.B.’s mother worked, the family food was always kept in a locked cupboard, and the food they were given to eat was frequently expired. [Y.S.](#) deals daily with an employer who is very strict about when she arrives at the house to start her work, yet doesn’t allow her to get off work on time, refuses to pay overtime, and always speaks to her in a menacing tone.

These are the real stories of Brazilian domestic workers. [Joyce Fernandes](#) is a history teacher, rapper, and black women’s rights activist. In 2016, Joyce created a Facebook page called **Eu Empregada Doméstica** (I’m a domestic worker). Through this page, she collects, anonymizes and shares domestic workers’ stories. Joyce, alias Preta Rara, is herself a former domestic worker who faced much of the humiliation, abuse and violations she brings to light to 140,000 followers on Facebook today. This is how [Joyce explains](#) what drove her to create the page: “Unfortunately for us, black women, being a domestic worker is something hereditary. My mother, my grandmother and my aunt were domestic workers. It is impossible to dissociate that from Brazil’s history of slavery.” Joyce recalls that at one of her jobs, she was forbidden to eat the food she cooked daily, and had to bring her meals and silverware from home.

Domestic workers’ stories of harassment, disrespect and violence are a lesson about the racism that shapes the reality of domestic work in Brazil. The ambiguous discourse of the elites, who often refer to domestic workers as “almost part of the family”, attempts to mask their experience as marginalized workers who work countless hours and get paid less than the minimum wage. They are also forced to use back entrances, service elevators, separate eating utensils and bathrooms. Slavery was historically built in the architectural design of middle and upper class houses in Brazil, which often include a windowless dorm near the kitchen meant for stay-in domestic workers. In the words of Joyce: “the maid room is the modern slave quarters.”

There are around [six million](#) domestic workers in Brazil. The largest number in the world, and 60% of them are black women. Until a few years ago, precarious domestic labor was consolidated in the Brazilian Constitution: only in 2013 was a [constitutional amendment](#) passed to give domestic workers the same rights as everyone else. The new law defined basic rights, such as an eight-hour working day, a maximum of 44 hours work per week, the right to the minimum wage, a lunch break, social security and severance pay. Its implementation remains a challenge today, which makes Joyce’s struggle against racism and for domestic workers’ labor rights so urgent and necessary. As [Preta Rara \(Joyce\) raps](#): “Where was the shame of the employer/ Who chose straightened hair over my turbans/ I was treated as slave labor/ Didn’t bow down thanks to the teachings of Afrika Bambaataa”.

Migrant domestic workers in Lebanon organize for economic justice*

“[Lebanese employers] categorize us as the lowest of the low in terms of social class. “Domestic worker” becomes our class, and it is as if

we cannot go beyond a certain social standard” – [Julia](#)

On January 28, 2017, the Lebanese General Security deported Roja Limbu, a Nepalese migrant domestic worker, activist, and unionist. Only a month and a half before Roja’s deportation, her colleague, Sujana Rana, had experienced [the same predicament](#). Despite having legal papers, both migrant domestic workers had been [arbitrarily arrested](#) from their employers’ homes in late November and detained in an old parking under a bridge turned into an immigrant detention facility in part of Beirut called, Adlieh.

The [Kafala or “sponsorship” system](#) ties migrant domestic workers to their employers, limits their freedom of mobility and access to justice, and denies them their bodily autonomy and integrity. Lebanese authorities have ferociously thwarted migrant domestic workers who have been [organizing and mobilizing their community](#) against this system. In addition to the authorities’ imminent threats of detention and deportation, the Lebanese [Ministry of Labor rejected the legitimacy](#) of the migrant domestic workers’ trade union, [formed in 2015](#).

The complicity of the Lebanese authorities with “maid” agencies and [trafficking of migrant domestic workers](#) make domestic and care work a profitable industry that feeds into the capitalist interests of the Lebanese state.

“Care is [...] extracted from the sending nation to the receiving nation at a great loss for the former” ([Shahvisi 11](#)). In their current format, care economies are intrinsically woven in the fabric of capitalism. They capitalize on global economic injustice and inequalities. Many women who migrate to countries such as Lebanon to engage in domestic work find themselves stuck in a lifetime of servitude; they provide care for other women’s

children, [a care that their own children lack back at home](#).

*This excerpt is from an article published on the [Feminist Voices](#) blog. To read the full article, click [here](#).

Philippines: “It Is Not For Women Like Us”*

The Senate of the Philippines recently [approved a bill extending the maternity leave of all women workers](#), from the existing 60-78 days to 120 days with pay and an option to extend for another 30 days without pay, regardless of civil status or legitimacy of her child. The proposed Expanded Maternity Leave Law of 2017 significantly extends the number of days of both maternity and paternity leaves regardless of public or private employment or method of birth/delivery.

Though the approved Senate bill is a strong indication that reproductive care work is gradually gaining the attention it deserves, whether it will apply to all women workers remains to be seen.

Emmeline Aglipay and Risa Hontiveros are the legislators who championed the bill in both Houses of Congress, and skillfully led the 16 year journey of the 2013 Magna Carta for Domestic Workers Act or Kasambahay Law. And there’s hope that the proposed law’s mention of all women will also include domestic workers.

Joy Tolentino is a 34-year-old mother of three and has been working as a domestic worker for the past 18 years. Extending maternity leave means working women can spend more time with their children and recover from childbirth, but domestic workers like Joy may not benefit from the same privileges.

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Rwandan Women’s Rights Organizations Stand Their Ground Amid Public Disapproval of New Law Governing Persons and Family*

In August 2016, a revised law governing persons and family was published in [the official gazette](#). This law was revised to comply with other laws and the constitution. The old law contradicts the principle of gender equality. Revised in 2015, the

[Rwandan constitution](#) and the national gender policy recognize equality between women and men. The old law governing persons and family stipulates that a man is the head of the household and contains regressive articles that reinforced gender stereotypes. The old law created barriers for women's full economic empowerment and decision making including on matters related to their sexual and reproductive health.

Through progressive articles in the revised law, Rwandans now have more control on everything from birth to parenting, marriage and divorce, or solving family issues. [The revised legal articles](#) make the customary rites (Gusaba) of paying bride price optional, set the age of consent to 18, make taking a spouse's name optional for either partner and simplify divorce procedures.

Even though the law was passed towards the end of 2016, the general public became aware of it at the beginning of 2017 when government and civil society organizations started raising awareness of the law. Some articles raised public disapproval among Rwandans; especially among those who have a negative mindset toward gender equality. For example, article 209 of the revised law on management of the household states that "Spouses jointly provide management of the household including moral and material support to the household as well as its maintenance. One of the spouses performs those duties alone if the other is unable to do so. In case of disagreement, competent authorities take the decision." Article 210 focuses on contribution to expenses of the household. It states that "each of the spouses contributes to the household expenses in accordance with his/her capacity and means."

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The Pacific: Women's Paid and Unpaid Labour Needs To Be Recognized As Work

Women still have to work twice as hard as men if they want to be recognized for the work that they do, regardless of what the working condition is - casual, domestic or being a CEO. This is a similar trend across the world.

Women's bodies and minds are on alert, from the minute they rise in the morning, to the time they

go to sleep. Their role as a wives, mothers, daughters or aunts, automatically switch on and the work they do is often never recognized or taken into account. For women to enjoy their life and what they do or the kind of work they want to engage themselves in, there needs to be a total dismantling of gender roles and expectations.

We tend to overlook this work that diverse women do, because we are so caught up with the phrase, that work is just about paid work. This line tends to really dilute the struggle for equality and value of our work because anything that we do which costs us our energy and time is WORK. It is time that is often diverted from our own personal care such as going for a health check up.

Today in the Pacific, many practices and working conditions still need to be changed. For example, women are expected to keep working until their ninth month of pregnancy. Moreover, it is still not enough to only provide three-month maternity leave and then expect women to fully return to work. This happens without regard to any potential birth complications or time recovery needed for post birth complications. Transition policies from reproductive to productive work, such as providing child-care in the workplace, are non-existent.

The Women's movement in the Pacific, SRHR coalitions and individual organisations that work specifically on sexual reproductive health and rights still have a lot of work ahead of them and will keep doing the great work that we are doing already.

Women in the UK face precarious work and in-work welfare conditionality

Over 1 million UK workers, 3% of the British workforce, are now on zero-hour contracts. This has been rising since 2010 when the government introduced a fiscal policy of austerity, leading to a drastic surge in precarious, insecure and temporary work, particularly for women and young, part-time workers or those in full time education. This number is set to continue to rise as British workers face shrinking protections and guarantees post-Brexit. With such instability and underemployment, women are often contracted to jobs where they do not have a regular or stable

income, are not ensured set or shift hours, leaving them economically vulnerable and at risk of drifting further into poverty.

For the first time, low income earners in the UK are subject to in-work conditionalities and sanctions to their benefits which supplement their earnings to create the conditions to allow them to survive, for example housing benefit and child benefit. These new conditionalities and sanctions come as part of changes to the welfare system, through the introduction of the controversial Universal Credit system. Critics see this as an extension of the already harsh conditionality and sanctions experienced by both working and non-working people in the UK.

Under the new measures, those working and earning less than the income threshold (what someone would be earning if they worked 35 hours per week on minimum wage), are required to increase their hours, get a second job, or find a new job to meet threshold or face sanctions and conditionality to their universal credit which covers not only job seeking, but child benefit and housing.

There are some allowances for caregivers and those with children under 3, however this will most drastically impact low-income workers, who are often women and migrant workers.

Mexico: Progressive Jurisprudence on Adolescent Health and Human Rights and on Gender Equality related to Care Work - but now what?

In November of last year, the Mexican Supreme Court upheld the health and human rights of adolescents in a landmark case that sustains the legitimacy and importance of a law created in 2014 on the human rights of adolescents (Ley General de los Derechos de Niñas, Niños y Adolescentes). The Court stated that the rights of girls, boys and adolescents to not be discriminated against because of their sexual preferences is upheld by the Mexican constitution, as is their right to access all forms of contraception without parental

consent and to comprehensive sexuality education.

According to the Court, these protections in no way go against the “best interest of the child” because these provisions recognize that boys and girls have the human right to non discrimination and to equality before the law. This is historic because in a way, it recognizes the rights of adolescents above the rights of parents and guardians in making informed decisions about their sexuality and reproductive autonomy.

In another case last year, the Supreme Court recognized the right of men to register their children in public child care facilities, which was previously only a right reserved for women and therefore perpetuated the disproportionate burden that women have on caring for their children. This case unleashed an important public debate on gender roles, the care economy, and the rights of caregivers.

These cases are undoubtedly progress. However, they are not enough. And public institutions, particularly the Health and Social Development Ministries, need to adequately put this case law into practice. This requires two main actions: ensuring that adolescents are treated as full rights-holders in accessing sexual and reproductive health care through a directive going to all health institutions that prohibits and sanctions their denial of any information or service. And second, that all health care workers are evaluated, promoted or demoted for their compliance in performance reviews. The Social Development Ministry only needs to issue a directive to all public child care facilities advising them that they are now obligated to allow fathers to register their children.

We shall see how these institutions prevail and uphold the human rights of adolescents and promote gender equality in care work.

