

Care Workers Coping with COVID Crisis in Argentina.

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Outline

- A brief background of Argentina's socio-economic and political context leading up to the Covid-19 pandemic
- The impacts of the pandemic on women's economic rights
- Brief examples of the government's responses to the pandemic
- The impacts of the government responses on female care workers from poor households

Socio-economic and political context

- Argentina is an upper-middle income country in LAC, though socio-economic inequalities are acute.
- Prior to the pandemic, the country was facing a socio-economic crisis experienced following four years of neoliberal government. Between 2015-2019, poverty increased significantly, rising by more than five percentage points, affecting 35.5 per cent of the population and 52.3 per cent of children from 0 to 14 years old (INDEC).
- In parallel, there was an exponential increase in foreign debt (rising from US\$ 240,665 million to US\$ 337,267 million in the same period).
- All this put a very restrictive macroeconomic context for the brand new Peronist government that took office when the Pandemic started.

The impacts of the pandemic on women's economic rights

- Though gender inequalities in the labour market were already marked before the pandemic, the situation was worsened, as female participation fell by more than eight percentage points (UNICEF-Mecon, 2021).
- In addition, the COVID-19 crisis resulted in a drop of productive activities, female participation in the labour market fell by 8%, especially in informal sectors and domestic service, where poor women employ.
- At the same time, unpaid reproductive and care work was intensified.
- A UNICEF survey shows that before the pandemic, women performed 68 per cent of household activities, and that since isolation measures were introduced, this has risen to 71 per cent.
- 51 per cent of the women over 18, interviewed in April 2020 said that they had experienced an increased burden of household chores compared to the previous period (Unicef, 2020).
- While women's economic rights were clearly affected, when focusing on poor women, the situation reveals critical.

Government Responses to the Pandemic

- UNWomen UNDP gender tracker stated that Argentina was one of the top countries in gender responses for Covid crises
- At the same time, the Ministry of Women, Gender and Diversity highlighted the importance of the issue of Care in Public Policy Agenda
- The confinement measures were accompanied by a package of initiatives that sought to protect jobs and incomes
- Dismissals without just cause were banned, while teleworking was promoted. All this mainly covered formal employees.
- For informal and unemployed workers, the "emergency family income (IFE)" was granted. This provides a monthly amount equivalent to 59.3 per cent of the minimum wage for only 3 months.
- Further measures adopted relate to the reinforcement of monetary allowances (pensions, retirement benefits, the universal child and pregnancy allowances).
- For domestic workers, paid leave was granted by a presidential decree. Even though, as 77% of them don't work "on the books", this measure was not widely respected
- Focusing on communitary work, the government increased budget allocations and provision of commodities.
- Up to what extent these measures were effective to cushion the Covid crisis? 3 sectors

The impacts of the government responses

- Among domestic workers, the impact of the policies adopted were not effective enough to cope with the ongoing crisis.
- A representative of the union of domestic workers (UPACP) expressed: "Many employers still argue "why should I pay my worker if she doesn't come to work?"
- Two out of three domestic workers were laid off and one in five were no longer paid (Donza, 2020).
- In 2021, this occupation showed a loss of 430,000 jobs. This trend contrasts with the recovery of male employment, which returned to levels similar to the pre-COVID-19 period, and with other sectors of female employment is alarming (CETYD-IDAES, 2021).

The impacts of the government responses

- Although the state provided increased resources at different levels, community care tasks were carried out in a context of insufficient supplies. This meant making the most of the resources available, as one interviewee said:

(...) instead of using one bag of potatoes for two pots, we use it for five. So clearly the nutrients are reduced. it's the only way to stretch, that is, it's the magic that our cooks do. (Beatriz, representative of a canteen belonging to Movimiento Barrios de Pie, located in Danubio Azul, Dock Sud, Avellaneda).

- The voices of the community canteen workers reveal that none of the policies implemented for the sector would have been successful without the organisational groundwork and the intensification of the care work of those who run the canteens.
- *A similar situation was found in communitary kindergartens and crèches*



Though the government's orientation was central to defining and financing measures in a context of macroeconomic restriction, they were not enough to contain the critical situation, especially when analysing the impact on poor female care workers.



Thanks!