

ROUNDTABLE

From Invisible to Visible: Women's Unpaid Care Work in Times of Crisis

Coordinator

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Roundtable Description

Unpaid care work is daily labor that keeps households and communities running, which is predominantly done by women and girls (UN Women, 2025). ILO estimates that globally, these unpaid care responsibilities exclude approximately 708 million women from participating in the workforce. In Asia and Pacific, women spend four times more hours on unpaid and paid care work than men (ESCAP, 2023). Despite being essential to sustaining life and involving physically and emotionally demanding activities, care work is often framed as a moral responsibility rather than recognized as economic and social contribution (Farris, 2025).

In Myanmar, the ongoing conflicts following the military coup have significantly pushed women to carry the increased care demands and fill the gaps in institutional services. While there are women fighters in exile, as more men are moved away from home due to their revolutionary activism and resistance to conscription, women are left to look after the home and family, earn money, and keep communities running. This situation clearly reveals how society heavily relies on women's unpaid work. Without women who will take care of the house, society would cease to function. Their labor forms the backbone and fosters the resilience of the revolution.

Challenge now is to determine how to respect what women are doing in sustaining communities, how to support those who perform it, and how to properly value their labor in post-revolution. Women's care work must be acknowledged as a foundation pillar for building an inclusive and resilient society in future, and their contribution should no longer remain invisible.

Discussion aims to raise the pressing issue affecting women since the coup - unpaid care burden. Session will explore why care work has remained invisible for a long time, focusing on gendered division of household responsibilities, the devaluation of domestic work and its exclusion from the mainstream economy. This invisible burden limits women's time and opportunities for learning and economic participation, ultimately affecting social well-being and long-term productivity. In practice, care work plays a crucial role in reproducing labor force that drives economic activities.

Session will further examine what it means to make women's care work visible – promoting social dialogue on recognition of both paid and unpaid care work, strengthening workers' rights, including the right to unionize and encouraging greater support from stakeholders. Drawing on migrant women's experiences and practice examples from different countries,

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discussion will identify actionable approaches that can be implemented in Myanmar's context.

In addition, panel will bring forward feminist voices on women's lived experiences in challenging gender roles in the revolution, as well as their increased household and community care responsibilities during crisis. This discussion will demonstrate how the intensification of care work caused by conflict and crisis exposes the deeper gender injustice and calls for a transformation of care systems.

By the end of the session, participants will gain a deeper understanding of the social and economic contribution of care work and the central role its play in sustaining our societies, particularly in times of crisis.

Keyword: Women's unpaid care work, Conflict and crisis, Myanmar