



## Migration without Rights is Exploitation

**IDWF at the International Migration Review Forum (IMRF) 2026**  
**04-08 May, 2026**

From 03-08 May 2026, the International Domestic Workers Federation (IDWF) participated in the [International Migration Review Forum](#) (IMRF) at the United Nations Headquarters in New York City, joining governments, trade unions, migrant-led organizations, UN agencies, feminist movements, and civil society groups from around the world to discuss review progress on the implementation of the [Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration](#) (GCM).

Held every four years, the IMRF serves as an important political and advocacy space where movements, workers, and allies can influence global discussions on migration, labour rights, social protection, care systems, and human rights.

While the instrument is non-legally binding, IMRF [Progress Declaration 2026](#) represents political commitment by member states to continue implementing the objectives of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM). Key commitments in the Progress Declaration call for the protection of all migrant rights, promote labor protection, access to social protection and basic services regardless of the migration status. It emphasizes the prevention of exploitation, discrimination and gender based violations, trafficking while promoting safe migration, reunification and regular pathway. However, despite these commitments, the Progress Declaration 2026 the declaration falls short in addressing workers' fundamental rights to freedom of association and collective bargaining, which limits participation in social dialogue and contributes to continued exploitation of migration regimes.

For IDWF, participation in IMRF was essential. Migrant domestic workers remain among the most invisible and excluded workers within migration systems, despite playing a critical role in sustaining households, economies, and care systems globally. Across regions, migrant domestic workers continue to face exploitation, violence, lack of labour protections, debt bondage, restricted mobility, and barriers to justice. This reality is often intensified by restrictive migration policies that prioritize labor supply over the protection of migrant' rights.

At the same time, migrant domestic workers are organizing, building unions, influencing policy, and leading movements across borders, and across sectors. IMRF created an opportunity to ensure that their experiences, demands, and leadership were present in global migration discussions.

*IDWF Delegation: Sonia George, Baryiah Binti, Ben Braga, Sofia Trevino + online participation from leaders and*



This year, IDWF participated with a delegation composed of on-site and on-line leaders, organizers, and technical team members from Asia, Africa, the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) and Secretariat. Throughout the week, the delegation on-site contributed to informal multi stakeholder hearings, official UN hearings, ILO side events, civil society forums, and alliance spaces with the ILO, trade unions, feminist organizations and government missions.

Across all spaces, IDWF carried one central message: **Migration without rights is exploitation.**

This message guided our participation throughout the week and shaped our interventions across discussions on: labour rights, migration governance, care systems, social protection, freedom of association, fair recruitment, and access to justice. As the global demand for care continues to grow, the Forum reinforced a critical political reality: *There can be no just migration system without rights, protection, and representation for migrant domestic workers.*

### Bringing Migrant Domestic Workers into Global Migration Discussions

Throughout the week, IDWF representatives participated in multistakeholder hearings, ILO side events, civil society forums, and care economy discussions, bringing the realities of migrant domestic workers into conversations that too often overlook domestic work and care labour.

Across these spaces, IDWF leaders and allies emphasized that migrant domestic workers are not only affected by migration governance — they are central to it. Discussions repeatedly highlighted the growing global demand for care work, while exposing the continued exclusion of domestic workers from labour protections, social protection systems, and migration policies.

#### 03-04 May at IMRF

- UN General Assembly Hearings
- ILO Side events
- Civil Society Forums
- Care Economy Dialogues
- Trade Union and Feminist Alliance Spaces
- Delegation meetings with partners and donors

Several interventions also raised concerns around:

- temporary migration systems,
- employer-tied visa systems,
- exploitative recruitment practices,
- violence and harassment,
- restrictions on freedom of association,
- and barriers access to justice.

[Watch intervention:](#)



One of the strongest contributions from worker leaders throughout the week was the reminder that migration policies cannot be discussed separately from workers' lived realities. Testimonies from migrant domestic workers grounded discussions in concrete experiences of exploitation, resilience, organizing, and survival across borders.



These discussions reinforced growing recognition that migrant domestic workers are essential to sustaining households, economies, and care systems globally — and that rights, representation, and organizing must be at the center of future migration governance.

### Migration, Care, and Labour Rights: A Growing Political Convergence

One of the clearest themes emerging from IMRF 2026 was the growing connection between migration governance, labour rights, and care systems.

Across multiple events, including ILO discussions, trade union spaces, feminist forums, and care economy dialogues, participants emphasized that migrant workers are sustaining care systems globally, often while remaining excluded from the protections and rights afforded to other workers.

For IDWF, these conversations were particularly important. Migrant domestic workers continue to fill critical gaps in national care systems, supporting children, older persons, persons with disabilities, and households across the world. Yet care work remains undervalued, underpaid, and highly informalized.

#### Discussions also highlighted growing concerns around:

- labour shortages in care sectors
- recruitment systems and labour intermediaries,
- portability of social protection,
- platforms and digital labour recruitment,
- and the increasing privatization of care services.

[Watch intervention](#), Bariyah at ILO Office side event.



Several allies and partners recognized that these debates are becoming increasingly urgent as countries confront demographic changes and rising demand for care work globally. Importantly, the Forum reinforced that migration cannot be treated only as a border or security issue.

For IDWF, this political convergence creates important opportunities moving toward the International Labour Conference (ILC) 2026 and broader advocacy on care, labour rights, and platform economies.

At the same time, worker leaders emphasized that migrant domestic workers are not passive victims of these systems. Across regions, they are organizing, building unions, supporting one another in times of crisis, and advancing labour and social protections through collective action.

On Day 3 of IMRF, allies gathered in solidarity to demand rights, dignity, and justice for all migrant workers. The rally was a powerful reminder that migration is not only a policy discussion. Migration is about people, livelihoods, families and workers organizing across borders to challenge exploitation and build collective power.



[Watch video](#)

<p>The Forum created opportunities to strengthen collaboration between:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● trade unions,</li> <li>● feminist organizations,</li> <li>● migrant-led networks,</li> <li>● care movements,</li> <li>● and civil society allies.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Key Spaces – Days 1-2</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Multi-stakeholder hearings</li> <li>● ILO: Decent Work &amp; Migration Governance</li> <li>● WIMN &amp; Civil Society Discussions</li> <li>● UN Roundtables on Labour Migration</li> </ul>
---	---

These alliances were particularly visible in discussions linked to:

- labour rights,
- care systems,
- fair recruitment,

- gender-responsive migration governance,
- and accountability for states and employers.

For IDWF, these spaces reinforced an important political lesson:

Worker voices change conversations. [Watch Video](#)



At the same time, the week also revealed ongoing challenges. While civil society participation remains important, access to formal negotiations and decision-making spaces continues to be limited. The IMRF 2026 has lack in implementing the GCM’s whole-of-society principle, which calls for meaningful engagement of governments, civil society, trade unions, the private sector, and migrants to ensure inclusive, effective, and accountable migration policies. Questions around implementation, accountability, and meaningful participation remain central moving forward.

Still, IMRF 2026 demonstrated the growing strength of transnational organizing and the importance of continuing to build collective power across movements and regions.

### Migration Governance in Times of Crisis

Throughout IMRF 2026, multiple discussions highlighted the growing impact of conflict, climate change, economic instability, and displacement on migrant workers worldwide.

For migrant domestic workers, these crises often deepen existing inequalities and expose major failures in migration governance systems. In regions such as the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), ongoing conflict and instability continue to leave many workers isolated, displaced, undocumented, or without access to protection and support.

IDWF and allied organizations raised urgent concerns around:

- lack of evacuation mechanisms for migrant workers,
- employer abandonment,
- confiscation of identity documents,
- restrictions on mobility,
- and barriers to accessing humanitarian assistance and justice.

#### Key spaces Day 3-4

- ILO Side event on Women Migrant Workers in the Care economy
- Dialogue at the Ford Foundation
- WIMN Women’s Caucus and launch of Spotlight review
- Social Protection side event
- Fair Recruitment Discussions



Discussions throughout the week reinforced that migrant domestic workers are often excluded from emergency responses despite being among the workers most affected during crises.

IDWF also participated in the launch of the new [Spotlight Report on Migration in times of Crisis](#), coordinated by the Women in Migration Network (WIMN). The report features a chapter on “Migrant domestic workers in the care economy: Essential but unprotected” by Adriana Paz, Grace Papa and Bariyah.

## Key Reflections Emerging from IMRF 2026

Several important reflections emerged throughout the week:

*1. The challenge is no longer lack of frameworks — but lack of implementation*

Across multiple spaces, governments and institutions acknowledged that existing commitments are failing to translate into meaningful protections for migrant workers on the ground.

*2. Domestic workers are increasingly visible within migration governance discussions*

Migrant domestic workers were repeatedly referenced in conversations on care systems, labour rights, fair recruitment, trafficking, and gender-responsive migration governance — reflecting growing recognition of their central role in global economies.

*3. Migration, care, and labour rights are becoming increasingly interconnected*

The Forum reinforced that migration governance cannot be separated from:

- care systems,
- social protection,
- labour standards,
- and gender justice.

*4. Worker testimony shifts political conversations*

Some of the strongest moments during the week came directly from migrant workers and grassroots leaders whose testimonies grounded discussions in lived realities and challenged abstract policy debates.

*5. Global alliances remain essential*

Collaboration between trade unions, migrant-led organizations, feminist groups, care movements, and civil society organizations remains critical to advancing rights-based migration governance and collective advocacy.

### Key Spaces – Day 4-5

- UN GA Negotiations
- IDWF co-hosted event: “Towards Migration governance with a Care Perspective”
- Movement Rally
- Bilateral meetings and donor outreach



## Looking Ahead

IMRF 2026 reaffirmed that migration cannot be discussed separately from labour rights, care systems, social protection, and social justice.

As IDWF moves toward the International Labour Conference (ILC) 2026 and continues broader advocacy on migration and care, migrant domestic workers will continue organizing across borders to demand:

- dignity,
- protection,
- representation,
- and rights for all workers — regardless of migration status.

At the same time, IMRF highlighted the importance of continuing political conversations and alliance-building with key partners and allies on the ground — before, during, and beyond global forums.

### In the News:

Women Press, 29 April 2026

<https://migrantwomenpress.com/2026/04/29/migration-without-rights-is-exploitation-a-call-from-migrant-domestic-workers/>

### Related Resources

🕒 Read: [Labour's Position on the 2026 IMRF Progress Declaration](#)

🕒 Read: [Women in Migration Network \(WIMN\) Manifesto](#)

🕒 Read IDWF Statement: [Migration without Rights is Exploitation: A Call From Migrant Domestic Workers](#)

🕒 Read [Trade Unions take on the Progress Declaration](#)