

ENGAGEMENT WITH CARE WORK

THE ASFARI INSTITUTE FOR CIVIL SOCIETY AND CITIZENSHIP
AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT

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AMERICAN
UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT
ASFARI INSTITUTE FOR CIVIL
SOCIETY & CITIZENSHIP
معهد الأصفري للمجتمع المدني
والمواطنة

OUR COMMITMENT TO ADDRESSING CARE WORK

Care work—both paid and unpaid—comprises the essential tasks that sustain individuals, families, and communities, including childcare, eldercare, domestic labor, and emotional and health-related support. Despite its essential role in upholding economic and social systems, care work is often undervalued and excluded from economic indicators and policy agendas. Globally, care work is marked by deep gender disparities, with women performing the vast majority of unpaid/underpaid labor. This imbalance contributes to broader patterns of inequality, limiting women’s economic participation and reinforcing structural discrimination.

In the MENA region, the dynamics surrounding care work are shaped by a combination of traditional gender roles, an underdeveloped care infrastructure, limited labor protections, and legal and policy frameworks that fail to recognize or support care work adequately. Many women remain confined to unpaid domestic responsibilities, while paid care workers, particularly migrant domestic workers, often operate within precarious conditions, including exploitative systems such as the Kafala sponsorship model. These issues are compounded by social stigmas, a lack of public investment in care services, and the absence of care policies that acknowledge the value of care work and those who perform it.

The Asfari Institute for Civil Society and Citizenship at the American University of Beirut is committed to addressing these challenges by advancing a transformative agenda on care work in the MENA region. We recognize that care work is a social necessity and an essential policy issue at the intersection of gender equality, labor rights, and economic justice. Our work is centered on the belief that recognizing, reducing, redistributing, and fairly compensating care work is essential for inclusive and equitable development.

The Asfari Institute seeks to generate evidence-based knowledge, raise awareness, and influence policy through interdisciplinary research and targeted advocacy. We engage with diverse stakeholders—government actors, civil society, academics, and international organizations—to push for the integration of care work into both national and regional policy frameworks. Our initiatives aim to challenge existing power structures, address the invisibility of care labor, and promote social protection measures that support caregivers and care workers alike.

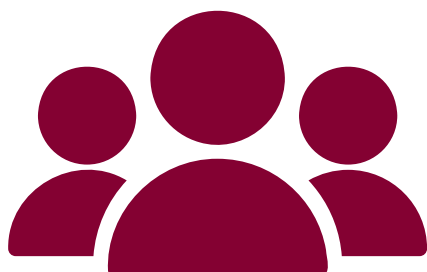
OVERVIEW OF OUR INITIATIVES

MENA WORKING GROUP ON CARE

Launched in September 2024

The **MENA Working Group on Care** (MENA-WGC) is an initiative by the Asfari Institute for Civil Society and Citizenship to develop a platform for individuals and organizations interested in advancing the care agenda. It includes 50+ representatives from diverse sectors, such as government bodies, NGOs, scholars, students, and civil society activists from the region. Members actively participate in various discussions and events, both online and in-person, aimed at fostering dialogue within the MENA care working groups.

This initiative falls under the framework of and in support of the **Global Alliance for Care (GAC)**, which is convened by both the Government of Mexico and UN Women, and is a key initiative arising from the Generation Equality Forum. Stakeholders, including governments, private sectors, and civil society groups, commit to concrete actions from 2021-2026. Their focus is on recognizing, reducing, and redistributing care work, ensuring fair remuneration and representation for care workers. The Alliance aims to empower women economically, establish comprehensive care systems, transform gender roles, expedite post-COVID-19 economic recovery, and advance gender equality.



BECOME A MEMBER



WATCH LAUNCH EVENT



OVERVIEW OF OUR INITIATIVES

CENTERING CARE IN THE MENA REGION WEBINAR SERIES

The Asfari Institute for Civil Society and Citizenship organized a webinar series that brought together experts and activists from the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region to discuss the intersection of care, gender, and policy in the region. Through a series of thematic webinars, the series highlights how care systems intersect with economic policy, migration frameworks, and climate justice, emphasizing the need for comprehensive and inclusive care policies across the region.

Each session is co-hosted with key partners, such as the Global Alliance for Care, ESCWA, ILO, and Oxfam, offering diverse perspectives and practical approaches to care-related challenges. The series aims to promote dialogue on policy reforms, alternative economic measures, and regional initiatives that recognize and support care work as a cornerstone of equitable societies.



BRIDGING CARE AND CLIMATE JUSTICE

FEBRUARY 12, 2024 | [WATCH HERE](#)



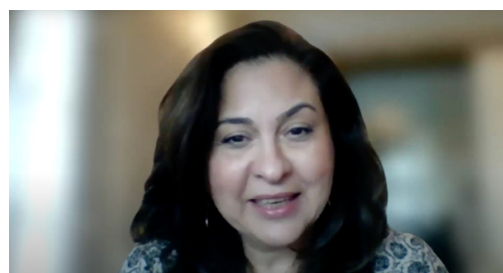
OVERCOMING CHALLENGES OF THE KAFALA SYSTEM

FEBRUARY 15, 2024 | [WATCH HERE](#)



CARE WORK AS A PATHWAY TO GENDER EQUALITY

FEBRUARY 19, 2024 | [WATCH HERE](#)



VALUING CARE: ECONOMIC PERSPECTIVES AND ALTERNATIVES

FEBRUARY 27, 2024 | [WATCH HERE](#)

OVERVIEW OF OUR RESEARCH

CARE RESEARCH GRANT

The Asfari Institute for Civil Society and Citizenship at the American University of Beirut issued a Call for Care Research Grant to support research initiatives focusing on care work within the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. The call aimed to engage scholars, researchers, and advocates in conducting practical research on both paid and unpaid care work and its impact on societies in the region.

Selected research projects include:

1) Unraveling the Impact of Traditional Gender Roles on Unpaid Care Work and Maternal Mental Health in the Middle East - Mira Ibdah

This research project aims to explore the relationship between traditional gender roles and the burden of unpaid care work on women in the Middle East. It focuses specifically on how these roles affect maternal mental health. The project seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of how the gendered division of unpaid care responsibilities impacts mothers' psychological well-being, while also examining the broader socio-cultural and policy environment that shapes these experiences.

2) The Relationship between Child Domestic Labor and the Challenges of Valuing Domestic Work in Iraq - Manal Hameed

This project investigates the intersection between child domestic labor and the broader issues related to the undervaluation of domestic work in Iraq. The research focuses on understanding how child domestic labor is both a consequence and a driver of systemic challenges in recognizing and valuing domestic and care work. It aims to shed light on the socio-economic factors contributing to child domestic labor and to explore pathways for policy intervention to protect child workers while promoting recognition of domestic labor.

OVERVIEW OF OUR RESEARCH

Additional research papers include:

1) Framing a Research Agenda on the Care Economy in the MENA Region - Dr. Deepta Chopra

This research paper examines how unpaid care work in MENA is heavily gendered, with women facing disproportionate responsibilities due to structural barriers like patriarchal norms, weak policies, and limited infrastructure. Using the 3R, 5R, and 7-4-7 frameworks, it identifies research gaps and proposes five priority areas: changing social norms, care in conflict settings, service models in fragile contexts, improving infrastructure, and making social protection systems care-sensitive.

2) Care Work in the MENA Region: Global Trends, Regional Dynamics, & Policy Insights

This research paper analyzes global trends in care work and highlights how, in MENA, unpaid care limits women's economic participation. It points to the impact of poverty, gender norms, legal barriers, and recent crises like COVID-19 in deepening care burdens. The paper calls for policies that recognize and redistribute care work, and emphasizes the role of feminist movements in advocating for better care systems across the region.

3) Importance of Women's Economic Empowerment and Current Legal and Policy Challenges Women Face in Lebanon

This outcome document highlights the challenges facing women and migrant domestic workers in Lebanon, particularly around unpaid and underpaid care work. It discusses how social norms, legal gaps, and practices like the Kafala system limit women's economic participation and reinforce inequality. Based on workshop discussions, it outlines key issues such as the invisibility of care work, lack of accessible services, and the economic crisis, while offering recommendations like investing in the care economy, amending labor laws, abolishing the Kafala system, and protecting and empowering care workers.

OVERVIEW OF OUR EVENTS



HIGH-LEVEL ADVOCACY EVENT ON WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

JANUARY 16, 2024 | [WATCH HERE](#)

The Asfari Institute for Civil Society and Citizenship held the second high-level advocacy event as part of the Shifting Narratives project in partnership with the Embassies of Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Sweden in Lebanon and the Nordic Council of Ministers. The second milestone entailed a significant conversation on women's economic participation, labor laws, and the care economy in Lebanon, by tackling challenges, exploring implications, and paving the way forward.



ADVANCING LEBANON'S CARE ECONOMY AS A MEANS TO WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

JULY 10, 2023 | [WATCH HERE](#)

The Embassies of Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Sweden, and the Asfari Institute for Civil Society and Citizenship hosted their second workshop as part of their project about enhancing women's political and economic empowerment, supported by the Nordic Council of Ministers. The workshop focused on the importance of women's economic empowerment and shed light on the existing legal and policy challenges faced by women in Lebanon. This event comes at a critical time, given the worsening conditions of care workers and the care economy, exacerbated by the ongoing economic crisis and the proposed amendments to the Lebanese Labor Law by Dr. Inaya Ezzedine. The project, supported by the Nordic Council for Ministers, aims to empower women economically and politically in Lebanon.

OVERVIEW OF OUR PODCASTS



Episode with Manal Said

on the Fragmentation of Lebanon's Feminist Movement and Women's Economic Participation

LISTEN NOW



Episode with Lamia Moubayed Bissat on Gender Equality, Sustainable Development, and Social Protection

LISTEN NOW



Episode with Gielan El Messiri on Women's Economic Empowerment, Unpaid Care Work, and Maternity Leave

LISTEN NOW



OVERVIEW OF OUR **PODCASTS**



Episode with Dr. Halima Kaakour on
Women's Political and Economic
Empowerment in Lebanon

LISTEN NOW



Podcast with Teresa Pontillas on
Realities and Challenges Faced
by Migrant Domestic Workers in
Lebanon

LISTEN NOW



LOOKING FORWARD...

Building on the momentum of our recent initiatives, the Asfari Institute for Civil Society and Citizenship at the American University of Beirut is committed to further deepening and expanding its engagement with care work in Lebanon and the MENA region. Over the past years, we have laid important groundwork through a series of activities that have brought attention to care work as a critical issue for gender equality, labor rights, and social justice. These have included the establishment of the MENA Working Group on Care (MENA-WGC), our regional webinar series centering care in policy dialogues, our Care Research Grant supporting new knowledge production, and high-level advocacy events addressing care work within broader conversations on women's economic empowerment.

Looking ahead, we aim to build on this foundation by expanding the activities and reach of the MENA-WGC. We plan to grow its membership, strengthen collaborations across sectors, and create more regular opportunities for dialogue, knowledge exchange, and joint action on care work. We also seek to produce more regionally grounded research that captures diverse experiences of care workers, informs policy debates, and highlights solutions from across the region. In addition, we will continue to create platforms — through webinars, workshops, podcasts, and publications — that engage a wide range of stakeholders, including policymakers, activists, researchers, care workers, and international partners.

Our goal is to maintain ongoing dialogue, ensure that the voices of care workers and marginalized groups are heard, and contribute to policy reforms that recognize, redistribute, and fairly compensate care work.





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