

Migration and the Future of Work



When essential cannot do without presence: Risk and vulnerability for domestic workers around the world

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In the beginning of the lockdown phase in Europe in spring 2020, a meme on Facebook said “Our cleaning lady just called and told us she will be working from home and will send us instructions on what to do”. The meme, while intending to be humorous, underscored the unavoidable necessity for many to physically go to work. The property of “teleworkability” which applies to many jobs today, including jobs which are considered essential to society (e.g., in communication, teaching, security and even medicine), does not apply to housecleaning, child care or elderly care where physical encounters are necessary to carry out the job. As a consequence, workers and care-receivers are exposed to contagion. This has risky consequences for those who belong to already vulnerable populations, such as domestic workers who are typically women from impoverished and socially stigmatized backgrounds. This talk will discuss the possible impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on such social groups, investigating also the role which public policies, especially in the field of migration, may have with a comparative look to different national contexts.