

# EQUITY, DIGNITY, AND SAFETY FOR MIGRANT & RURAL WOMEN

*A guide for policymakers by  
Justice for Migrant Women*



Justice for  
Migrant Women



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## Who We Are

- **Focused on Migrant and Rural Women:** We directly address the needs of migrant and rural women, including farmworkers and their families. We apply a gender equity lens to all our work.
- **Powerful Storytellers:** We shift the narrative around gender equity for migrant women.
- **Intersectional:** We have unique expertise to focus on the challenges that exist within the intersection of working people's rights and anti-sexual violence.
- **Trusted Leaders:** We lead with love. We are a trusted, well-respected organization within the field, and we lend our voice to advocate for the rights of migrant women. We advance our mission with courage, leading and co-leading while recognizing everyone has power.
- **Ground-Up Approach:** We are closely engaged within the community. Many of our staff have personal, lived experience and deeply understand the challenges faced by migrant women. We engage the community in defining success and are responsive and adaptive to their needs.

## Mission

Justice for Migrant Women (J4MW) champions migrant and rural women's right to live and work with dignity, and without fear of sexual violence.

## Vision

Our vision is a world with equity, dignity, and safety for all migrant and rural women.

# What We Do

We serve **survivors**. Our constituency has experienced or witnessed sexual and physical violence in their home countries, suffered violence in migration, and/or experienced similar mistreatment in their communities and workplaces in the U.S. For those living in rural communities, it is often more difficult to access services and community resources that will support them in their journey to thrive.

We work with **women who are low paid workers** and have migrated to and/or from rural areas, whether that migration is across international, regional or state borders.

We work alongside many **immigrant women and communities**. It is important to recognize both the intersection of and distinction between immigrant and migrant women. While many migrant women cross borders, others who we serve migrate seasonally for work and do not identify as immigrants.

We work in **rural communities**. Commonly shared mainstream narrative about rural communities in the United States do not reflect our lived reality, which is that rural communities in the United States are sustained by migrants, including immigrants, women of color and low paid workers.



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# Together We Can:

At Justice for Migrant Women, we believe through the emphasis of shared humanity, we can work collaboratively across political parties, industries and sectors to advance our three main goals:



## End Workplace Sexual Violence



## Address Workplace Mental Health

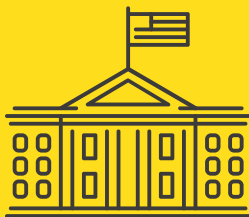


## Achieve Equal Pay

Congress and federal agencies have a unique role in achieving these outcomes. They must prioritize:



- **BE HEARD in the Workplace Act**
- **Funding the Farm and Ranch Stress Assistance Network**
- **Expanding Childcare in Rural America Act, or S.1867/H.R. 3922**



- **Cross agency collaboration to increase efficiency in responding to and preventing workplace violence and harassment**
- **Including mental health as a component of enforcing health and safety in the workplace**
- **Reinstating the EEO-1 pay data collection**

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# End Workplace Sexual Violence

Migrant and rural women are particularly vulnerable to experiencing sexual violence in the workplace context. The International Labour Organization (ILO) reports that women account for over **40% of the 164 million migrant workers globally**. In a global poll conducted by Gallup in collaboration with the ILO and Lloyd's Register Foundation, **80% of female respondents** reported that they had experienced some form of harassment or violence in the workplace.

It can be difficult to seek care and services because of the transient and often isolated nature of their work. For some migrant women, their legal status as immigrants makes them vulnerable and subjects them to unjust power dynamics between employer and employee. This is particularly true when individuals are unfamiliar with the U.S. legal system.



Congress should: Pass the **BE HEARD in the Workplace Act**. It is bold legislation that responds to the needs of all to address and prevent all forms of harassment, including sexual assault in the workplace for all workers regardless of the size of their workplace.

The Citizenship for Essential Workers Act, H.R. 3043 / S.1392 is also important because it would provide immigrant workers a pathway to citizenship, expanding their opportunity to leave a dangerous workplace.



Investigative branches of government agencies, such the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) and Department of Labor, must **prioritize investigations of reported workplace sexual assault**, especially in settings with a high number of workers from marginalized or underserved communities. Agencies must create **cross-agency collaboration systems** to ensure effective and efficient responses.

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# Address Workplace Mental Health

Many migrant women face workplace conditions that worsen mental health, such as harassment in the workplace, wage theft and lack of paid family leave. People who migrate annually across state lines, such as those employed in agriculture, face a variety of challenges with accessing mental health care. These include issues such as health insurance or the impracticalities of trying to find a therapist with each seasonal move.

A Morning Consult poll found that during 2021, **61% of farmers and farmworkers and 51% of rural adults reported experiencing more stress and mental health challenges** compared to the prior year. Data from a Doctors Without Borders report demonstrates the connection between mental health, migration and sexual violence. Fifty-six (56) % of the migrants treated by Doctors Without Borders present with moderate or serious symptoms of mental illness. Of those treated for sexual violence along the migration route, 67.5 % were women.



Congress should: Fund the **Farm and Ranch Stress Assistance Network (FRSAN)** through the reauthorization of the Farm Bill. Passage of the Supporting Farmworker Mental Health Act or H.R. 5637/S. 2898 would ensure that authorized funds are allocated specifically to farmworkers.

Congress should also pass the Working for Immigrant Safety and Empowerment (WISE) Act, or H.R. 5145. This bill would expand access to necessary care and resources for survivors.



The Department of Labor should include **mental health as a component of enforcing health and safety in the workplace**. The mental health crisis in the United States is a public health crisis.

Furthermore, the administration should use its convening power to host mental health professionals and advocates alongside migrant and rural community members to ensure that resources and solutions being invested in by the federal government reach the most vulnerable communities.

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# Achieve Equal Pay

Migrant and rural women often work in industries that lack protections under basic labor law, such as the National Labor Relations Act and the Fair Labor Standards Act. This means that individuals such as farmworkers, domestic workers and migrant women who are independent contractors or employed in the gig economy may not be afforded the right to overtime or the right to unionize. Data shows that unionization helps close the pervasive gender wage gap by providing better wages, better paid leave and access to good benefits, such as health care. Latinas are among those that face the widest wage gap.

For women in Rural America, the lack of access to childcare exacerbates the pay gap. Women for the Land highlights that **43 percent of U.S. farmland** –nearly 388 million acres– is now farmed or co- farmed by women, yet a Center for American Progress study calls rural areas child care deserts and says **nearly 60% of rural families don't have any access to child care.**



Congress must reauthorize the Farm Bill with provisions to address childcare in rural America by including the **Expanding Childcare in Rural America Act, or S.1867/H.R. 3922**. This would direct the USDA to authorize and prioritize funds for improving childcare in rural America.

Congress should also Pass the Paycheck Fairness Act., or S. 728 to address the wage gap and strengthen protections for individuals filing sex based wage discrimination claims.



The EEOC must **reinstate EEO-1 pay data collection** as a way to help identify and eliminate pay discrimination and close the wage gap nationwide. Expansive and accurate data is crucial for creating and implementing policies that protect the most vulnerable communities from experiencing a wide pay gap.

# Immigration

Justice for Migrant Women's constituency is greatly affected by the outdated immigration laws and systems that are in place, and immigration rights intersect with each of the aforementioned priorities. Oftentimes, immigration status adds to the already existing vulnerabilities faced by women. Whether individuals are in the United States as immigrants with differing immigration status or they are part of mixed status families that are presented with fear and instability due to the broken immigration system, there is widespread fear and, too often, harm committed against them because of their immigration status or that of their family and friends. Women and children in detention are at further risk of being abused, sexually assaulted and in some cases forcibly sterilized. The reasons why women migrate to the United States are numerous, including **fleeing violence in their own country as well as disasters caused by climate change**, among other reasons. Justice for Migrant Women offered extensive comments regarding the restriction of asylum and the impact that this has not only on the United States, but globally.

Justice for Migrant Women calls on Congress and the Administration to act **swiftly to protect women, girls and their families coming to the United States**. We must remedy the nation's immigration system by expanding legal rights status and providing a **pathway to citizenship for the roughly 11 million undocumented immigrants** living in the U.S. who have endured years, and in some cases decades, of marginalization, exploitation and abuse because of their immigration status.



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# Conclusion & Acknowledgements



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The issues addressed here are interlocking with myriad others. Justice for Migrant Women's advocacy mirrors that of our constituency who hold multiple, intersecting identities. Solutions require analysis on how decisions related to economic security, safety and health, connect to others and what the impact of these actions will have on the lives of migrant and rural women, as well as their families.

This resource was made possible by women, immigrants, farmworkers, and their communities. We are grateful for their leadership.



Contact J4MW's Policy Manager at [catherine@justice4women.org](mailto:catherine@justice4women.org) for more information.