



Until we are all equal

Ana Lucia is a SOAR project participant in Ecuador.



# Soaring, Flying, Breaking Free

See the impact you've made for caregivers in Ecuador and Paraguay through the SOAR project.



Bernarda Lopez, a Paraguayan Trade Union Confederation representative, shares her opinion during a workshop on the National Care Policy.

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## THE FACTS

**WHO:** Through the **Strengthening the Organization, Agency, and Rights of Women Early-Childhood Care and Development Workers (SOAR)** project, Plan is partnering with 900 women child-care workers and preschool teachers in Ecuador and Paraguay, helping them become more socially and financially independent. The project is funded by Global Affairs Canada and individual Canadian donors.

**WHAT:** The project focuses on creating fairer working conditions and a more balanced sharing of family-care duties. We're tackling long-standing inequalities, especially around care work like child care and housework that is done mostly by women. Our goal is to ensure that women are treated fairly for this work and that labour laws are upheld. And by connecting women workers, we're helping them stand up for their rights and create real change together.

**WHERE:** In Quito and Guayaquil in Ecuador and in the departments of San Pedro, Caaguazú, and Guairá in Paraguay as well as the capital, Asunción. We chose these areas because they have many early-childhood care and development (ECCD) workers and active women's-rights organizations.

**WHEN:** April 2024–March 2028

**WHY:** Women ECCD workers in Ecuador and Paraguay often lack benefits like paid time off or health care, and they face wage gaps, workplace discrimination, and limited access to professional development and legal protections. They also handle most household responsibilities, such as child care, cooking, cleaning, and caring for older family members – often without pay or recognition.

**Only 10% of women surveyed in Paraguay had a written contract for their caregiving or domestic work. In Ecuador, only 54% said they receive a stable monthly salary from their employer.**

## PROJECT OVERVIEW

# The Cost of Care

**I**magine getting ready for work in the morning. You grab your keys, wallet, and bag and step outside. As you walk to the bus stop, your pulse races and you look over your shoulder, feeling vulnerable because of the violence in your community. When you arrive at your workplace, the challenges continue. For women in some parts of Ecuador and Paraguay, this is their everyday reality.

A study conducted in 2019 by the Inter-American Development Bank estimated there were 156,623 caregivers in Ecuador and 105,831 caregivers in Paraguay. Many work informally, without contracts, often for long hours and little pay. Workplace violence and abuse are real risks. If they get sick, health care is hard to access.

In its first year, the SOAR project focused on listening to women caregivers and domestic workers to understand the barriers they face. We brought together local teams and partners, conducted surveys and focus groups, and built trust. Many women told us they want to improve their skills and organize, but things like slow internet connectivity, no laptops, and trouble reading make it tough. They asked for hands-on training and printed materials that are easy to read. For a lot of women, their schooling ended at the secondary level, so practical, accessible learning is key.

With these insights, we're shaping programs that fit their lives and working to ensure that local governments and organizations support the right laws and provide support so caregivers aren't left to face these challenges alone.



### The SOAR project's targets include:

- Training 900 women ECCD workers in professional skills and their economic and social rights
- Reaching 700 women via digital learning platforms
- Supporting 90 women leaders to be better advocates for themselves and others
- Engaging 11,300 community members to grow awareness of labour rights for women ECCD workers
- Involving 125 men working in ECCD as allies
- Training 1,090 civil workers to provide public services for women ECCD workers free of bias and discrimination

SOAR helps care workers access formal training and certifications, which helps them move from informal, low-paying jobs to more secure employment.

## Thank you for your support

You're helping create better working conditions for women care workers in Ecuador and Paraguay and helping shift attitudes so that women have more say in decisions and so men share the workload at home more equally.

### Did you know?

The SOAR project and its partner organizations helped shape Paraguay's National Care Policy, which ensures access to care services for young children, elderly people, or people with disabilities as well as resources and support to caregivers like domestic workers and preschool teachers.

**Up next:** SOAR will be directly supporting the implementation of the National Care Policy.

BY THE NUMBERS

## Project Insights

“

Caregiving is something that we often take for granted. The care economy is the foundation of societal development.”

—Sara Nikolic,  
program manager,  
Plan International  
Canada

Plan International's conversations with 226 women in Ecuador and 382 women in Paraguay mark one of the first large-scale efforts to truly listen to paid and unpaid caregivers about their everyday realities. These women shared stories of working without contracts, being paid late or not at all, facing workplace violence, and carrying unequal burdens at home. For many, confidence and personal skills are hard-won in environments that rarely support them. Here's what we found:

**90%** of women in Paraguay didn't have written contracts for their caregiving or domestic work.

**20%** of women in Paraguay experienced violence or sexual harassment at their workplace. Only 7% reported it, as many women were afraid to lose their jobs.

**63%** of nannies in Paraguay also did work around the house, reinforcing the idea that women are expected to “do it all.”

**70.3%**

of women in Ecuador don't feel supported by their family and community in exercising their rights.

**76%** of women in Ecuador are confident in themselves and their skills but feel they cannot exercise their rights due to factors such as inaccessible social services and legal protection against violence.



Lucía helps a child learn to write as part of her care work in Ecuador.

## A STORY OF CHANGE

# Take Care, Joanna

One woman's decade-long story of resilience and caring for children.



There's colour everywhere around Joanna. Her classroom for three- and four-year-olds bursts with red, yellow, and blue streamers. The windowpanes are bright green. There are red chairs and pink-and-turquoise cartoons on the door. Even Joanna's striped orange shirt is a patchwork of the alphabet, with a grey elephant sitting next to a yellow "E" on her sleeve.

Joanna fills children's lives with colour and care. But her journey as an educator and caregiver hasn't been easy. "Not having enough money for tickets [for public transit], not having enough to eat, not having enough to pay the rent is something very difficult that affects us emotionally," Joanna says. "Even so, we have to come to work."

In her 10 years of caring for children – both her own and others' – the work has taken a toll on her health. Even with health insurance, it's difficult for her to get a doctor's appointment. "We have to come to work sick, and it's really hard to care for children when you're exhausted and don't have any energy," she says.

It's insights like Joanna's that are shaping the SOAR project. Before we launched any training, we sat down with caregivers and domestic workers like Joanna to ask what would help: what kind of training, what topics, what formats, and how often. We're also working with institutions like the Ministry of Women in Paraguay and the Ministry of Labour in Ecuador to make it easier for women to access health care, take time off, and put their own care first.

A government representative from the Paraguay La Central region facilitates a workshop co-organized with the Ministry of Women on the National Care Policy. The meeting brought together representatives from civil-society organizations (including Plan Paraguay and its women's-rights organization partners), academia, domestic workers unions, and various trade unions.



“

If I am in good health, I can take better care of the children.”

—Joanna, 38, a caregiver in the SOAR project

Joanna has been doing care work for over 10 years.



As part of her work, Janeth helps a child play in Ecuador – providing the care work that helps build children's futures and sustain communities.

## Thank you!

**This work is only possible because of your support. Thank you for your incredible generosity and commitment to creating better working environments for caregivers and domestic workers in Ecuador and Paraguay – places where their rights are protected and their work is truly valued.**



### About Plan International Canada

Plan International Canada is a member of a global organization dedicated to advancing children's rights and equality for girls. Plan International has been building powerful partnerships with and for children for over 85 years and is now active in more than 80 countries. We stand with children, especially girls, wherever they are oppressed, exploited, left behind, or not equally valued. We're determined optimists, and we will continue to persevere until we are all equal.

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