

AuPair Repair manifest on 8th of March

[EN]

Dear (privileged) *white* women,

We, au pairs, would like to remind you on this year's March 8th, that your choice to use your money to delegate your household duties to another woman is not without the consequence of contributing to the patriarchy. Just because you are an emancipated woman, does not mean that you are participating in feminism.

Au pairs are brought into families from many countries (many from the global south and east), under the guise of a cultural exchange or a gap year experience. Expecting to be part of the family and participate in many cultural activities, including language learning, engaging in local customs and cooking and being involved in the family life. This is, however, often not the case. For many au pairs, their experience turns into a cacophony of mis- or unclear communication, undefined working hours, underspecification of expectations and general uncomfot. Even when an au pair has a university education and plans to eventually migrate to their host country, they are often not taken as seriously as a local babysitter who is equally qualified would because au pairs are seen as additional and cheap childcare. How is one expected to be "part of the family" when they are depending on the family for many things, including housing, a visa and a salary?

When one is living under the same roof as their employer and is depending on them for many things, especially as a non-EU citizen, how can problems be brought up without fear of losing not only job security but also housing? The one sided relationship and power dynamic of the "host" parents can heavily result in an au pair that is left feeling unsupported, underpaid, isolated and exploited. And how can they reach out for help? When there are no associations or government organizations that keep track of the number of au pairs (in Austria), how do they know if they need to check in on an au pair?

In addition to organizations not being able to help au pairs, because it's not clear how many there are and where they are located, au pairs are also not often familiar with the government of their host country and cannot reach out for help or don't know what resources they have. The regulations that are made by the government about how much au pairs are allowed to work and what officially counts as work are not clearly defined, leading to difficulties bringing up issues or recognizing exploitation on the au pair's side.

Au pair work is often marketed as "fun" or "easy" because it's seen by society as a woman's job, however what is not taken into account is the amount of mental energy it takes. If an au pair is learning a language and a new culture, a new family dynamic, trying to communicate with the children, as well as being expected to do "light household tasks", their job is more like that of a household manager for most people than a childcare worker. Additionally, if they are being delegated jobs by the woman of the house, this is directly creating a chain of oppression.

So, dear (privileged) white women, what are we?

Are we your household manager, that gets paid appropriately, that has clear tasks, that knows their worth and gets treated as such? Or are we just your "older daughter" that doesn't have enough time to share her culture because she is exhausted by the unclarities and overexpectations of tasks?

