

Conversations on Working in Freedom

Linking evidence and gendering policies to prevent trafficking in the wake of COVID-19 Pandemic

A discussion series with experienced trade unionists and expert researchers

Organised by the Work in Freedom programme, ILO

First Panel Discussion on

Domestic Workers and the COVID-19 Pandemic

Understanding Challenges Ahead and Evolving Collective Strategies

June 18, 2020 at 2:30 pm - 5 pm IST via Webex Online

The first discussion in the WIF series will focus on domestic workers in and from India. The ground realities of the impact of COVID-19 on their working and living conditions and the challenges they face in returning to work with dignity and protection against the COVID-19 virus will be the focus of the seminar. Media reports indicate that both live-in and live-out workers have been adversely affected, while they may have been impacted in different ways based on their employment terms. Non-payment of wages has emerged as a common issue, while part-time workers fear losing their job due to their living conditions where social distancing is a challenge and stigmatisation stemming from notions of domestic workers as 'corona carriers' has led to arbitrary restrictions being placed by resident welfare associations. In addition, harassment by landlords for rent, no food have led to many left with no option but to walk back despite the risk of infection. Many domestic workers are reported stranded abroad,

some have been turned out by their employers without settlement of dues while others are working overtime, without rest and heightened risk of abuse. Both types of workers are at risk of contracting the virus from their employers.

A pertinent, yet worrisome factor is that and despite notifications on wages of domestic workers in some states and continuing struggles to implement the existing laws for DWs, their rights in the workplace are seldom recognised because their workplace itself is not legally recognised. Due to COVID, the state and central government's directives to employers of informal workers are unprecedented, yet, domestic workers mostly lie outside the ambit of benefiting as workers eligible for relief. This factor has also been one of the main obstacles in enacting a law to protect domestic workers and the need to collectively strategize on these issues, will be essential to translate demands into a reality.

The ILO Convention 189 holds renewed significance in upholding decent work for domestic workers, next year will be a decade since its adoption. A renewed commitment to LO Convention 190 will draw attention to the need to prevent violence and harassment in the workplace. The International Domestic Workers Day on June 16 is observed to celebrate a growing global movement to assert the rights of this vast, hidden yet essential workforce. Therefore, to join the global celebrations and reflect on challenges ahead, the first discussion series will be held on June 18, 2020 online and speakers will include Nalini Nayak (SEWA), Kiran Moghe (CITU), Sujata Mody (PTS), Vani Saraswathi (MigrantRights.org) Praveena Kodoth (CDS Trivandrum) and Samita Sen (University of Cambridge). The discussion will be introduced by Neha Wadhawan (National Project Coordinator - India, Work in Freedom, ILO) and moderated by Igor Bosc (Chief Technical Advisor, Work in Freedom, ILO).