

Domestic work refers to housework such as sweeping, cleaning utensils, washing clothes, cooking, caring of children and such other work which is carried out for an employer for remuneration. Domestic work provides an important livelihood source for illiterate women or those with very little education. Official statistics place the numbers employed in India as 4.75 million, (of which 3 million are women) but this is considered as severe underestimation and the true number to be more between 20 million to 80 million workers! However, numbers alone do not describe the importance of their work, or the hardships they face. Many of these workers do not even receive the minimum wage (in States where it exists), work extremely long hours and often do not get one day's rest. According to a recent study (Institute of Social Studies Trust 2009 "Key findings from survey of live-out domestic workers in NCT of Delhi"), in Delhi the monthly income reported by domestic workers on an average is RS 1875. This varies based on the number of tasks, types of tasks, number of households and the locality where work is performed.

Despite the benefits paid domestic work offers employers, the workers are slow to get recognition as workers and there are no law and policy to regulate and protect workers employed in this sector.

Domestic workers are often exploited at the hands of the so called placement agencies that lure workers from the rural areas to the cities, promising them lucrative salary, lifestyle and benefits. A significant number of these women migrate from states like Jharkhand, Bihar, Bengal and Orissa. Most come from vulnerable communities, lower caste or ethnic minority communities. As per broad estimates, there are over 800-1000 placement agencies in the capital city of Delhi itself. Placement agencies also take commissions – amounting to Rs. 10,000- from employers promising to place skilled workers. Most agencies do not share the information regarding the negotiated wages with the workers. Some adjust a considerable proportion of domestic workers' salary of the initial months as brokerage expenses, transportation cost etc. There are many tales of employers who have failed to get the promised placement of workers, and the agents have also become untraceable. Many times, an employer pays the workers' salaries to the agent believing the wages are being paid to the workers, but in actual reality the wages are kept by them. This situation clearly poses a "lose-lose" for both workers and employers, yet placement agencies remain firmly embedded in the dynamics of supply and demand because of the highly informal nature of the domestic work sector, which enables this kind of exploitation to go unregulated.

Given this, **in India**, the Ministry of Labour and Employment, Government of India, has acknowledged the importance of domestic work to households and the need to improve welfare and regulatory measures for promoting decent work for domestic workers. Also, for the very first time, domestic workers have been recognized as workers in the Unorganized Sector Social Security Act, 2008.

At the **international level**, domestic work is being recognised as "real" work and there will be a discussion in June 2010 at the International Labour Conference (ILO) to decide on a international Labour Convention for domestic work. Many countries such as South Africa, Brazil, Hong Kong, Philippines, Uruguay, Mali, Spain, France, Italy, Switzerland, have labour laws or mechanisms to protect and promote rights of the domestic workers.

In India, a draft bill has been proposed by National Commission For Women to govern conditions of work for domestic workers and is under review and discussion. The major areas covered by the proposed bill relate to definitional issues, such as who is a domestic worker, the age of the worker, the definition of employer, workplace, the placement agency, defining work hours, rest periods, weekly offs, annual vacations, wage levels, payment of wages, need for a written contract, creation of fund for domestic workers, registration of domestic workers, enabling them to use existing social security and maternity benefits and enrolment in future schemes and programs of the government.

CAMPAIGN ON DOMESTIC WORK:

Keeping in mind the households and the largest workforce of domestic workers in urban settings, the ILO has launched a campaign "**Your Work Is Important**" to generate public awareness on the value of the work undertaken by domestic workers. Public perception of domestic work is often that it is low status work undertaken by destitute women and men. In such a context, the sheer benefit of their services, or what will happen if households could not depend on their services, is forgotten. The campaign aims to

- Spread awareness amongst the domestic workers about the importance of work they do
- Sensitize and create awareness amongst the households who employ domestic workers about the contribution of the domestic workers in their homes
- Promote decent work for domestic workers

To continue with the ongoing Campaign, it is proposed to organize a **Photo Competition** under the theme '**Your Work Is Important**', to protect and promote the rights of the domestic workers as 'workers' and to make their work more visible to the society. This photo competition aims to involve youth and employers in the campaign and spread awareness about the contribution of domestic workers in the household. It will also spread awareness about the challenges and issues faced by domestic workers.

- The photographs can be clicked by professional and amateur photographers and can include photographs:
- Of the domestic workers in the work environment or at their homes
- Linked to the concept of 'paid' domestic work
- That promote the concept of decent work for domestic workers
- That recognizes the contribution of the domestic workers towards enhancing the quality of life and economic condition of their own family or the households where they work.