



Regional Workshop on the Role of Trade Unions in Promoting Decent Work for Domestic Workers in Arab Countries

(Beirut, 11-12 November 2010)

Background

There are today millions of domestic workers. They represent an important and growing segment of the labour force and their work enables others to improve their living standards. The great majority of them are women and many are migrant workers. Since 1948, the International Labour Organization has repeatedly drawn attention to the insufficient or absent protection of domestic workers in labour legislation. In March 2008, following an international campaign by global unions, the ILO Governing Body decided to place Decent Work for Domestic Workers as an agenda item for the 2010 International Labour Conference.

The ILO Governing Body proposed that the International Labour Conference develop ILO instruments, possibly in the form of a Convention accompanied by a Recommendation, to give this group of workers the protection they so urgently need. Trade unions, in particular the Workers' Group of the ILO, has been at the forefront of promoting the adoption of international standards to improve the legal environment and enable domestic workers to benefit from the full range of protections and rights related to decent work. A global campaign has been launched to support the adoption of an International Convention accompanied by a Recommendation.

The majority of domestic workers in Arab countries are migrant women from Asian and African countries. They largely live within the households that receive their services, under sponsorship arrangements. Excluded from labour and social security laws in the region, they are often viewed as aliens or victims rather than workers at both the level of social perception and policy response. The undervaluation of care work at all levels can lead to the undermining of workers performing it.

To date, trade unions across the region have had limited involvement in the campaign for Decent Work for Domestic Workers. Regional labour activists have tended to claim that addressing the concerns of specific groups of workers, such as domestic workers, carries the risk of falling into a 'divide and rule' situation, since it is the rights of all workers that should be promoted. However, the pursuit of social justice requires giving priority to the worst-off, and adopting a sense of strategic planning rather than an 'all or nothing' approach.

Sustainable improvement in the conditions of domestic work in the Arab region hinges on the self-organization of domestic workers, including women migrant domestic workers. It is often the case that neither can they join trade unions in their countries of origin nor are they welcome in the trade unions of the countries where they work. Upon their return home, they may associate with support organizations mainly providing help to mitigate the trauma and abuses that they have suffered.



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More recently, associations of domestic workers have emerged to organize migrant domestic workers in their countries of origin. The experiences of domestic workers organizing in countries of destination can also inspire and guide ongoing efforts. Across the Arab region, domestic workers' support networks do exist and are quite vibrant, although typically strictly confined to national community lines.

Trade unions globally, and in the Arab region particularly, have a crucial role in advancing the standard setting process on Decent Work for Domestic Workers. The ILO's Brown Report¹, which includes the proposed Convention and Recommendation based on the first discussion, as well as Office commentary, has already been sent to governments. Governments' replies need to reflect the results of consultations with employers' and workers' organizations. Employers' and workers' organizations can also reply directly. In this context, the workshop aims to enable the formulation of a regional trade union position in support of Decent Work for Domestic Workers.

Objectives

Organized jointly by the ILO Regional Office for Arab States and the Bureau for Workers' Activities (ACTRAV), this two-day activity will gather national and regional trade union representatives to discuss the standard setting process for Decent Work for Domestic Workers. The two-day workshop is expected to:

- Advise national trade union centres concerning comments to be made on the Brown Report as per the International Trade Union Confederation's (ITUC) position;
- Inform and mobilize future trade union actions; and
- Develop plans for moving forward

Time & Place

Padova Hotel, Sin el-Fil, Horsh Tabet
November 11-12, 2010
Beirut, Lebanon

¹ The full text of *Report IV(1): Decent Work for Domestic Workers* known as the Brown Report can be accessed at: http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/@ed_norm/@relconf/documents/meetingdocument/wcms_104700.pdf



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Participants

The 25 to 30 participants at the two-day meeting include:

- Representatives from workers' organisations from Arab states
- Migrant domestic workers in Lebanon will give testimonials
- Representatives from the international trade union movement, including the International Trade Union Confederation
- Human rights NGOs, women's organizations and other relevant trade union partners are invited as observers

Languages

The workshop will be conducted in Arabic and English with simultaneous translation.

Resource Persons

- Walid Hamdan, Simel Esim and Azfar Khan (Decent Work Team – ILO Beirut)
- Martin Oelz and Luc Demaret (ACTRAV – ILO Geneva)
- Marieke Koning (ITUC)
- Trade unions' representatives from the region
- Domestic workers' representatives from Lebanon

Resource Materials

- *Report IV(1): Decent Work for Domestic Workers* (Brown Report)
http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/@ed_norm/@relconf/documents/meetingdocument/wcms_104700.pdf
- *Moving towards decent work for domestic workers: An overview of the ILO's work*
http://www.ilo.org/gender/Informationresources/lang-en/docName--WCMS_142905/index.htm
- *FAQ about Live-in Domestic Workers in Lebanon*
http://www.ilo.org/gender/Informationresources/lang-en/docName--WCMS_113954/index.htm
- *ITUC Circular No. 43 (2010)*



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- *Issue Brief 1: Promoting the Rights of Women Migrant Domestic Workers in Arab States: The Case of Lebanon*
http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---gender/documents/publication/wcms_097023.pdf
- *Policy Brief 1: Social Care Needs and Service Provisions in Arab States: Bringing Care Work into Focus in Lebanon*
http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---gender/documents/publication/wcms_097022.pdf
- *ILO Arab States Gender Equality Newsletters 1-4:*
http://www.ilo.org/public/english/region/arpro/beirut/downloads/equality/gendernews_1.pdf
http://www.ilo.org/public/english/region/arpro/beirut/downloads/equality/gendernews_2.pdf
http://www.ilo.org/public/english/region/arpro/beirut/downloads/equality/gendernews_3.pdf
http://www.ilo.org/public/english/region/arpro/beirut/downloads/equality/gendernews_4.pdf
- *Brochure - Gender Equality at Work in Arab States*
http://www.ilo.org/gender/Informationresources/Publications/lang--en/docName--WCMS_114373/index.htm
- *Maid in Lebanon (documentary)*
http://www.ilo.org/sapfl/Informationresources/Audiovisuals/lang--en/WCMS_143048/index.htm
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=94rO242G6dY>
- *World of Work Magazine n°69, August 2010 - The fight against child labour: Moving into a higher gear*
http://www.ilo.org/wow/PrintEditions/lang--en/docName--WCMS_143510/index.htm
- *World of Work Magazine n°68 - April 2010: Decent work for domestic workers*
http://www.ilo.org/wow/PrintEditions/lang--en/docName--WCMS_126576/index.htm
- *World of Work Magazine n°65 - April 2009: Gender Equality at the Heart of Decent Work*
http://www.ilo.org/wow/PrintEditions/lang--en/docName--WCMS_105172/index.htm