

**ILO Asian Knowledge Forum: Realizing Decent Work for Domestic Workers
Bangkok, Thailand, 24-26 April 2013****INFORMATION NOTE****Background**

At the 100th annual Conference of the International Labour Organization (ILO) in June 2011, government, worker and employer delegates adopted the Domestic Workers Convention (No. 189) and Recommendation (No. 201) aimed at improving the working and living conditions of tens of millions of domestic workers worldwide. Thereafter, the ILO Governing Body endorsed an ILO Strategy for action towards making decent work a reality for domestic workers worldwide which highlights the importance of knowledge development and the exchange of experience and good practice among ILO constituents and domestic workers organizations worldwide.

In Asia, the interest of the ILO constituents in the lead up to the adoption of these historical standards has been considerable. There is a high demand for decent job creation in this female-dominated occupation, and, therefore, many countries in the region have started to make decent work a reality for more domestic workers. In Asia, this demand is the direct result of significantly large number of women joining the labour force, increased economic pressures on families, care requirements of aging populations in and beyond the region, and a pressing need for substantial numbers of jobs for new labour market entrants.

The ILO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific and the Conditions of Work and Employment Programme are organizing an Asian Knowledge Forum on Realizing Decent Work for Domestic Workers (A2DWF) from 24-26 April 2013 in Bangkok, Thailand. The Forum intends to facilitate exchange and cooperation among Asian countries on good practices, promising initiatives, and innovative mechanisms, and to set priorities for the adoption of a regional strategy to realize decent work for domestic workers at the next Asia-Pacific Regional Meeting for Labour Ministers in 2016.

Rationale

Worldwide, at least 53 million domestic workers provide domestic services in households for others. The largest number of domestic workers resides in Asia, where around 21.5 million people are now employed by private households. This represents a substantial increase from 1995 when 13.8 million were employed in this occupation in the region. As in other parts of the world, the sector is predominantly female. In Asia, no fewer than four out of every five domestic workers are women, and region-wide, one out of every twelve wage-earning women works in this sector.

There is a need to advance and protect domestic workers' rights, acknowledge their economic and social contributions and enhance their development opportunities, because they often do not have access to decent work, they work long hours for little pay and lack respect. Asian domestic workers are often migrants who have moved from rural to urban areas in their home country or to other countries in Asia or elsewhere. Many experience isolation, harassment, abuse and violence. Domestic workers are known to be at risk of working in conditions akin to forced and indentured labour and have fallen victim to human trafficking. Considerable numbers, around 11.3 million, again mostly female, are children and youth under 18 years serving working families, with some working

engaged in conditions considered as the worst forms of child labour. Domestic work – being a ‘servant’ – has a low status and, as such, many domestic workers face multiple forms of discrimination on the grounds of their sex, race, ethnicity, social origin and migrant status.

But domestic work, including migrant work, is not exclusively about woe and sorrow. On the contrary, domestic work is vital for the well-being of families and the effective functioning of labour markets and societies everywhere. Many domestic workers impersonate strength and resilience, they achieve positive gains, returning home with savings, their children completing their education, or investing in business enterprises. Domestic work, when truly decent, is a professional job, and brings substantive economic and social benefits to the families of employers and workers, and their communities and societies at large.

Labour institutions in the region are vital for realizing decent work for domestic workers, and they need to acquire the competencies to extend legal protection to domestic workers and their employers. Within Asia and the Pacific the proportion of domestic workers covered by labour legislation is lower than in other parts of the world. In the developing and emerging countries of the region as many as 61 per cent of domestic workers are excluded from any sort of legal protection. Across the region only one per cent of domestic workers are covered by national laws regulating normal weekly hours and only three per cent are entitled to a weekly rest of at least 24 consecutive hours and/or annual leave. Generally, domestic workers typically earn less than half of what is considered an average wage, and sometimes no more than about 20 per cent of that average. Worldwide, more than two of every five workers are not covered by minimum wage legislation. Throughout Asia this figure is much greater – nearly nine out of every 10 domestic workers are not entitled to a statutory minimum wage. Access to legal protection, the right to organize and representation are formidable challenges.

Forum outcomes

The Forum is designed to assist ILO constituents and other relevant partners in each country to improve protection for domestic workers, with special attention to remuneration and working time, by:

- Deepening understanding of the Domestic Workers Convention No. 189.
- Sharing and gaining knowledge about policies, practical measures and alliances in and between countries.
- Assessing and identifying possible solutions and new perspectives for use in each country.

Selection criteria for Forum participants

One representative each will be invited from governments, employers’ and workers’ organizations from nine ILO member States, including Cambodia, China, India, Indonesia, Lao PDR, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Viet Nam. Observers will include representatives of the International Domestic Workers Network in Asia, the International Trade Union Confederation, the International Organization of Employers and selected national wage specialists.

Since the discussions will be technical in nature, nominating organizations from each country are requested to select participants who are knowledgeable on the subject and responsible for promoting decent work for domestic workers within their organization. A good command of English is required to engage in discussions at the Forum. Experience with promoting gender equality, extending legal protection to workers in informal employment and/or wage setting is recommended. The nine country delegations are requested to ensure equitable participation of men and women among their team (at least one man or one woman in the delegation from their country). The ILO reserves the right to request for a change of candidate should we consider that the candidate is not qualified to participate in the Forum.

Resource materials

Publications available for the Forum include:

- *“Domestic workers across the world: Global and regional statistics and the extent of legal protection”*
(http://www.ilo.org/global/publications/books/WCMS_173363/lang--en/index.htm)
- *“Effective protection for domestic workers: A guide to designing labour laws”*
(http://www.ilo.org/global/publications/books/forthcoming-publications/WCMS_173365/lang--en/index.htm)
- *“Achieving decent work for domestic workers: An organizer’s manual”*
(http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_dialogue/---actrav/documents/publication/wcms_181344.pdf)
- *“Decent work for domestic workers in Asia and the Pacific: Manual for trainers”*
(http://www.ilo.org/asia/whatwedo/publications/WCMS_184194/lang--en/index.htm).

Two other tools will be used to increase the focus and the impact of the Forum – these are:

- **An online survey prior to the Forum** to identify key sentiments and reflections from participants on challenges and opportunities with respect to domestic work issues in their countries – the survey will be sent to nominated participants ahead of the Forum and they are requested to contribute as a prerequisite for informed participation at the Forum.
- **An interactive online discussion after the Forum**, using the AP-MagNet Community of Practice (<http://apmagnet.ilo.org/>) as a host. The online discussion aims to bring together Forum participants (and possibly a broader set of AP-MagNet members) to engage in sharing follow-up actions and development after the Forum. The online discussion will be facilitated and take place 2 months after the Forum.

Participants and resource persons are welcome to bring information and guidance materials, reports and audio visuals for sharing during the Forum.

Note

A separate preparatory meeting will be organized by the ILO Bureau for Workers’ Activities for representatives from workers’ organizations and the International Domestic Workers Network (IDWN) on **23 April 2013** at the same venue.

Agenda

The summary agenda is attached for information in Annex 1.

Practical arrangements

A Note on administrative and travel arrangements is attached in Annex 2.