

# MIGRANT DOMESTIC WORKERS IN ACTION



International  
Labour  
Organization



A Global Action Programme on Migrant Domestic Workers and their Families

# AROUND THE WORLD, AT LEAST **52 MILLION PEOPLE** – OVER **80 PER CENT** OF WHOM ARE **WOMEN** – EARN THEIR LIVING AS **DOMESTIC WORKERS**

They clean, cook, look after children and take care of the elderly, among other tasks. Domestic workers provide much needed skills and make invaluable contributions to the families and homes they care for, and to society at large. Yet their contribution is often not valued, and they remain largely unprotected and subject to abuse.

In many countries, there is an increasing demand for domestic workers – a demand which is largely filled by women who come from less wealthy countries in search of decent jobs to support their families. This movement of workers across borders is structured by social class, ethnicity and gender. Because of this, new global care chains have come into existence, reflecting the global unequal distribution of resources.

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Domestic workers usually do not enjoy the same level of protection as other workers. They are excluded from national legal protection in more than half of the world, and find themselves working in a sector that historically has not received equal respect and value. Domestic workers frequently work for excessively long hours with little pay and virtually no access to social protection. Many are vulnerable to sexual and gender-based violence. Due to the social, cultural and physical isolation they often work and live in, they face specific challenges in the exercise of their social, economic and cultural rights. Migrant domestic workers are disproportionately exposed to abuse compared to nationals in the same sector due to a series of intersecting factors, including dependence on recruitment agencies, lack of reliable information on migration procedures, limited freedom to change employers, contract substitution, the retention of travel and identity documents by others, and lack of access to justice and effective redress mechanisms. The vulnerability of domestic workers is exacerbated when they are in an irregular migration situation.

## CONVENTION NO.189 AND RECOMMENDATION NO.201

In June 2011, the International Labour Conference adopted an ILO Convention and Recommendation concerning decent work for domestic workers. Together, these instruments contain a number of provisions that address migrant domestic workers, their particular needs and the specific risks they face.

For example, the Convention requires that migrant domestic workers receive a written job offer or contract with the terms and conditions of employment, which is enforceable in the country of destination, prior to their arrival (Art. 7 and Art. 8). The provisions of the Convention concerning live-in domestic workers (Art. 6 and Art. 9), the right to keep their travel and identity documents (Art. 9) and the regulation of private employment agencies (Art. 15) are also of particular relevance for migrant domestic workers, many of whom are recruited through such agencies.

These features are important because the absence of minimum protection is widely recognized as a “breeding ground” for conditions where abuse, including in some instances forced labour and human trafficking, can occur.

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**The Global Action Programme on Migrant Domestic Workers and their Families (Migrant Domestic Workers in Action)** seeks to address the specific challenges migrant domestic workers face by implementing global advocacy and knowledge development initiatives in five “migration corridors”: Indonesia-Malaysia; Paraguay-Argentina, Nepal-Lebanon; Ukraine-Poland; Zimbabwe-South Africa.

The Programme’s framework is rights-based and employment-centred, with the overall goal to promote human rights and decent work for domestic workers at all stages of the migration cycle.

### **WHAT WE HOPE TO ACHIEVE:**

- New information on migrant domestic workers for policy action
- Stronger domestic worker organizations and networks
- Exchange of good practices and better policies for migrant domestic workers.

## THE PROGRAMME WILL PROMOTE GOOD LABOUR MIGRATION GOVERNANCE BY:

- 1 Developing knowledge on the situation and characteristics of migrant domestic workers and on the factors that affect their opportunities to exercise their human rights and access decent work in conditions of freedom and equality.
- 2 Expanding avenues for informed decision-making on migration, based on solid, evidence-based information and analysis.
- 3 Developing tools and guidelines for policy-making, grounded in international human rights, including labour standards.
- 4 Promoting dialogue and cooperation between countries of origin and destination to design migration policies that respond to genuine labour market needs and respect, protect and fulfil workers' rights.
- 5 Ensuring policy coherence in countries of origin and destination.

## PROJECT PARTNERS

The project is implemented by the ILO (for more information, go to [www.ilo.org/migrant](http://www.ilo.org/migrant)) in collaboration with the following partners and associates:

- UN Women ([www.unwomen.org](http://www.unwomen.org))
- Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights ([www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Migration/Pages/MigrationAndHumanRightsIndex.aspx](http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Migration/Pages/MigrationAndHumanRightsIndex.aspx))
- KSBSI, Indonesia ([www.ksbsi.org](http://www.ksbsi.org))
- International Trade Union Confederation ([www.ituc.org](http://www.ituc.org))
- International Domestic Workers Network ([www.idwn.org](http://www.idwn.org))

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