



# MIGRANT DOMESTIC WORKERS IN FOCUS: An ILO Newsletter

ISSUE 2 | OCT 2013 - FEB 2014



## THE FOUNDING CONGRESS OF INTERNATIONAL DOMESTIC WORKERS' FEDERATION (IDWF)

### October 26-28, 2013

The Founding Congress of the International Domestic Workers' Federation (IDWF) took place at the City Hall in Montevideo, Uruguay gathering nearly 200 participants from Human Rights Watch, the ILO, national trade centres and domestic workers' unions from 42 countries around the world. Representing the ILO delegation were Anna Biondi, the deputy director of ACTRAV, Maria Elena Venezuela, program manager for the GAP-MDW Project from the Headquarters in Geneva and Marie-Jose Tayah from the Beirut office. This 3-day event marked the first Congress meeting for the new IDWF where international domestic workers organizations came together to discuss how to improve the working conditions of domestic workers worldwide. The event kicked off with a panel, chaired by Myrtle Witbooi, the president of IDWN, and speeches were heard by the Mayor of Montevideo, the National Institute of Women, the National Institute for Social Security and the Minister of Labour and Social Affairs. Domestic workers then had an opportunity to share their testimonies, highlighting their challenges and successes they had experienced while establishing domestic workers' organizations in their respective countries and regions. Organizations such as ITUC, IUF, WIEGO, and the ILO were also given an opportunity to present as they have provided continuous support to the IDWN. Presentations revealed that the active involvement of the IDWN has encouraged domestic

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workers in the informal sector to voice themselves and their demands to the ILO.

Workshops were held during the event to enhance dialogue on the promotion of the rights of domestic workers, including the right to organize. Concrete steps were outlined to participants on what actions could be taken by migrant domestic workers in moving forward and experiences were shared on lessons learned in building domestic workers' organizations at both regional and global levels. These discussions allowed participants to delve into the question of how migrant domestic workers can become more engaged in the political agenda of receiving countries, and also

on national campaigns to ratify C189 and innovative strategies for collective bargaining.

The last day of the event was particularly momentous as it signified the formalization of the international network of the IDWN by becoming the International Domestic Workers Federation (IDWF). Elections took place for a new Executive Committee for the IDWF, which includes a five-year term. Myrtle Witbooi, previous chair of IDWN, was elected as president and Ernestina Ochoa, was elected as the Vice-President. Elizabeth Tang, former IDWN International Coordinator, was elected as the new General Secretary. Moreover, six titular members and their alternates were additionally elected for each region. The new IDWF Constitution including minor amendments and an explicit mention to migrant domestic workers were unanimously also agreed upon.

The occasion closed with heightened excitement and concluded with remarks from the President of Uruguay, Jose Mujica. He expressed how proud he was of the progress that his country has been able to make in recognizing and improving the conditions of domestic workers. He further encouraged everyone to never cease fighting and to continue working collectively to push for the rights of workers, which he deemed to be the biggest strength for the movement of domestic workers.

### European council decision authorizing the ratification of C189

The ILO welcomes the adoption by the Council of Ministers of the EU of a Decision authorising EU Member States to ratify the ILO Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189). The signatory countries are required to take measures to ensure fair and decent working conditions as well as to prevent abuse, violence and child labour in domestic employment. The Council Decision was proposed by the European Commission in March 2013, and endorsed by the European Parliament.

While states sign and ratify the convention as a first step towards these important changes, implementation is another essential component. States are obligated to uphold Convention 189 as to ensure that domestic workers not only receive equal treatment alongside other workers but are also comprehensively informed regarding all details about their employment, are protected against discrimination, have easy access to complaint mechanisms, are offered decent living conditions as well as uphold foreign recruitment regulations.

### FIRST MEETING OF THE RESEARCH ADVISORY BOARD OF THE GLOBAL ACTION PROJECT ON MIGRANT DOMESTIC WORKERS AND THEIR FAMILIES (GAP-MDW) \*

The first GAP-MDW Research Advisory Board meeting convened on the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> of February at the ILO Headquarters in Geneva. The meeting gathered pertinent ILO staff and seven board members, including academic experts in the field and representatives of implementing project partners.

The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the research parameters of the Project, namely, the knowledge gaps identified on migrant domestic work and the strategy and methodology that

the project will adopt to address these gaps. Special attention was given to the research that will be carried out at regional, national and global levels to produce the global flagship report on migrant domestic work, which will be released in 2015. This report is intended to provide a substantive contribution to the global debate on the topic based on thematic research as well as the analysis of the five migration corridors covered by the project. These five migration corridors include: Ukraine-Poland, Zimbabwe-South Africa, Indonesia-Malaysia, Nepal-Lebanon, and Paraguay-Argentina.

The meeting served as a platform to share knowledge of existing work on regional topics and to expand the network of relevant stakeholders involved in carrying out research activities for this Project.



One of the important topics of discussion for the global flagship report was on the thematic area of the care economy; it was suggested that the report provide a conceptual framework for care work to define and assess the value of domestic work in each corridor and region. This could include recent trends in the care economy, its links to the economic crisis and migration cycle, and the responsibility of States for providing care to children, elderly and people with disabilities. Additionally, the gender division of domestic labour in relation to changing demographics, gender bias in attributions of responsibility for care work and the privatization of social services could further be explored under the area of care economy.

In light of the discussions that took place, the Board expressed a few concerns regarding the challenges that will be faced in producing the report. One challenge mentioned was in linking and building upon country specific research to regional analysis, particularly since the situation of migrant domestic work can be different from receiving to sending countries and human rights and legal frameworks generally vary depending on the country and/or region. Furthermore, it was noted that the Board should be mindful of the remaining two years of the Project and consider what is realistically feasible for political change within the allotted time frame.



The final session of the meeting was dedicated to revisiting the outline of the global flagship report. The Research Advisory Board would like to extend an invitation to the recipients of this newsletter to partake in the ongoing discussion of finalizing the outline for the global flagship report. We would like to strongly encourage you to suggest any interesting or relevant bibliographies and to submit topics of interest to the GAP project team that you would like to see included in the report. Thank you in advance for your dedicated interest in this topic and your participation in this process.

**If you would like to suggest topics for the global flagship report, please send them to:**

**Ms. Maria Elena Valenzuela:** [valenzuela@ilo.org](mailto:valenzuela@ilo.org)  
**Ms. Maria Gallotti:** [gallotti@ilo.org](mailto:gallotti@ilo.org)

## DECENT WORK FOR DOMESTIC WORKERS IN SPAIN

The Spanish Workers Organizations Comisiones Obreras (CCOO) and Union General de Trabajadores (UGT) and the Bureau for Workers' Activities (ACTRAV) organized a trade union seminar on domestic work in Madrid on 18 and 19 of December 2013 along with the International Training Centre in Turin, Italy, and the ILO Office in Spain, with the purpose of discussing strategies that promote decent work for domestic workers in Spain.

Spain is one of the countries within the European Union with the highest number of domestic workers. According to figures from the National Institute of Statistics in 2012, the number of domestic workers in Spain was indicated as being 660,000, comprising of 313,294 formally and 346,706 informally employed workers.<sup>1</sup>

In 2012, the Government of Spain promulgated a Royal Decree updating the rules governing the labour relationships of domestic employees and setting out to improve working conditions in the sector by bringing them as far as possible into line with those of other workers. This legislative reform was welcomed as a key step forward in the direction of promoting decent work for domestic workers. Encouraged by this legislative reform, worker organizations and activists in the field have engaged in proactive campaigning for the promotion of ratification of Convention 189.

This, which was opened by Paloma Lopez, the Confederal Secretary of Employment and Migration Policy of CCOO, Almudena Fontecha, Equality Secretary of UGT, and Joaquín Nieto, the director of the ILO Office in Spain, was organized with the purpose of strengthening trade union action and coordination with other organizations for the enhanced protection of domestic workers.

Mr Joaquín Nieto encouraged all social partners to continue to push for Convention No. 189 and offered the support of the Office for creating new initiatives to support the ratification of Convention No.189. He also announced activities underway, including the creation of a brochure entitled "Know your rights" and the release of a radio program series on *Radio Exterior of National Radio of Spain (RNE)*, intended to inform listeners about the situation of domestic workers and their employers and the content of Convention 189. These initiatives have the potential to reach an audience of several million in Latin America and Spain.

ILO experts focused on providing a national, regional and global overview on the subject followed by interactive discussions and exchange of experiences between Trade union's representatives and relevant civil society organizations on how to continue pushing the agenda forward. Ms. Gallotti, Senior Migration Policy Specialist from ILO-Geneva, provided an update on the current status of ratifications of the Convention, which entered into force on 5 September 2013, with 11 countries having ratified the Convention to date.

Judith Carreras, adviser to the ILO Office for Spain, reported on Spain's status of the ratification of the Convention mentioning that the country has taken an important step with the unanimous approval of a proposal by the Committee on Employment and Social Security of the Spanish Parliament in October 2013. The Proposal recommends that the House of Representatives urges the Government to determine a reasonable time frame to ratify Convention No. 189 and its accompanying Recommendation No. 201 and adapt legislation accordingly.

Also in attendance were a number of other guests, including Ruben Garrido, CTA from Argentina, and Garaciela Espinosa, a domestic worker of the PIT-CNT, the largest labour union in Uruguay. Espinosa emphasized the importance of domestic work and the need to set social values. She said, "I want my rights to be recognized as any other worker. I want to exercise (my rights) with dignity. I want it to be decent work." Jesús García, Coordinator of Activities for ILO-ACTRAV in Turin for the Latin America and Caribbean (LAC) region, provided an overview of the training activities that will be carried out by the International Training Centre in Turin.

<sup>1</sup> This data stems from expert interviews and online survey(s) and is retrieved from the Spanish Instituto Nacional de Estadística, the Ministry for labour and social security and the database on social security affiliations. (Pape 2012, p.5).

Marta Figueroa, the Federal Secretariat of the Federation of Equal UGT Services, and Palmira Maya from the Federation of Private Services CCOO additional provided information on the regulatory process and equality of rights, and intervention strategies for trade unions.

The session allowed for domestic worker organizations to exchange experiences with organizations of domestic workers of Valencia. A debate followed, covering the challenges posed by possible alliances and the potential and strengths of joint action.

### FACTS AND FIGURES

- ❖ There are at least 53 million domestic workers worldwide, not including child domestic workers
- ❖ Nearly 10.5 million children worldwide – most of them under age – work as domestic workers
- ❖ 83 per cent of domestic workers are women
- ❖ The ILO's Domestic Workers Convention – C189 (2011) came into force on 5 September 2013
- ❖ To date, 12 countries have ratified the ILO's C189 (2011) and Recommendation No. 201: (2012): Uruguay, Philippines, Mauritius (2013): Nicaragua, Bolivia, Paraguay, South Africa, Guyana, Ecuador, Germany, Italy, and (2014): Costa Rica

### BRAZIL'S EFFORTS TO IMPLEMENT SOCIAL DIALOGUE

A delegation of Brazilian ministries met in Rome, Italy during the week of October 29<sup>th</sup> with their government counterparts from Italy, France, and Spain, and social partners from Belgium and Italy to discuss policies and regulation in the areas of migration and domestic work. From the ILO-Geneva, Ms. Maria Elena Valenzuela, the Chief Technical Advisor (CTA) for the GAP-MDW attended this meeting. The objective of the meeting was to promote an exchange of information and practices, based on the results of an ILO led research project on the “integration of migrant domestic workers in Europe”<sup>2</sup>, between high-level government experts of Brazil and their counterparts of selected European countries. This meeting convened particularly to discuss Brazil's agenda for social dialogue on the issue of

domestic work, and was held under the purview of a European Commission technical cooperation project initiative called EUROsociAL aimed towards improving social cohesion in Latin America.

The location of this meeting was significant, as Italy was the first to ratify Convention 189 and now has a progressive legislation on the subject as well as the oldest European national collective labour contract for the household sector, which dates back to 1974 and now covers nearly all aspects of working conditions for domestic workers.

While Italy has adopted immigration policies over the last decades, specifically opening regular migration channels for the purpose of domestic work, social partners presented at the meeting identified at least two important areas for improvement.

First, they highlighted the need for a mechanism to emerge domestic work from informality through implementing a system for tax exemption of charges on household services. According to the proponents, this would not have financial costs for the government and would help to fight against undeclared work while boosting employment of this sector. Secondly, the need to foster professionalization of domestic work, which the social partners have already started to address through bilateral bodies was identified.

The Brazilian delegation additionally had the opportunity to meet bilaterally with Italian social partners (CGIL, CISL, UIL and ASSINDATCOLF and FIDALDO) to discuss the importance and peculiarities of collective bargaining for this specific sector.

Comparatively, though the situation of domestic work differs from Italy to Brazil, the Latin American country has embarked on a major process of legislative reform on domestic labour with the introduction of a constitutional amendment that guarantees equal rights for domestic workers. It establishes 16 new rights for domestic workers, including the right to overtime pay, a maximum eight-hour working day and a 44-hour working week.

The experience of European countries on regulating the sector, and in particular the role of social dialogue and collective bargaining were key interests of participants. Ms. Valenzuela of the EC funded “Global Action Programme on Migrant Domestic Workers and their Families”, further offered an overview on ILO's work in the area of domestic workers and presented the project objectives to participants, opening avenues for further exchange and collaboration within the project framework.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> See the 4 national reports and synthesis report published under the “Promoting integration of migrant domestic workers in Europe”, financed by the EC and implemented by the ILO together with the 4 research partners (FIER Italy, Fundacion Ortega y Gasset, Spain, CEMis, Belgium, INED, France), and the ETUC. [http://www.ilo.org/migrant/capacity-building-and-technical-assistance-on-labour-migration/projects/WCMS\\_183810/lang--en/index.htm](http://www.ilo.org/migrant/capacity-building-and-technical-assistance-on-labour-migration/projects/WCMS_183810/lang--en/index.htm)

<sup>3</sup> See EC funded GAP-MDW project website: [http://www.ilo.org/migrant/capacity-building-and-technical-assistance-on-labour-migration/projects/WCMS\\_222567/lang--en/index.htm](http://www.ilo.org/migrant/capacity-building-and-technical-assistance-on-labour-migration/projects/WCMS_222567/lang--en/index.htm)



## MEDIA SPOTLIGHTS ON MIGRANT DOMESTIC WORK

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL: April 6, 2014

[Domestic Workers in Lebanon Speak Out](#)

THE HINDU: April 1, 2014

['Tied' visa rule worsens condition of migrant domestic workers in UK](#)

JAMACIA OBSERVER: March 10, 2014

[PM: Jamaica to ratify ILO Household Workers Convention](#)

GULF NEWS: March 2, 2014

[Standard contract for maids in the UAE](#)

SAUDI GAZETTE: February 9, 2014

[Shoura set to discuss Riyadh-Manila domestic worker pact](#)

## REINTEGRATION OF ETHIOPIAN RETURNEES FROM SAUDI ARABIA \*

Through the development of a Tripartite Framework for the support and protection of Ethiopian and Somali women migrant domestic workers to the GCC States, Lebanon and Sudan, the ILO has started working on re-integrating Ethiopian returnees from Saudi Arabia into the labour market, while preparing awareness raising programmes to avoid stigma and discrimination for these returnees.

Saudi Arabia began a crackdown on undocumented foreign workers after a seven-month amnesty period that expired on Nov 3<sup>rd</sup>. Since then, around 155,413 Ethiopian migrants have repatriated to Ethiopia after being held for weeks in deportation camps in reportedly extremely poor living conditions. The return of these 155,413 young migrant workers has sparked fears that the arrival will worsen the already existing high youth unemployment rates within the country. In response to these pressures, the Ethiopian Government recognizes the need to increase livelihood opportunities in order to reduce the likelihood of re-migration and to guarantee security.

This project will specifically support the re-integration of 1,000 women returnees from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Women returnees from Saudi Arabia come mainly from very poor households and often vulnerable situations. Many have returned with children, many have no families to turn to, and some face psychosocial difficulties.

There is a great need to foster the socio-economic re-integration of these returnees so that they can sustain their families and contribute to the development of their country. As an immediate response to this crisis, the ILO provided USD 100,000 to support the emergency relief efforts made by the government. In addition, an integrated plan of activities which includes business and entrepreneurship training, capacity building, mentorship and coaching is being launched to help the returnees get back on their feet, provide for themselves and their families, and become part of a productive segment of society.

## PROWD PROJECT IN LEBANON AND FIRST PARTICIPATORY NEWSLETTER FOR DOMESTIC WORKERS' RIGHT \*

**Beirut (January 2014)** Over 250,000 migrant domestic women workers reside in Lebanon, a country with a native population of some 4.2 million. Compared to international standards, institutional and legal protection for migrant domestic women workers remains very weak in Lebanon and efforts to ensure decent working conditions are confined to a limited number of local organizations, international actors and activists. In June 2011, in response to the compelling need to protect migrant domestic worker's rights, the ILOs Regional Office Arab States launched the "Promoting the Rights of Women Domestic Workers in Lebanon" (PROWD) project, which has been working for the rights of women domestic workers throughout the country.

Funded by The European Union, the PROWD project aims to achieve better living and working conditions for domestic workers through direct cooperation and partnership with various stakeholders including the Lebanese government, trade unions, private recruitment agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and diplomatic missions of domestic workers' countries of origin. While substantive policy change has been slow, PROWD has also focused on raising awareness, and influencing public attitudes towards greater recognition of domestic worker rights as well as efforts to organize domestic workers in collectives, enhance coordination mechanisms and facilitate greater information sharing between stakeholders.



In the course of three years, the project has developed the capacity of key partners to become advocates for the rights of migrant domestic workers. As part of this process, several awareness-raising tools were created and disseminated among both workers and the employers. The latest tool developed is a participatory newsletter entitled *Asraab*, which acts as a platform for sharing information among various stakeholders.

*Asraab*, Arabic for "Flocks of Migrating Birds", was coined by its contributors who include eight local NGOs working on domestic workers issues, Lebanon's Ministry of Labour, the Syndicate of Recruitment Agencies of Domestic Workers in Lebanon, the National Federation for Labour and Workers' Unions in Lebanon and domestic workers themselves.

*Asraab's* first issue highlighted initiatives led by the different stakeholders with an opening editorial by the Ministry of Labour and an article by a domestic worker about her experience in Lebanon. The newsletter will continue to evaluate its reach, ensuring continual and effective advocacy for migrant domestic workers.

To read the first issue of “*Asraab*”, please go to:

**English:**

[ASRAAB - ISSUE #1 SEPTEMBER / NOVEMBER 2013](#)

**Arabic:**

[٢ ال ثاني ت شرين - أيلول / الأول ال عدد - أسراب](#)

***Migrant Domestic Workers in Focus***

Is a quarterly newsletter published by the Labour Migration Branch of the International Labour Organization:

4 Route des Morillons  
CH-1211 Geneve 22- Switzerland

For changes in subscription, please send an email to:  
Ivon Garcia at [\*\*garciai@ilo.org\*\*](mailto:garciai@ilo.org)



\*This project is funded by the European Union

\*This project is implemented by ILO.

The views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views of the European Commission.