According to International Labour Organisation (ILO) estimates, there are 53-100 million domestic workers worldwide, 83 per cent of whom are women. They represent 4 to 10 per cent of the labour force in developing countries and about 2 per cent in developed countries. Their work is an important contribution to economic and social development. Still, 40 per cent of countries worldwide do not regulate this type of employment.

Around the world, UN Women is working with Governments, unions and the private sector to promote the rights of domestic workers and ensure that their profession is both regulated and covered by social protection. This includes supporting the Global Forum on Migration and Development and promoting the ratification of ILO Convention 189 on domestic work, the landmark international treaty entered into force on 5 September 2013.

A snapshot of UN Women’s work globally...

“Due to conflict, I was displaced, jobless and forced to go to Israel to work to feed and educate my children,” says 40-year-old Kalpana Giri, a caregiver from Kathmandu in the district of Bajura, western Nepal. “I faced violence, verbal abuse, my mobility was restricted by the recruiting agency, and there was less payment of salary, so I returned within five months.”

Kalpana returned to Nepal, where she found POURAKHI, a network for returned women migrant workers, mostly domestic workers, which was created and is supported by UN Women. Kalpana became a community mobilizer in one of their pilot reintegration programmes. She helped train 77 migrant workers returnees like herself to become small-scale entrepreneurs in vegetable farming, poultry raising, tailoring and trading in tea, among others.

“After facing so many problems, after facing violence, I became a local leader,” says Kalpana. “Today I feel very empowered. I am a role model for my village.”

UN Women’s advocacy and engagement has a long history in Nepal and it has yielded concrete results, such as the Pourakhi network which supports migrant women workers, legislation that has cemented rights, and regulations that provide protection for the country’s 2.7 million migrant workers.

UN Women provided technical support during the drafting of Nepal’s Foreign Employment Act, as well as financial support for the intensive 72 rounds of consultations held with diverse stakeholders from 2005 to 2007. The Act was adopted by the Government in 2007 and Regulation was developed in 2008. The legislation establishes the right to non-discrimination, ensures equal opportunities for women and men working abroad, and socioeconomic protection for migrant workers and their families. UN Women also supported preparation of the Foreign Employment Policy, adopted in 2012, which includes a separate section focusing on the rights of women domestic workers.

Beyond Nepal’s borders, shelters for returned migrants have been established with Nepali Embassies in Kuwait, UAE, Saudi Arabia and Qatar, providing safe houses for distressed...
women and support for their rescue and repatriation. Six labour attachés also work in Nepali Embassies in Korea, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, United Arab Emirates, Kuwait and Malaysia. The Nepalese Government is regulating the recruitment and placement of domestic workers in four countries to ensure that foreign employment agencies are certified and approved by Nepali diplomatic missions there. Nepal's Foreign Employment Promotion Board even reimburses women migrant workers for their pre-departure orientation expenses.

UN Women has also helped develop a domestic work manual, standard operating procedures for its skills training centers, a handbook on safe migration to help local government officials design their own programmes and assist migrant families, and supported the establishment of a mechanism to provide access to justice for cheated migrant workers.

**Asia-Pacific** - Beyond Nepal, UN Women has been active at a regional level as well, organizing forums and conferences to review current international human rights tools and labour standards, as well as share best practices and lessons learned.

In Indonesia, UN Women supported the formation of women migrant worker's networks across six districts with technical and financial support to advocate with local governments for legislation, such as that adopted in the city of Blitar, East Java, in 2008. UN Women also worked with partners to ensure gender-sensitive provisions in the national law governing migration and the protection of domestic workers' rights.

In the Philippines, UN Women galvanized advocacy for the Batas Kasambahay Bill, signed into a path-breaking national law on 18 January 2013. It provides labour and social protection such as: a written contract in a language understood by both employee and employer, regularly paid minimum wages, maximum daily working hours with provisions for overtime pay, workers' coverage under the social security system, and protection against abuse and violence.

**Latin America and the Caribbean** - In the Southern Cone UN Women works closely with ILO in support of a regional plan for the ratification of the ILO Convention 189, unifying domestic workers unions in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Uruguay and Paraguay in a common action plan. In Brazil, UN Women has strengthened the political organization of domestic workers and supported public information campaigns around the regulation of domestic work.

UN Women's multi-country office for the Caribbean, in collaboration with the ILO, has worked to create a formal regional network of domestic workers unions from Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, Guyana, Jamaica, and Trinidad and Tobago.

UN Women has supported the Jamaica Household Workers Association to become a union and to better advocate for decent work legislation.

**Europe and Central Asia** - In Azerbaijan, local UN Women partners are running an awareness-raising campaign among parliamentarians and trade unions on the ILO Convention and the rights of domestic workers. In Kazakhstan, UN Women and the Federation of Trade Unions are jointly preparing resource material to advocate for the rights of domestic workers, including a brief explanatory guide for employers outlining international norms along with a standard recommended labour contract.

At a regional level, UN Women is engaging policymakers with the Eurasian Economic Community, urging them to integrate international standards on domestic workers’ rights in their legislation.

**Africa** - In Cameroon, the National Association Supporting Domestic Workers organizes training sessions on labour legislation, the drafting of work contracts, as well as professional ethics. With this training, domestic workers have been able to affirm their social status and better defend their rights.

In September 2013, UN Women and the ILO initiated a programme to support the Government of Ethiopia to ensure the rights of low-skilled rural women migrant domestic workers in countries that are part of the Gulf Cooperation Council.

**Arab States** - UN Women's Fund for Gender Equality runs a programme to improve public policies to protect female domestic workers’ rights in Egypt, which has helped create an NGO called “Helpers” with plans to form a national union.

In Jordan, UN Women strongly supported changes to the Labour Code and a new Regulation in 2009 to include domestic workers, cooks, gardeners and similar workers – becoming the first Arab country to provide labour protections to domestic workers. UN Women also supported the Government in its development of a standard unified work contract for migrant domestic workers.

**FOR MORE INFORMATION:**


UN Women Briefing Kit “Domestic Workers Count Too: Implementing Protection for Domestic Workers”