

# DOMESTIC WORKERS: SWEEPING INVISIBILITY

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Extract from UN Women  
Fund for Gender Equality's  
Annual Report 2017-2018



## THE PROBLEM

An estimated 67 million domestic workers comprise a significant part of the global workforce in informal employment. They are among the most vulnerable workers; 80 per cent are women. They work for private households, often without clear terms of employment and excluded from the scope of labour legislation. This exposes them to physical, sexual and mental abuse, trafficking and bonded labour, as well as physical, social and cultural isolation. They may have no right to rest, or take leave or sick days, and have limited to no access to health care.

Many come from poor households, often in rural communities, where limited access to education and skills development leave them with few employment opportunities and choices. Others, especially those migrating abroad, may be skilled, yet unable to find employment commensurate with their levels of education. Asia and the Pacific is the region with the largest number of domestic workers, with 21.5 million. In Latin America, they account for more than 7.5 per cent of total employment.

All estimates indicate that the sector is poised to grow,

partly due to ageing populations in many countries. ILO Convention 189 aims to promote decent work standards and safeguard protections for domestic workers, yet it has only been ratified by 25 countries.

## DOMESTIC WORK AND THE FGE

Worldwide, the civil society movement for domestic workers' rights is gaining ground. UN Women's Fund for Gender Equality (FGE) grantees can attest to this. Since its creation in 2009, the Fund has supported 14 projects with a focus on domestic workers, or 18 per cent of its global portfolio. This area has grown in emphasis, representing 25 per cent of the active portfolio.

The hidden yet widespread nature of domestic work calls for stronger data collection and public awareness on its realities. The isolation it imposes requires collective structures. Socioeconomic vulnerabilities among these workers and their exposure to risks demand strong legislation, effective service provision and wide-spread information. This section presents some of the different strategies and good practices used by grantee organizations across the globe to support domestic workers' rights.



Members of the Mexican National Union of Domestic Workers (SINACTRAHO) with Latin American domestic workers leaders at a regional meeting on exchanges of experiences in Mexico City. Photo courtesy of Instituto de Liderazgo Simone de Beauvoir / Carolina Corral

## RESEARCH IN EGYPT

The Al-Shehab organization led the first thorough social and economic study on the situation of women domestic workers in Egypt. It provided evidence to support awareness and advocacy to defend their rights at national and regional levels – and specifically shed light on the situation of children as domestic workers.

## TAILORED ADVOCACY MESSAGES IN MEXICO

The Instituto de Liderazgo Simone de Beauvoir aims at triggering a cultural change by rallying a broad group of actors in support of domestic workers' rights. Tailored messaging speaks to their interests and their relevant roles. This includes language about security for employers, labour rights for unions, international commitments for the government, the financial significance of savings and remittances for financial institutions, and the importance of domestic and care work for the general public and the media.

# FGE GRANTEES' STRATEGIES

#1

**ADVOCACY TO RATIFY  
ILO CONVENTION 189  
AND ADOPT RELATED  
LEGISLATION AND  
POLICIES**

#2

**PUBLIC AWARENESS**

#3

**DOMESTIC  
WORKERS' SUPPORT  
NETWORK**

#4

**DOMESTIC WORKERS'  
ACCESS TO  
INFORMATION AND  
SERVICES**

#5

**FACILITATING MIGRANT  
DOMESTIC WORKERS'  
REINTEGRATION IN  
THEIR HOME COUNTRIES**



A domestic worker who migrated from Ethiopia is employed in Beirut, Lebanon. Photo courtesy of UN Women/Joe Saade

## INTEGRATED APPROACH FOR FILIPINO MIGRANT WORKERS

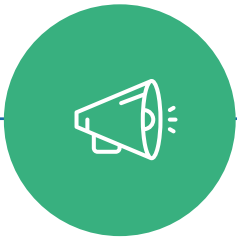
Atikha Overseas Workers and Communities Initiatives is applying an integrated approach to support Filipino domestic workers employed overseas, by: helping them set specific savings goals, save and invest, for a more successful return; helping children left behind to understand the motivations and realities of their mothers to ensure strong and healthy family relationships; and providing information to potential domestic workers before they leave.

## MOBILE APP FOR DOMESTIC WORKERS IN BRAZIL

Following the regulation of labour rights for more than 7 million domestic workers and the strengthening of their unions, ELAS Fundo de Investimento Social and THEMIS Assessoria Juridica e Estudos de Genero developed a mobile app providing accessible information to workers on their rights and protection agencies. It fostered the formation of a social network of domestic workers.



- Research providing quantitative and qualitative data to uncover the numbers and situation of domestic work
- Analysis of relevant existing policies to identify entry points for a policy framework sensitive to domestic workers rights
- Policy papers for legislators to build arguments in favor of Convention ratification
- Fostering political alliances across parties
- Spaces for dialogue among civil society actors, with decision-makers and employers, and with other sectors including businesses and media
- Crafting common agendas for advocacy



- Communication campaigns to sensitize general population and potential employers on domestic workers' rights and on existing legislation in a given country
- Support domestic workers to become direct public advocates of their rights
- Employers' awareness: education, tools (standard contracts), feasibility studies



- Collective structure: creation and strengthening of domestic workers' unions with capacity-building and equipment
- Promoting domestic workers' engagement in unions
- Creation of civil society networks to provide support and convening power
- Building apps to connect domestic workers
- Working with domestic workers' families



- Provision of support, directly or through referrals, to access existing governmental schemes
- Legal support, financial assistance, access to health care, education, issuing of official documents such as birth certificates or ID cards, psychosocial support and specialized support for women subject to domestic violence
- Sensitization and rights awareness
- Training on vocational, entrepreneurial and financial skills



- Informing migrant workers about rights and work conditions before and after leaving, and upon arrival
- Help workers set specific saving goals for their migration experience
- Support their employability with increased skills
- Help workers make investments in their countries of origin
- Sensitizing children left behind about the reasons and reality of migrant workers' experiences