



International  
Labour  
Organization

# Decent Work for Domestic Workers: ACHIEVEMENTS SINCE THE ADOPTION OF C189

On 16 June 2011, workers, employers and governments came together to adopt ILO Convention No. 189 on decent work for domestic workers. **In the last five years** since its adoption, some **70 countries** around the world have taken action to advance decent work for domestic workers. These measures represent the **first steps** in a long path to redress a history of exclusion; **making decent work a reality for domestic workers though will require sustained attention to ensure real progress.**

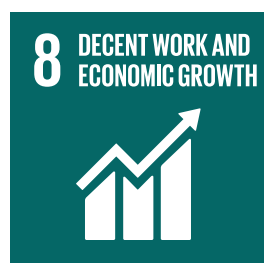
## Background

The origins and purpose of the Convention were made clear in its preamble: domestic work was undervalued and invisible, and carried out by people who were particularly vulnerable to human rights' abuses, and discrimination in respect of working conditions. Domestic work was also not recognized as "real work", but as a natural part of a woman's unpaid work in the home.

Recognizing this pervasive situation, and the contribution of domestic workers to the well-being and the global economy, ILO constituents thus called for the first international standard on domestic work. It was adopted with near unanimity.

16 June 2016 marks the 5th anniversary of the adoption of Convention No. 189 and its accompanying Recommendation 201. These standards have stimulated countries around the world to take action to reverse a history of exclusion, and the momentum for change continues to grow. Making decent work a reality for domestic workers will undoubtedly require many more years of such efforts. Continuing to build on current progress will not only help raise the standards and quality of domestic work worldwide, it will also contribute to the achievement of the sustainable development goals, including poverty (Goal 1), gender equality (Goal 5), decent work (Goal 8), and inequality (Goal 10).

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## A growing workforce to meet growing demand for care

New ILO estimates on domestic work indicate a workforce 67 million strong, totalling 2% of labour participation. 80% of these are women, which represents 4% of total female labour participation. We now also have new estimates on migrant domestic workers, showing that 17% of domestic workers are migrants.

According to UN estimates, the number of persons aged 60 and above is expected to more than double by 2050 and more than triple by 2100. While Europe is currently the “oldest” region, rapid ageing across the world means that all major areas, except Africa, will have nearly a quarter or more of their populations aged 60 or over.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, multigenerational households are becoming less common, meaning more and more of the elderly live alone, or in institutions, where these are available and affordable. In Europe, studies have found that people prefer home-based care.<sup>2</sup>



The domestic work sector is therefore poised to grow: with ageing populations, an increasing number of women willing to enter the labour force worldwide, and the reduction of public care policies in some cases, families are increasingly turning to domestic workers to care for their homes, children, and ageing relatives. Out of concern for cost and complexity, many avoid formal arrangements, resulting in high levels of informal employment in the form of undeclared work in some countries.

Domestic workers are therefore a fundamental part of the care economy, delivering in-home care services in both the informal and formal economy.



## Changes in Law and Policy

The ILO estimated that only 10% of domestic workers in 2010 were covered by labour legislation to the same extent as other workers. Since the adoption of the Convention, 22 countries have ratified, and 30 have successfully adopted reforms in law or policy to extend protections to domestic workers. At least another 18 are currently considering law or policy reform to extend protections. In some cases, measures have been taken to extend minimum wage protections or limit working time. New

collective bargaining agreements were also concluded in a number of countries. In other cases, comprehensive legislation was adopted to extend equal protections to domestic workers. A number of countries, particularly in Latin America, have also actively pursued the formalization of domestic work, including through labour inspections, and extension of social security. Measures to improve labour migration have also been taken, notably in the form of bilateral agreements. Since 2011, the ILO has provided assistance to at least 60 countries in these areas, as well as tackling child labour, forced labour.



## Organizing and social dialogue is on the rise

Firmly rooted in the informal economy in many countries, domestic work has presented several challenges to organizing. In 2011, domestic workers' organizations had just formed an international network. Only a few organizations of employers existed.

Today, trade unions in some 90 countries have taken up the ITUC 12x12 campaign, launched in 2011 to advocate for ratification of the Convention. In 2013, the International Domestic Workers' Federation (IDWF), an affiliate of the International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tobacco and Allied Workers' Associations (IUF), held its founding congress. In 2016, it has 54 affiliates, including some 330,000 domestic workers.

Employers' organizations have also increasingly sought ways to organize employers of domestic workers. While longstanding organizations of employers of domestic workers existed in some countries, several new ones are forming. These organizations have strengthened social dialogue in some countries, facilitating policy reform.

**Workers' and employers' organizations have strengthened social dialogue in some countries, facilitating policy reform.**

## New tools on effective protections

To support constituents on this path, the ILO has developed law and policy tools, briefs, statistics and empirical studies, manuals and training modules and research tools. They cover a wide range of policy areas, including social protection, working time, minimum wages, collective bargaining, organizing, dispute resolution, labour inspections, child labour and labour migration. They also include guidelines for quantitative and qualitative research on domestic workers, and the first attempts to provide comprehensive global and regional statistics on domestic workers.

## Decent work deficits persist

Governments, trade unions and employers' organizations around the world have clearly acknowledged the importance of achieving decent work for domestic workers. At the same time, domestic workers around the world continue to face abuse, from the daily lack of rest and wage theft, to the more extreme abuses of forced labour and trafficking.

Indeed, even in countries where domestic workers enjoy labour rights, domestic workers continue to face decent work deficits due to the challenges in compliance. Estimates based on available data suggest that domestic workers typically earn less than half of average wages – and sometimes no more than about 20 per cent of average wages – keeping their households in poverty. The high concentration of women in the sector means women face an important wage penalty for being domestic workers. Moreover, 90% of domestic workers do not enjoy effective social protections, putting them and their families in highly vulnerable situations.

**90% of domestic workers do not enjoy effective social protections.**

The ILO also estimates that 14.2 million people are victims of forced labour exploitation in economic activities, with domestic work highlighted among the four most affected sectors. There also remain 11.2 million child domestic workers, between the ages of 5 and 14.

## The road ahead: Making decent work a reality for domestic workers

The adoption of ILO Convention No. 189 has set the world on a path to correcting a history of exclusion of domestic workers; but the journey to make decent work a reality for domestic workers has just begun. Ensuring effective protections for domestic workers will require continued efforts among workers, employers and governments to raise public awareness of the value of domestic work to societies, the rights and responsibilities of workers and employers, and the importance of formalizing the sector. Public institutions require capacity building to design effective labour laws, and to implement effective strategies to ensure compliance. Workers' and employers' organizations can also strengthen their organizing efforts, working towards social dialogue and collective bargaining to ensure the voice and representation of the workers and employers.

The ILO will continue to actively pursue these goals with constituents around the world. In addition to providing direct assistance to countries, the ILO will be expanding its research to assist countries in formalizing domestic work, as part of the follow up to Recommendation 204 on formalization of the informal economy, and protecting workers from unacceptable forms of work.

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2015). World Population Prospects: The 2015 Revision, Key Findings and Advance Tables. Working Paper No. ESA/P/WP.241.

<sup>2</sup> Eurofound (2013), More and better jobs in home-care services, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

[www.ilo.org/domesticworkers](http://www.ilo.org/domesticworkers)

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