

Domestic workers in Asia and the Pacific

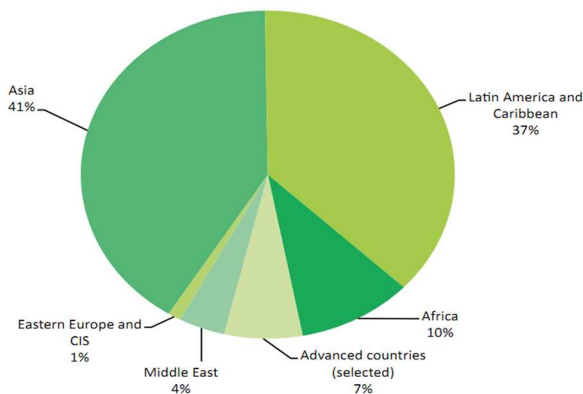
Recognition for an 'invisible' workforce

An important and growing workforce

Work in households and homes is as old as time, vital for the well-being of families, communities and societies at large. Traditionally done by women and girls without pay, domestic work is often not perceived as “real employment”. Some argue that women’s contribution to the home and general social good is immeasurable, and so precious that any effort to add a price tag only demeans their contribution. This gender-biased argument has resulted in the effective, systematic, marginalization and undervaluation of domestic work.

41 per cent of the world’s domestic workers are in Asia, equivalent to 21.5 million people aged 15 or above. The numbers are growing in many countries, including Indonesia, Malaysia, Mongolia, Philippines, Republic of Korea, Sri Lanka and Viet Nam. In India the number of domestic workers appears to have doubled between 1994 and 2005, from 2.097 million to 4.207 million.

Distribution of domestic workers by region, 2010 estimates



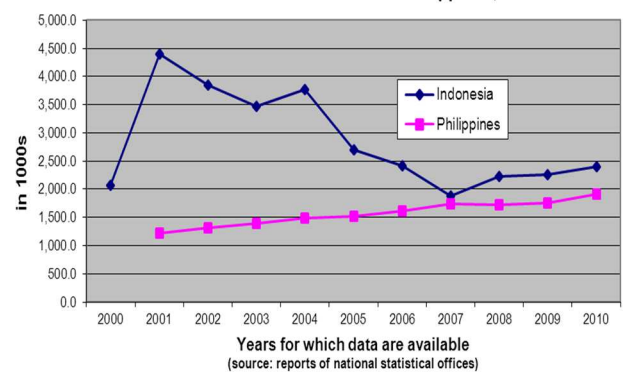
Child domestic workers

Although the number of child domestic workers (under 18) in the region is not systematically monitored, case studies in the early 2000s found several hundreds of thousands of child domestic workers in Indonesia and the Philippines, and tens of thousands in Kathmandu, Phnom Penh and Thailand. In most countries the majority are girls but in Mongolia most child domestic workers are boys.

A female-dominated occupation

80-85 per cent of domestic workers in Asia are women. In some countries it is an important source of female employment. In the Philippines, 11.2 per cent of employed women are domestic workers (2010); in Malaysia, 5.9 per cent (2008); and in Indonesia, 4.4 per cent (2010). The regional average is about 2.5 per cent.

Domestic workers in Indonesia and the Philippines, 2000-2010



Migrant domestic workers - additional challenges

Some of the largest flows of overseas migrant domestic workers in the world originate in Asian countries such as Bangladesh, Indonesia, the Philippines and Sri Lanka. Some of their major destinations are also in the region, including Hong Kong (China), Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand. Roughly 90 per cent of these migrants are women and their numbers are also increasing while some other migrant categories (including professionals, middle-level and unskilled workers) have registered declines. In 2010 the Philippines deployed 96,583 “household service workers”, a 54 per cent increase from 2004. In Sri Lanka the number of overseas migrant housemaids rose from 108,709 in 2008 to 113,777 in 2009 (a 4.7 per cent increase).

Migrant domestic workers face additional challenges associated with working in a different culture and language, including racial, gender and class discrimination, temporary worker status and compromised legal protection. In many destination countries local labour law does not cover foreign domestic workers (Hong Kong (China) is a noteworthy exception), or they are covered by a separate law (as in Singapore), bilateral Memorandums of Understanding, or standard employment contracts. The non-binding nature of these agreements and lack of dispute resolution procedures makes these instruments less effective in resolving contract disputes and other problems.



Decent work deficits

The ILO estimates that about 60 per cent of domestic workers in Asia are excluded from national labour laws. Almost 99 per cent have no legal safeguards against excessively long hours, 88 per cent are not entitled to a statutory minimum wage. These gaps partly explain why domestic workers are highly vulnerable to poor working conditions, abuse and violence.

Human rights abuses experienced by migrant domestic workers have been widely publicised, but the conditions of domestic workers in their own countries have received much less attention. Case studies among live-in domestic workers in Cambodia, China, India, Indonesia, Pakistan and Thailand have revealed excessively long working hours (11-18 hours daily, no weekly rest day, on-call 24 hours). At the same time they are among the lowest paid workers. The 2010 Philippine Labor Force Survey found one in five worked 11 hours or more per day, and 33 per cent worked 9-10 hours, for an average real hourly wage of Php 10.80 (US\$0.25).



Many workers' and civil society organizations in Asia are actively engaged in promoting the decent work agenda for domestic workers. These include the National Domestic Workers Movement (NDWM) in India, the Federation of Domestic Workers' Unions (FADWU) in Hong Kong (China), the Association and Linkage of Domestic Workers in the Philippines (SUMAPI), and the Network of Domestic Workers in Thailand. Trade unions include SEWA, HMS, INTUC and AITUC in India; HKCTU in Hong Kong (China), MTUC in Malaysia, SRC in Thailand, and APL, FFW and TUCP in the Philippines. There is also the Visayan Forum in the Philippines, Jala PERT in Indonesia, the Foundation for Labour and Employment Promotion (HomeNet) in Thailand, and the regional Migrant Forum Asia.

Promoting decent work for domestic workers

There are several initiatives in Asia to support decent working standards for domestic workers. Most prominent is the campaign to ratify the new ILO Domestic Workers' Convention, 2011 (No. 189). In addition there are a number of national initiatives, including:



- In India, a draft national policy would establish domestic workers' fundamental rights and provide better labour and social protection. The Government has already extended the coverage of the Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojana unorganized sector health insurance scheme to domestic workers. State governments have been urged to include domestic workers in their minimum wage measures.
- In Indonesia, draft legislation on domestic workers is under consideration.
- In the Philippines proposed legislation would raise domestic workers' minimum wages, regulate working times, guarantee a weekly rest day and extend social security entitlements.

Resources

Texts of Convention 189 & Recommendation 201

http://www.ilo.org/travail/whatwedo/publications/lang--en/WCMS_168266/index.htm

Decent Work for Domestic Workers in Asia-Pacific

http://www.ilo.org/asia/whatwedo/projects/WCMS_114205/lang--en/index.htm

ILO site on domestic workers

<http://www.ilo.org/global/topics/domestic-workers/lang--en/index.htm>

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For further information please contact:

Nelien Haspels, Senior Specialist on Gender & Women Workers Issues

ILO Decent Work Team for East and South-East Asia and the Pacific
United Nations Building
Rajdamnern Nok Avenue
Bangkok 10200, Thailand

Tel: +662 288 1234
Fax: +662 288 3062
Email: BANGKOK@ilo.org
www.ilo.org/asia

