

Written statement for the 61st session of the Commission on the Status of Women

Submitted by:

The Swedish Women's Lobby (Sveriges Kvinnolobby)
The European Women's Lobby (EWL)
The Swedish Federation of Immigrant Women's Associations (RIFFI)
The European Network of Migrant Women (ENoMW)

On the 16th of June 2011 trade unions came together to adopt the ILO Convention No. 189 on decent work for domestic workers. Domestic workers all over the world are targets of violence and other human rights abuses. It is estimated that at least 80 percent of all domestic workers are women which means that this group is disproportionately affected by these conditions. In the light of the CSW 61 theme, "Women's economic empowerment in the changing world of work", we call on all UN member states to address the situation of female migrant and domestic workers and to take urgent actions to ensure decent working conditions and human rights.

In 2010, ILO estimated that only 10 percent of all domestic workers were covered by labor legislation to the same extent as other workers. More recent statistics show that domestic workers earn less than half of average wages and sometimes no more than about 20 percent. 90 percent do not have access to social protection, such as pensions and unemployment benefits. A recent ILO analysis also shows that 17 percent of all domestic workers are migrants.¹ As the vast majority of domestic workers are women, it is of most importance that all policies and measures have a gender equality perspective, taking into account the specific needs of women domestic workers, and ensuring their human rights. The fact that migrant female domestic workers are more vulnerable to exploitation and abuse than men, particularly sexual exploitation, also needs to be recognized and tackled.

Today, millions of people are working in the domestic sector and recent UN estimates on population and ageing confirm that the demand for domestic work is likely to grow. Ageing populations, public care cuts and an increasing number of women entering the labour force worldwide makes families increasingly turn to domestic workers to care for their homes, children and ageing parents. It is essential to protect the rights of the increasing number of female domestic workers.

There are several circumstances that make the conditions that migrant female domestic workers are facing particularly exploitive and abusive. Susceptible to gender-based segregation in the workplace, migrant women are often employed in individualized or isolated work environments where there is rarely any visibility. Often, the workers are promised decent salaries and good working conditions, but in the end the employers are abusive. Domestic workers are targets of physical and sexual violence as well as human trafficking.

In June 2012, the European Commission urged Member States to ratify the Domestic Workers Convention in the context of the EU Strategy towards the Eradication of Trafficking in Human Beings. In 2014, the EC yet again entreated the EU member states to implement the ILO Convention. The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women agrees on the importance of ratifying the ILO Convention 189. In their Concluding Observations to several state parties, the CEDAW Committee urge member states to ratify the Convention, which is also in accordance with the Istanbul Convention.

¹http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_protect/---protrav/---travail/documents/briefingnote/wcms_490778.pdf

Raising the standards of domestic working conditions worldwide 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).

The European Network of Migrant Women also states that ratifying the Domestic Workers Convention is an urgent issue. Enforcing the Convention across the EU should be a priority in securing decent work and social security for all migrant workers, including migrant women domestic workers. ENoMW calls on EU member states to ensure that the protection of domestic workers and their access to rights and justice is not limited to documented migrants only, but is extended to all migrants employed in this sector, without any exceptions.²

It is urgent to address and counteract the discrimination and exploitation that female domestic workers, and especially migrant women, are facing. UN Member States needs to fulfill their responsibilities and protect domestic workers through law and policy, and ensure that all necessary measures are taken to ensure economic empowerment of all women, regardless of their profession, marital status, citizenship or age. Ratifying the ILO convention is essential in ensuring women's economic independence in the changing world of work. We therefore urge UN Member States to ratify and implement the Convention by ensuring that:

- Domestic workers receive equal treatment with other workers with regard to compensation and benefits, for example in the case of maternity, parental or sick leave.
- Domestic workers have and are informed about safe terms and details of their employment.
- Domestic workers are protected against discrimination of any kind and that they have easy access to complaint mechanisms.
- Domestic workers are offered safe and decent living conditions.
- Domestic workers have guaranteed access to affordable high quality child and elderly care.
- Mechanisms and policies ensure an end to impunity in cases of violence, sexual abuse or exploitation of domestic workers.
- Women's organizations are involved and listened to in processes and policies on domestic work.

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About the Swedish Women's Lobby

The Swedish Women's Lobby (SWL) is a politically and religiously independent umbrella organization for women's organizations in Sweden. We gather 43 member organizations with the mutual aim to fulfill women's human rights within Sweden, the EU and internationally. The SWL is based on feminist grounds. The foundations of our activities are CEDAW and the Beijing Platform for Action.

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²http://picum.org/picum.org/uploads/file_/ENoMW%20International%20Domestic%20Workers%20Day%20statement%202014_1.pdf