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Women migrant domestic workers: bringing the sector into the open

Poor pay, difficult working conditions, bad treatment in both the north and south, migrant workers of both sexes are the target of large-scale discrimination. Having 'unsuitable' skin colour for the job, lacking the right qualifications to hope for anything better, waiting for their work and residence status to be regularized or condemned to live clandestinely; migrant workers are obvious targets for exploitation of many kinds. The position of the women who represent a growing portion of this migrant population is doubly fragile on this immigrant employment market, combining as they do the disadvantages of their migrant status with those of their gender (more difficult access to education and lower social position). In their host countries these foreign women very often undertake difficult and thankless tasks and, where they lack legal status, live on

the edge of society. In many countries domestic service is one of the main activities of migrant women. But despite growing significantly, this phenomenon remains today largely invisible and ignored, even though with economic and social changes such as the rising number of households with two full-time working parents, family disintegration and the problems attached to an ageing population, it is set to increase in the coming years. These migrant domestic workers, due to their social isolation, their direct dependence on their employers and their continuous presence at their place of work, are amongst the most vulnerable of all foreign women workers, and also the most difficult to unionise. What are their living and working conditions? How are trade unions around the world mobilizing to help and organise them? We give an overview below.

Helping them out of illegality

In Italy, data from FILCAMS-CGIL (Italian Federation of Commercial, Hotel, Catering and Service Workers – Italian General Workers' Federation) shows that, out of one million domestic workers, 480,000 are migrants. In 1995 women domestic workers represented almost one third of all work permits granted. Today, with a vast regularization effort under way, of the half million dossiers filed with the authorities, according to the CGIL, 340,000 relate to domestic employees, home helps, persons assisting dependent persons. Of every 10 immigrant women in Italy, 4 are from Europe, 3 from Africa, 2 from Asia and one from Latin America. 85% of the 7,000 citizens of the Dominican Republic who have emigrated to Spain are women and are also extensively employed in the do-



In Cotonou, Benin, maidservants from neighbouring countries work, often clandestinely, in particularly deplorable conditions. (Photo: J.D.)

mestic sector. In 2002 the CC.OO trade union numbered the total of women migrant domestic workers with correct social security papers at 80,000, with another 25,000 living in an irregular situation. In France, domestic work also constitutes a major source of work for such women: a study carried out back in 1984 showed that almost 55% of migrant workers in an irregular situation were domestic employees. In Switzerland, according to trade union figures, this sector represents 50,000 out of the 120,000 clandestine jobs in all sectors combined. Thousands of kilometres away, in Asia, the same tandem of "domestic work - migrant women" is found for the same reasons. In Sri Lanka, for example, a study undertaken in 1996 put at around 400,000 the number of its women nationals working in this sector

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abroad. In 2001, over 100,000 of them were in the Gulf states, the Middle East and Malaysia. The Philippine government too spoke of an equivalent number in the early 1990s, pointing out that over half these domestic workers had emigrated without legal work contracts. Official figures for 2001 indicated that over 70,000 Philippine nationals were working as domestic labour in the Gulf states, the Middle East and Malaysia. In the Middle East, 20% of the workforce (estimated at 6 million persons) consists of women migrant domestic workers, most of them recruited by private hiring agencies. In Malaysia, a destination ideal for would-be migrants given its geographical and linguistic proximity, around 165,000 Indonesian women are employed as domestic workers, but in working conditions frequently denounced as contrary to human dignity. In Hong Kong their number is put at 240,000. In the United States, domestic workers of both sexes and all ages numbered over 800,000 in 1996. The Canadian province of Toronto alone was home to almost 30,000 illegal "nannies" in 1993.

Recently, several cases of extreme exploitation of migrant women domestic workers have hit the headlines. Inside the luxurious residences of central Paris, London and Athens, young foreign women domestic workers have been found living in states of near slavery. Deprived of their freedom, without papers, fed with the scraps from meals, the target of violence and at times rape, these women's stories have been shocking, bringing to public attention the existence of a new form of servitude in Europe. These cases of extreme violence have also highlighted the size of the illegal market in "little serving girls" recruited by wealthy European families to take care of domestic tasks and children. In 1997 a study commissioned by the European Commission and carried out in various European cities revealed the seriousness of the abuse suffered by women migrant domestic workers. Apart from the low consideration in which their work is often held, they face racism and a high degree of dependency owing to the irregular nature of their situation, with employers frequently in a position to openly exploit their domestic workers. Exactions that are rarely punished and which today are mobilising many trade unions and migrant women's associations (see box on 'Respect'). In many countries, and in particular where migrant domestic workers are living clandestinely, the trade unions are seeking to establish contact with these women and to militate for their regularisation. In France, for example, during the campaign to regularise persons without papers dur-



In Haiti there were 250,000 of them in 1997 aged between 7 and 10. (Photo: UNICEF)

ing the 1980s a large number of Philippine and Haitian women joined the CFDT trade union federation, which helped them put together their files. In the same way Swiss trade unions are today helping migrant women domestic workers who have the misfortune to belong to the country's largest user of clandestine labour. According to the SIT (Interprofessional Workers' Union), this sector represents 50,000 out of the 120,000 clandestine jobs in the country as a whole, in all sectors combined.

***Home helps
and do-
mestic
cleaners sweep, vacu-
um clean, wash and
polish floors, do the
washing and ironing,
buy food and other
domestic necessities,
prepare food, serve
meals and take care
of numerous other do-
mestic functions".***

ILO definition.

This sector is also expanding rapidly, in conditions of limitless precarity. As SIT President Georges Tissot explained, "since the SIT opened its consultancies, fifty people a day have turned up at our offices. The trade union is helping them with the administrative hurdles. It also provides candidates with certificates proving that we are defending them. Gradually a sort of tacit agreement has been concluded between the authorities and ourselves not to arrest these per-

sons during the procedure." Today, however, the sector remains largely impermeable to unionisation, as only 200 migrant women domestic workers have become SIT members. In Belgium, around 400 Philippine workers of both sexes, most of them in the domestic service area, today belong to the FGTB trade union federation, which also provides them with legal and administrative assistance. In Italy the unions are similarly committed now that the authorities have launched a new regularisation campaign. The CGIL and UIL have, however, warned that out of the 340,000 dossiers filed by domestic employees and home helps, a large number will not be successful owing to the refusal either by many employers to pay the 290 euros required to put them in order or that of the prefecture to consider the work done as sufficient. Today the trade unions observe that employers are dismissing many of the domestic workers whom they have hired on the black market. Nana Corracaz, in charge of women's questions at the CGIL tells us that "one can say that 90% of the one million women migrant workers present in Italy are concentrated in the domestic service and personal help sector, a status which, by offering them a salary and housing, looks like an initial opportunity to get a foot on the employment market. Even if, as we have to admit, this sector is a source of exploitation and segregation. Apart from the low salaries, this work does not match the qualifications of the women doing it and is incompatible with a normal family life. The conditions imposed on the women workers imply also the waste and dispersal of professional potential." Given the growing number of

migrant women from transitional economies and from developing countries, the CGIL last year launched a programme entitled "Active Citizenship for Migrant Women", with various initiatives (seminars, campaign to combat expulsions, letter to the prime minister, etc.) certain of them in collaboration with other trade unions. In Portugal, a fact that stands out for its rarity, the law has recently been strengthened in order to simplify and assist the legalisation of migrant women workers. In this context, the accommodation of migrant women workers is moving ahead with much greater ease and speed. The Portuguese trade union confederation, UGT, has, for example, developed training courses to familiarise union leaders with legalisation procedures and the support available to immigrants and has organized various congresses on this theme. On the ground, SLEDA, the cleaning sector trade union, is working to get domestic workers better informed of their rights. Maria Amélia Lourenço, the secretary-general of this trade union explains that "right now, my organization has made contact with 500 women workers whom we have provided with information on how to go about legalising their situation and on their rights under Portuguese law. This should help them better protect themselves against

the all too frequent abuses of power." These women workers come essentially from the former Portuguese colonies (Angola, Cap Verde, Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique) and increasingly from the countries of the former USSR and Brazil. In general they are aged between 25 and 40. The complaints that they relay to SLEDA relate to the failure to grant them the so-called "work declaration" needed in order to receive a residence permit. In Great Britain, the Transport and General Workers Union (TGWU) has for many years been encouraging migrant domestic workers to join its ranks, whatever their status. The trade union has integrated them into its structures by providing them with identity cards and with advice and support. It has also repeatedly been their voice in the combat for the regularization of their status. The same scenario is repeated in Greece, where a domestic workers' trade union has been set up in liaison with the Athens Labour centre.

CHEAP "LITTLE MAIDS"

Thousands of kilometres away, in Cotonou, Benin, maidservants from neighbouring countries work, often clandestinely, in particularly deplorable conditions. In order to help them, the National Domestic and Restaurant Employees Trade Union (SYNEMB), affiliat-

ed to CSA-Benin, was founded in 2001. As Christophe Lawson from Synemb's legal department explains, the primary purpose of the trade union (active right now in Cotonou only), which has 245 members, is to assist its members in settling the all too frequent disputes over dismissals, often for implausible reasons. Like the case of Justice Gnaguenon, accused of stealing 800,000 CAF francs after refusing to follow her boss to the Lebanon, or that of Friday Toussou, also accused unjustly of the same crime and whom SYNEMB placed as a cleaning girl with another boss for a salary of 25,000 CFA per month (in general such girls' earn no more than 5,000 CFA francs – approximately 7 Euros). For Christophe Lawson, the prospects offered to these young women are particularly grim. "These domestic workers," he explains, "who come mainly from northern Benin or Togo are more and more numerous and increasingly exploited and sexually harassed because they are very young. The situation is deplorable, and if nothing is done within 5 years, the current campaign to stop the advance of AIDS will be a drop in the ocean because these girls have no one to help them locally and will give themselves to whoever makes the first offer. To get out

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A European Network

No more "yes ma'am, yes ma'am"

In Great Britain can your employer fire you because you become pregnant or for wanting to join a union? In Spain, can you change boss after renewing your work permit for a second year? Is there a minimum salary in Greece? Given their high degree of dependency on their employers and their lack of knowledge of how things really are in their new country, the tendency is often to agree to everything and anything. It is not easy for women migrant workers arriving in Europe to have their rights respected. The Respect network has therefore decided to fill in these gaps by producing an information manual with the help of its members (in particular organisations of women migrant domestic workers living in Europe).

The book is a mine of useful advice on working and living in Europe. It also includes testimonies to the abuses that too many women domestic workers have suffered and continue to suffer. Respect's message is clear: "don't let yourself be overrun, demand that your rights be respected". In this context Respect has also adopted a 10-point charter of women domestic workers' rights, calling in particular for a women domestic employee work status that recognises the professional nature of this work, the right to a minimum salary and to social security protection, together with an immigrant worker status which is independent of any one employer and includes the right to change employer. It also demands the right of freedom of movement –and the right to private life and leisure time. Demands that are

obviously supported by the many trade unions in the network. For persons needing to find help, Respect lists at the end of the document different women migrant worker aid organisations in the nine European countries in which it is present. Among them two important addresses: Kalayaan in London and Solidar in Brussels, which are founder members of Respect. In addition, the NGO, Anti-Slavery International (a member of Respect) has just published an awareness guide to fight against a particular form of domestic labour- that which affects children. The manual, 'Child Domestic Workers: Finding a Voice,' can be found at <http://www.antislavery.org/home-page/resources/AdvocacyHandbookEng.pdf>

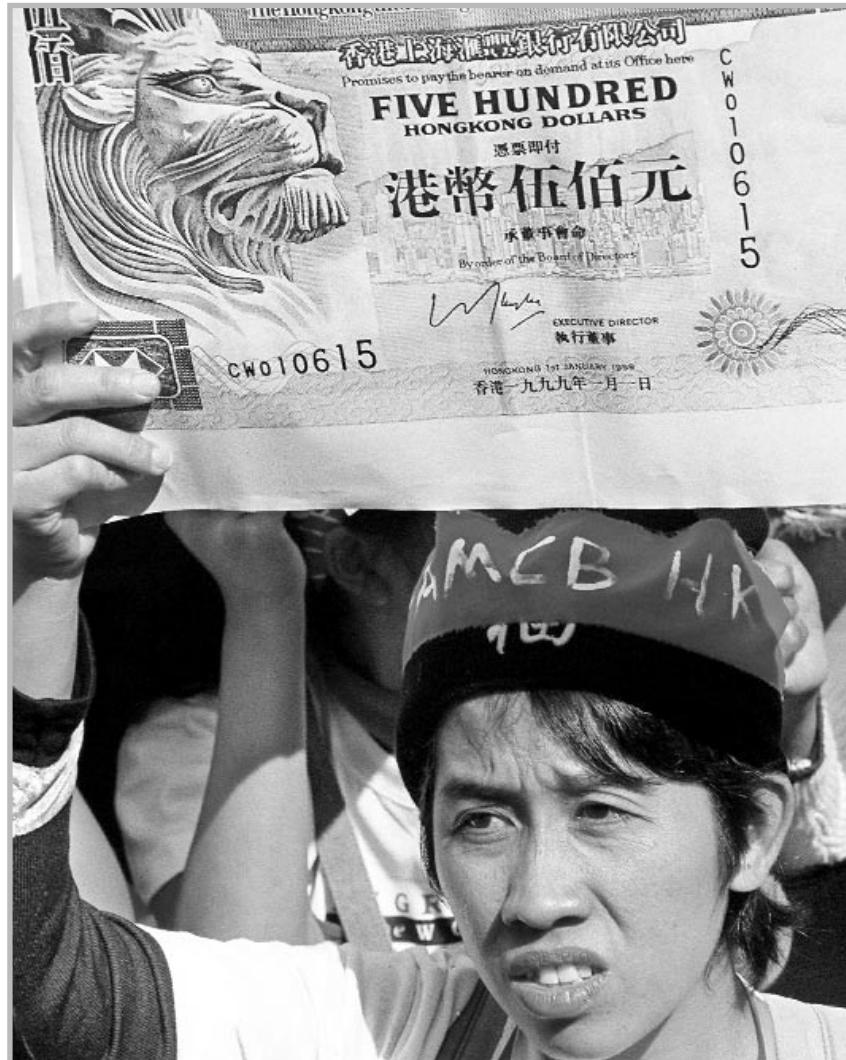
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of this impasse, it is vital to stress the need for training for our members and to find the funds to undertake it". Training and information are constant themes for the many trade unions around the world that are assisting migrant workers.

THE GULF STATES: UNLIMITED EXPLOITATION

In the Asian countries, where migrant domestic workers are in most cases recruited through private placement agencies – which means that they have legal work permits – abuses are also frequent. An even worse situation prevails in the Gulf where many countries' legislation forbids domestic workers to belong to trade unions. In Saudi Arabia, for example, as the ICFTU stated in its 2001 survey of union rights violations, Asian domestic workers employed there were once again the subject of bad treatment and even executions. In the same year other testimonies denounced the particularly atrocious detention conditions (a Jeddah prison infested with rats) in which 80 young Philippine women domestic workers who had fled the maltreatment of their employers were kept. Abused first by their bosses, they were again abused by the jailers. Yet elsewhere in the Gulf region, the Bahraini authorities deserve credit for recent reforms allowing migrant workers of both sexes to join trade unions.

Certain cases inventoried in Malaysia are almost nightmarish. In 2000 for example, 40-year old Indonesian home help Nurjanag Matyak was found by the police, covered with injuries, her eyes practically shut due to bruising. She said at the time that her boss, a woman, had hit her violently around the head with a rattan cane. She also declared that she had been punched on the mouth, first of all for not responding quickly enough when called, and then for spilling water on the ground. On other occasions she had been forced to lick urine and eat hair. Her boss, Yap Sow Li, a 50-year old businesswoman, pleaded not guilty. Even if found guilty she risks no more than one year of prison or a fine. The Malay authorities' response to such delicate cases has improved: the immigration department has introduced a telephone help line, the plan being to withdraw mistreated domestic workers' passports to prevent their employers sending them back to their home countries before the case has gone to court, and with bosses who are found guilty banned from hiring any servant again ever etc. For the MTUC (Malaysian Trades Union Congress- an ICFTU affiliate) this is a start, but only the right to belong to a trade union will put an end to the expulsion of workers. MTUC vice-president Indera Putra Ismail explains that "this right is



Last December, faced with persistent rumours of new legislation imposing heavy taxes on them (around 500 Hong Kong dollars a month (62€), women migrant domestic workers organised a mass demonstration with HKCTU support. (Photo: AP)

guaranteed by law, but certain migrant workers' employment contracts stipulate that they are not allowed to join a trade union. And many of those who can are not attracted by the trade unions, either due to lack of knowledge, or out of fear of reprisals from their hiring agency, their employer or the authorities".

ILO: LEGAL GAPS

In 1965 the ILO adopted a Resolution on the employment conditions of domestic workers. This text called on Member States to take measures to improve these conditions and to make them compatible with fundamental labour standards. Almost 40 years on, the ILO has advanced little in this area: few countries have institutionalised the rights of domestic workers and there is no international convention addressed specifically at them. An example clearly illustrating this marginalisation is the fact that in certain countries such as Brazil, Jordan, Kuwait and in the Canadian province of Ontario, they are not

allowed to form trade unions as they are not considered as fully-fledged employees. Other countries' labour codes contain clauses that discriminate against them. In Costa Rica, for example, where workers are generally not allowed to work more than 8 hours a day, the labour code states that, for domestic workers, the daily hours are between 12 and 16. The ILO, via the studies it has undertaken which point to the high vulnerability of this section of workers, continues to plead forcefully for the recognition of their rights. To assist them the organisation has published several information guides, in particular a general purpose "Information Guide on Preventing Exploitation and Abuse of Women Migrant Workers" and a brochure for Nicaraguan women domestic workers working in Costa Rica "Todo lo que tengo que saber como migrante: Guía informativa para mujeres nicaragüenses en Costa Rica" (Everything I need to know as a migrant. Information Guide for Nicaraguan women in Costa Rica). ●

Helping them to have their rights respected

As Lee Cheuk-Yan, the secretary general of the Hong Kong Congress of Trade Unions (HKCTU) explains, even where a labour contract exists between an employer and a domestic worker, there are cases where this is respected little, if at all, depending on certain criteria and in particular on whether the domestic worker lives or not in his boss's house. "In Hong Kong it is relatively easy to contact women migrant domestic workers as every Sunday several thousands of them meet at the same places. But once employed they are afraid to voice any complaints, as their employers place them under pressure. Their living conditions are frequently difficult because many of them live at their employers' premises and their only living space is the kitchen, where they have to dismantle their beds during the day. They are also obliged to work in their bosses' shops, although this is not in their contracts". The 240,000 or so women migrant domestic workers in Hong Kong (most of them from Sri Lanka, Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand and having legal work permits) are nonetheless grouped today in twenty or so trade unions and battle with a high degree of solidarity for the defence of their rights. Last December, faced with persistent rumours of new legislation imposing heavy taxes on them (around 500 Hong Kong dollars a month (62€), women migrant domestic workers organised a mass demonstration with HKCTU support.

ADMINISTRATIVE COMPLEXITY

Another factor, which can contribute to employers' failure to respect the law, is the administrative complexity of legally hiring domestic labour. In Switzerland, for example, most persons in this sector work in the unofficial ("black") sector, a situation due either to the ill-will of their bosses, or to the complexity of the administrative procedure to be accomplished by the latter in return for just a few hours' work a week. Bearing in mind that these people have to work for several employers in order to obtain a minimum income with which to live, one can say that around 25,000 employer households and families are directly concerned by this problem. These women workers come essentially from Peru, Colombia, Brazil and the Philippines. In this context the trade union is currently trying to develop a system of employment cheques, a formula which exists already in France, which allows each employer to declare

cleaning women to the social insurance and tax authorities without administrative complications. Many other solutions have also been proposed in order to improve these household employees' highly precarious employment conditions, such as a standard labour contract including a certain number of items protecting the domestic workers, but which the employer can waive in writing.

In France and Italy, where this sector is covered by a collective agreement, the fate of domestic employees appears to be more desirable. But these texts have also to be applied, which is far from being the case as observed by Maya Jezewski of Babaylan, an association of Philippine women in France, and which is part of the Respect network. "We turn to the CFDT domestic employees' trade union in particular for expert and legal advice and for matters concerning the collective agreement. Fortunately, in France we do not have too many serious complaints of maltreatment, but we do see a lot of problems owing to the failure to respect these women's rights, in particular in terms of working hours and salaries." In South Africa, the SA Domestic Service and Allied Workers' Union, Sadsawu (close to ICFTU-affiliate Cosatu) is also trying to unionise these workers to help them defend their rights. The principal objectives of this

trade union, founded in April 2000 in KwaZulu Natal, are to train and sensitise domestic workers across the country. Last March, during an initial public mobilisation, the trade union's leaders chained themselves to the railings around Parliament to protest against the possibility of excluding domestic workers from unemployment indemnity funds. The initiative has worked as the proposal is no longer on the table, and as the organisation's president Hester Stephen declared on leaving Parliament, "me, a domestic worker in Parliament! It's unheard of but I'm here today. This was a victory for domestic workers, the most oppressed workforce within South Africa". The authorities hardened their tone in November 2002 with new legislation introducing a minimum wage for women domestic workers and warning recalcitrant employers that they will have to answer in court. Under this new law, the minimum salary in urban areas should increase from 600 to 800 rand a month (65 to 86€). Sadsawu also took part in these negotiations. ●

Bibliographical references: Domestic work, conditions of work and employment: a legal perspective – Ramirez-Machado, Jose Maria, Geneva, march 2000, ILO. Gender and migration in Education Ouverte, N°129, 4/2002.



The South African authorities hardened their tone in November 2002 with new legislation introducing a minimum wage for women domestic workers and warning recalcitrant employers that they will have to answer in court. (Photo: Gamma)

Portrait

In Mauritius and Paris alike, Françoise defends the rights of female domestic workers

On arriving in Paris in 1987 "Françoise", as we shall call her, already had many years of experience behind her as a 'domestic worker'. Looking after children and cleaning, ironing and cooking is all that Françoise has done since leaving school around the age of 12 in Mauritius, the island where she was born. When she came to Paris as a migrant worker, at the age of 30 or so, she had no illusions as to her job prospects. She knew that like many of her compatriots she would "look after the house" for some boss or other – whether French or Mauritian, it didn't really matter. Having set up the first trade union for domestic workers in her own country, Françoise was ready to stick up for her rights despite her foreigner status. "To begin with, the 'old hands' tried to tell me that the work was different in France from Mauritius and there were ways of hanging on to your job. But I mainly wanted to know the price of a loaf of bread, the cost of a maid's room and my hourly wage. In Mauritius I had learnt how to look after myself and I was determined to do the same in France and to fight to get rid of my clandestine status". She very quickly contacted the CFDT, which helped her sort out her legal status (in fact they helped her get a special permit). Thanks to the wave of 'legalisations' at the time, many Filipinas and Mauritians were getting help from the union in sorting out these legal formalities and were joining the CFDT 'en masse'. Françoise became a very active

member and even held a seat on the national committee of the employees' union. Thanks to the CFDT a collective agreement was signed covering domestic workers. But after a colleague made some racist remarks, Françoise decided to reduce her commitment to the organisation. However, she is still a member today, as she says the CFDT is the organisation that can help her if she is sacked.

"The 35-hour week has never been applied to domestic workers and we don't get a thirteenth month or a holiday bonus unlike other employees".

However, she would like today's unions to do more to meet the needs of migrant female domestic workers. "Often the union is only able to help us based on the letter of the law, however migrant women domestic workers have many other needs. They need help with coping with their isolated living conditions, with their education and training needs and with finding reasonably-priced accommodation". Françoise is now trying to help her compatriots through the association she has set up called "Mauritian Solidarity in Europe". But she has limited resources: "in Mauritius we had a place to meet for a coffee and cheer ourselves up, but there's nothing like that

here. To get a room we are dependent on the goodwill of local parishes and women working long days find it tough travelling around the city". As Françoise explains, many of the young women arriving nowadays from Mauritius or elsewhere (increasingly from Africa and Haiti) have qualifications and don't want to do this job all their lives. She admits that that will be an increasingly difficult challenge for clandestine workers. For herself, as a legally declared domestic worker, there are other pressing demands, not least regarding wages. Her association asserts ironically that French employers will soon just need to queue up at the local authority to get a free domestic worker. "Our main criticism is that employers are able to take us on at a fixed price, which suits them very well as they can write off up to half the cost against tax, whereas we get nothing at all from the deal. In fact the system cheats us through its negative effects on our sick leave and pension rights. Employers can also now insist on paying us 'responsible' hours, i.e. hours when we are paid less since the children are sleeping, for instance. That is illogical given the awful hours that most of us have to work. The 35-hour week has never been applied to domestic workers and we don't get a thirteenth month or a holiday bonus unlike other employees".

Trade union without borders

Diplomats and international officials above the law

In many countries, a considerable amount of abuse is also perpetrated against domestic personnel working for diplomats or international officials, whose presence is particularly large in the main western metropolises. Whilst in general these staff have proper labour contracts, their working conditions can in extreme cases represent veritable slavery. In Geneva a trade union specialising in defending these workers has been set up under the name "Syndicat Sans Frontières" (trade union without borders). But as Adel Salameh from Syndicat Sans Frontières admits, his association lacks the necessary back-up resources. "What we offer is an emergency rescue service. People come and see us when they

have problems. When things are sorted out, they don't return. Many domestic workers are also obliged to follow their employers wherever they go." For Adel Salameh, the most frequent abuses relate to the failure to respect working hours and salaries. "On arriving from the third world, workers from developing countries see Switzerland as an Eldorado, but they are often abused by accepting less than the Swiss legal minimum salary of 1600 francs (plus housing and insurance). Others are also subject to physical and moral violence, but are afraid to speak out, in particular as there is not much that can be done against their superiors, who enjoy immunity." According to him, there is a need to pass to another stage today and to tackle the problem linked to this diplomatic immunity. His pro-

posal: a diplomatic conference (of European and Scandinavian countries) in order to distinguish between problems relating to individual states' sovereignty on the one hand and labour problems on the other. In this context he is calling for a reform of the Vienna Convention agreements that safeguard this sovereignty. Public opinion, which is today more sensitive to this topic, can also help advance matters. Denouncing and mediatising this behaviour is also the path chosen by the Anti-Slavery Today Committee (<http://www.antislavery.org>) set up in Paris and which today has outlets in several European countries. Its team of legal experts, psychologists and journalists provides assistance to victims and pursues abusers in the courts.

UNICEF

Little maid-servants hardly 10 years old

In too many developing countries, domestic work lies on the shoulders of children, certain of whom are not even 10 years old. In Paraguay, a UNICEF study carried out in the early 1990s revealed around 15,000 girls aged between 11 and 18 working as maids in the capital Asuncion. In Haiti there

were 250,000 of them in 1997 aged between 7 and 10. In Venezuela, where the ICFTU recently denounced the widespread use of child labour in informal and unregulated activities (quoting a figure of 1.2 million children in work), 60% of girls aged between 10 and 14 are domestic workers. In Brazil, 22% of the child labour force is in this sector.



In too many developing countries, domestic work lies on the shoulders of children, certain of whom are not even 10 years old. (Photo: ILO)

Trades unions call for all migrants' rights to be respected

This year in Malaysia, a number of serious incidents have once again highlighted the violence suffered by a growing number of migrant workers, leading to a mobilisation of trade unions and humanitarian organisations. Faced with the Malaysian government's recent decision to expel 80,000 Bangladeshi workers from the country and to block any new arrival of migrant workers from this country, the secretary general of APRO (the ICFTU's Regional Organisation for Asia and the Pacific) sent a letter of protest to the Malay Minister of Human Resources calling on him to retract this decision. Other serious incidents in Malaysia involving the ill-treatment of tens of thousands of migrant workers of both sexes from the Philippines and Indonesia, and in particular the rape of a little girl from this community, have also led APRO to intervene. APRO has once again denounced the inhuman conditions in which thousands of Philippinos are incarcerated in detention camps. In these overcrowded centres, the shortage of food and water and appalling sanitary conditions result in several child deaths

daily. APRO is therefore calling on the government to offer maximum protection to migrant workers of both sexes by applying to this category the full battery of labour legislation and social security regulations.

APRO has once again denounced the inhuman conditions in which thousands of Philippinos are incarcerated in detention camps.

Determined to combat discrimination against migrant workers of both sexes everywhere in the world, the ICFTU and its affiliates have been committed for a number of years to a series of concrete activities in this area. The trade unions, which view migrant workers as fully-fledged workers with the same rights as others, are fighting at both national and international levels to promote and ensure the proper application of the legal instruments recognising these rights. Several international conventions provide for equal treat-

ment of migrants in terms of employment conditions, salaries, social security and trade union rights. But these are amongst the least ratified instruments (ILO Conventions 97 and 143 and the UN Convention on the Protection of the Rights of all Migrant Workers and their Family Members). A situation which has pushed the ICFTU and the organisations defending human and migrant rights to launch an international ratification campaign, one of the major outcomes of which has been the adopting of 18 December as International Migrants' Day. Apart from this international campaign, the ICFTU has been particularly involved in another event which has revived debate of this important issue: the United Nations World Conference against Racism, Xenophobia and Intolerance held from 31 August to 7 September 2001 at Durban. In this context the ICFTU has adopted a specific Action Plan entitled "No to Racism and Xenophobia" allowing it to intensify its struggle not only in the workplace, but also within its own ranks and throughout the entire community. ●

Trends in figures

Global migration

"Poverty and violence" are often the reasons pushing thousands of people to leave their home countries in search of a better future. In total, there are 150 million migrants or 2% of the world's population, 50 million of them in Africa alone. Over 100 million of them, according to the ILO, are workers, including a very large proportion of women (47.5% of

these flows). To this estimate must be added a growing number of illegal or clandestine migrants (30 to 40 million). A movement that is not expected to stabilise in the coming years. Economic globalisation and the development differentials which it has produced in southern hemisphere and in Eastern European transition countries are every day pushing thousands of people to leave their home countries to find a form of subsistence in wealthier lands.

Useful migrant web sites:

- Global campaign for the ratification of the convention on the rights of migrants:
<http://www.migrantsrights.org>
- Migrants Rights International:
<http://www.migrantwatch.org>
- December 18:
<http://www.december18.net>
- Respect Network; via Kalayaan:
kakayaan@compuserve.com
or Solidar: <http://www.solidar.org>
- CCEM:
<http://www.ccem-antislavery.org>