



ITUC-Africa Statement on International Domestic Workers Day 2024: Justice and Better Protection for All Domestic (Migrant) Workers

On this year's International Domestic Workers Day, the African Regional Organisation of the International Trade Union Confederation (www.ituc-africa.org) recognises, appreciates and celebrates the invaluable contributions of domestic workers worldwide to global productivity and wealth creation. We salute all domestic workers for their sacrifices in ensuring that our homes, workplaces and communities function in order, purpose and efficiency.

Though most domestic workers work behind the scenes and are seldom seen, heard, or known, their tireless services, efforts, and critical contributions are immense and commendable. Domestic workers perform the vital labour that enables other work to happen. They care for our children, ensuring parents can pursue their careers. They look after our elderly loved ones, providing comfort and safety in their twilight years. Their work is essential, yet they remain some of the most exploited and vulnerable workers globally.

As we are also commemorating the 13th anniversary of the landmark International Labor Organisation (ILO) Convention 189 (Decent Work for Domestic Workers), which set a new precedent for the rights and protections of domestic workers worldwide, let us remind ourselves of both the progress we have made and the significant challenges that still lie ahead in our quest for justice and better protection for all domestic workers, particularly those who are migrants.

Approximately 5.2 million domestic workers are employed in Africa, with 3.8 million women and 1.4 million men. They constitute 1.4 per cent of the total employed workforce and 4.9 per cent of paid employment, making Africa the third largest

employer of domestic workers after Asia and Latin America. However, these figures likely underestimate the accurate scale of domestic work in Africa due to the lack of disaggregated employment data, the invisibility of certain forms of domestic work such as child domestic labour and domestic servitude, and the social stigma that often prevents domestic workers from identifying themselves as such.

Domestic workers live in precarious working conditions, characterised by long working hours, derisory wages that do not take into account the hours worked, the worker's qualifications and experience, the legal provisions concerning the guaranteed inter-professional minimum wage, moral and sexual harassment in the workplace, the absence of health and safety conditions, the lack of a written employment contract, etc.

ITUC-Africa reiterates its calls for recognising domestic work as meaningful and essential labour. Our society needs to show respect and appreciation for the vital contributions of domestic workers. We must work to eradicate any stigmas attached to their work and ensure that domestic workers are treated with the dignity they deserve. Domestic workers should be entitled to social protections, such as access to healthcare, unemployment benefits, and retirement security. Migrant domestic workers, in particular, should receive these protections irrespective of their immigration status.

Domestic labour is crucial in migration patterns, especially in meeting labour demand gaps in some economies and regions. The financial impact is significant: the remittances sent by migrant domestic workers are a lifeline for millions of families in their home countries. Moreover, we must acknowledge and address the egregious human and labour rights violations faced by migrant domestic workers in the Middle East, particularly in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) and the United Arab Emirates.

Many domestic workers in the Middle East are not sufficiently covered by labour laws and regulations, making them vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. They often work long hours, sometimes exceeding legal limits, with little or no time for rest. These violations include forced labour, non-payment of wages, unsafe working conditions, slavery-like treatment, severe restrictions on freedom of movement and association, and even deaths. The gravity and scale of these abuses are immense and continue at alarming rates. We are committed to campaigning for the improved protection and defence of the rights of African migrant workers everywhere. This is why we are currently seized with our migrant workers' rights preservation targeting the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Similarly, ITUC-Africa fully supports the African Union's call for effective labour migration governance at the Africa-Gulf Cooperation Council, Jordan, and Lebanon Dialogue on Labour Mobility inaugurated, now known as the "Doha Dialogue". We see the establishment of the Doha Dialogue as one of the ways of enhancing, through inclusive, collaborative and genuine social dialogue with all stakeholders, including social partners, a better protection arrangement for the rights of African migrant workers.

Finally, we call on our governments, employers, and other users of domestic worker services to ensure that laws and practices safeguarding domestic worker rights are formulated and applied. The legislation and practices should encompass fair wages, reasonable working hours, mandated rest days, and protection from abuse and exploitation.

ITUC-Africa and its affiliates will continue to better organise domestic workers and engage them in collective bargaining efforts in Africa and beyond. We shall continue to advocate for laws, practices, and systems that secure the protection and promotion of migrant workers' rights. Importantly, we shall insist that their voices and concerns should be integral to policy discussions and decisions affecting their lives and work.

Signed, Akhator Joel ODIGIE, General Secretary, ITUC-Africa. Issued on the 14th of June 2024 in Lome, Togo.