



April 2021

## European Multi-stakeholder Conference

### 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of ILO Convention 189 on Decent Work for domestic workers

#### Conference concept note

In June 2021, the ILO Convention 189 on Decent Work for domestic workers will celebrate its 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary. To date, seven EU Member States<sup>1</sup> have ratified the Convention and despite the global mobilisation that followed its adoption<sup>2</sup>, the issue of improving domestic and care workers' rights remains more than ever a topical issue. The COVID-19 crisis has highlighted both the essential contributions of those workers to our societies and the precarious working and living conditions a vast majority of them still face.

Therefore, the 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Convention 189 marks an important milestone to take stock of the progress made and the remaining issues. The event will outline concrete examples on which Member States could leverage to enhance the situation of personal and household services workers domestically. It will also provide an opportunity to refine commitments of actions and pledges from key stakeholders and will launch a series of national coordinated actions in favour of domestic workers' rights.

#### 1. Partners

The following European organisations representing domestic workers and their employers are strongly involved in the multi-stakeholder event celebrating the ILO Convention 189 on Decent Work supported by the European Commission and the ILO Office for the European Union and the Benelux countries:

- the **European Association of Service providers for persons with disabilities** (EASPD),
- the **European Federation of Food, Agriculture and Tourism Trade Unions** (EFFAT),
- the **European Federation for Family Employment and Homecare** (EFFE),
- the **European Federation for Services to Individuals** (EFSI),
- the **International Domestic Workers Federation** (IDWF),
- the **Platform for International Cooperation on Undocumented Migrants** (PICUM), and
- **UNI Europa**.

<sup>1</sup> Belgium, Finland, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Portugal and Sweden – out of 31 ratifying countries worldwide.

<sup>2</sup> Such as ILO-EU cooperation through various projects on domestic work and the Council decision of 28 January 2014 authorising Member States to ratify the Convention in the interest of the European Union.

For several years now, these partners are accustomed to work together, be it within the Stakeholder Group on migrant domestic and care work<sup>3</sup>, the Advancing Personal and Household Services (Ad-PHS) project<sup>4</sup> or more recently in their Joint Statement on the COVID-19 Pandemic in PHS<sup>5</sup>.

Furthermore, the Portuguese Permanent Representation to the EU<sup>6</sup>, members of the Employment and Social Affairs Committee of the European Parliament and of the Women's Rights and Gender Equality Committee have also been invited to join the event.

## **2. When? Where?**

The event will be organised online on the 28<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> of June 2021<sup>7</sup>. Live interpretation will be available in English, French, Italian, German, Polish, Romanian and Spanish. In order to foster as much interaction as possible between participants, a meet-up virtual room will be open during the breaks.

## **3. For whom?**

The event will attract a high number of delegates across the EU and beyond working on the issues related to domestic and care workers. It will be an opportunity for participants to present illustrative practices, learn from peers and fuel national thought and activities.

Delegates comprising of national authorities in the Member States, in particular those in charge of employment, social affairs, social inclusion and migration policies, as well as decision-makers, workers' and employers' representatives and civil society organisations will be invited to the event. Representatives from national bodies such as labour inspectorates or occupational health and safety bodies are also important stakeholders. Finally, opening the conference to academics could be also beneficial as domestic work and the care sectors have been a dynamic area for university research in the past few years.

## **4. Aims and objectives:**

First and foremost, the event will aim to put back at the forefront the issue of working conditions of domestic workers. By creating a political momentum around the issue, the event will:

- (1) provide a forum for the presentation and discussion of the achievement of the ILO C189 ratification and inspiring practices that have contributed to enhancing domestic workers working conditions around the world;
- (2) contribute to the identification of obstacles for the improvement of domestic workers working conditions and of related technical support needed to leverage relevant actions;
- (3) contribute to strengthening the EU platform of relevant stakeholders in PHS at EU level, initiated by the [Ad-PHS project](#);
- (4) foster the organisation of national events/campaigns on domestic workers' rights and promote them.

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<sup>3</sup> [http://www.picum.org/Documents/Publi/2018/concerns\\_recommendations\\_migrant\\_domestic\\_care\\_work\\_February2018.pdf](http://www.picum.org/Documents/Publi/2018/concerns_recommendations_migrant_domestic_care_work_February2018.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> <https://ad-phs.eu/>

<sup>5</sup> [http://www.efsi-europe.eu/fileadmin/MEDIA/publications/2020/EFFAT-EFFE-EFSI-UNI\\_Europa\\_Joint\\_Statement\\_COVID-19\\_Pandemic\\_in\\_PHS\\_final.pdf](http://www.efsi-europe.eu/fileadmin/MEDIA/publications/2020/EFFAT-EFFE-EFSI-UNI_Europa_Joint_Statement_COVID-19_Pandemic_in_PHS_final.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> Portugal will take over the rotating Presidency of the Council of the European Union in the first half of 2021.

<sup>7</sup> The ILO plans to hold its 109<sup>th</sup> Session of the International Labour Conference from 7-18 June 2021 therefore preventing the event to be held on the Anniversary date of the Convention (16 June 2021).

## 5. Benefits:

- Learn from good practices demonstrated across the EU and externally.
- Foster reflections that could feed ongoing EU strategies with concrete recommendations for action<sup>8</sup>.
- Provide national delegates with information to prompt their own reflection.
- Identify strategies to improve the working and living conditions of domestic workers.
- Discuss possible follow-up activities.
- Utilise an opportunity to disseminate the results of successful ILO/European Commission joint projects as well as the Ad-PHS project.
- Meet and network with relevant stakeholders in the field.

## 6. Main topics to be addressed:

The event will offer a programme of activities allowing open dialogue, constructive critique and self-reflection. Partner organisations have identified the following topics as relevant for the event:

- A reminder of the **enthusiasm created by the adoption of the Convention** back in 2011<sup>9</sup>. This topic will be tackled in the opening session during which domestic workers testimonies will be broadcasted. They will be asked to report on the atmosphere at the time of the adoption, to share their thoughts on the significant changes they have witnessed since then, as well as their expectations for the future.
- **Domestic workers' access to labour and social protection: this** access depends on various factors:
  - Despite the adoption of ILO Convention 189, **many domestic workers still suffer from poor labour law and social protection**. Amongst the 6.3 million formal domestic workers working in the EU, nearly 2 million of them do not enjoy standard labour rights and social protection as they are subject to specific derogatory regulations<sup>10</sup>.
  - **Domestic work is often undeclared**, therefore domestic workers do not have access to workers' social protection. Amongst the 9.5 million personal and household services workers of the EU27, at least 3.1 million of them are operating under no formal contract<sup>11</sup>. Workers' undeclared status is mainly linked to the unaffordability of domestic and care services in countries where no financial support is given to the sector.
  - Even in countries where the labour and social protection regulatory frameworks could be considered as satisfactory, we witness **weak enforcement of domestic workers rights**.
  - **Platform work** offers opportunities for opening up formal employment to greater number of domestic workers while at the same time having the potential to expand precariousness in the labour market. Platforms generally require that

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<sup>8</sup> The issue of domestic work is relevant for ongoing EU debates such as the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights, the European Gender Equality Strategy as well as the Green Paper on Ageing.

<sup>9</sup> In this regard, IDWF has released a [documentary film](#) that illustrates how women from around the world organised within the ILO to establish the Convention 189.

<sup>10</sup> Lebrun, JF. (2020), *La complexité des estimations du nombre d'emplois générés par le travail domestique en Europe*, rapport réalisé à la demande du Bureau International du Travail, December 2020, unpublished.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

domestic workers operate under a self-employed status which offers them very little protection.

- Domestic **workers migration**: an important share of domestic workers are migrants. They fill the increasing demand for domestic and care services in Europe. However, this has not been reflected in the provision of residence and work permits for non-EU nationals to work in the sector. Migrant domestic workers – a majority of whom are women – commonly work with precarious or irregular residence status. Being undocumented leaves them unable to access the same rights as other workers and puts them at greater risk of exploitation, violence and abuse in a sector already suffering from a lack of recognition and poor regulation. Therefore, a panel will tackle the issues facing migrant domestic workers, in particular access to stable permits and access to justice, by highlighting the current situation and providing concrete examples of initiatives supporting decent work for migrants in the domestic sector.

The **gender dimension** of domestic and care work will be a cross-cutting issue across all topics. In the European Union, 91% of domestic workers are women<sup>12</sup>. The lack of recognition of domestic and care work as work in the public sphere, lack of appropriate regulations, and lack of adequate social service provision intersect with gender stereotypes. According to these, care work is considered to be a responsibility of mainly women and women's labour market participation is facilitated by employment of female domestic workers – often migrant women - in precarious employment.

In times of the Covid-19 pandemic, access to social protection has become a major issue, not only for domestic workers themselves but also in the context of public health. If countries want to successfully tackle the Covid-19 outbreak, they should not allow “blind spots” with regard to health coverage. Therefore, this event will provide an opportunity to discuss the latest developments in terms of domestic workers' access to social protection (at European and national levels) and to highlight national practices that have proven their effectiveness in guaranteeing domestic workers' social protection in the spirit of the Convention 189 while reducing undeclared work. In this regard, it could be worth highlighting the direct link between domestic workers' working conditions and services' quality in the domestic and care sectors.

All the topics mentioned above will be addressed in an international dimension and will involve both the countries that have ratified the Convention and countries that have not. Furthermore, the partners consider that the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on domestic work should be tackled comprehensively as it has worsened the situation of many domestic workers and its impact will most probably be long-lasting. Finally, the issues listed above are directly related to health and safety at work, labour inspections in domestic work, professionalisation, support to workers' and employers' organisation in domestic work, (de)valuation of domestic work and live-in carers and therefore might also be included in the discussions.

## **7. Side-initiatives**

In addition to the European Multi-stakeholder conference, partner organisations are planning the following initiatives:

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

- a **common social media campaign** celebrating C189 10<sup>th</sup> Year Anniversary. Such campaign could aim at raising awareness of decision-makers, workers and employers about the Convention and the fundamental contribution of domestic work to our society and the need for better regulation and an increased investment in the sector. The campaign could run from May to June 2020 with the highlight being the week of the European Multi-stakeholder conference. Partners will agree on a common toolkit which will provide key messages, slogans, hashtag and a visual identity. The campaign could be held in several languages in order to reach the largest audience as possible.
- foster **national coordinated actions in favour of domestic workers' rights**. The C189 Alliance partners organisations will grant their moral support to a limited number of national events in order to increase public interest in, and visibility of the event among citizens, the media and civil society. No financial commitment is linked to the granting of patronage; however, the C189 Alliance commits to supporting national organisers in promoting the event; inviting them to the European multi-stakeholder conference; liaising with relevant domestic workers' stakeholders; and inviting international experts to the national event. Such national events will aim to make a strong call towards decision-makers. Each national event will be designed according to the national situation (prior ratification of the Convention, prior political commitment in favour of domestic work, preparatory work toward the ratification, etc.) and the stakeholders involved (trade unions, employers' organisation, undocumented migrants' associations, civil society, etc.). So far, three national events are currently considered in Germany (May 2021), Spain (July 2021) and Italy (December 2021).
- **Workers' testimonies**. In order to give domestic workers a face, some workers will be invited to give their testimony, be it through video messages broadcasted on social media prior to the event or during events, notably the European multi-stakeholder conference.
- **Joint publication**. Finally, partner organisations are considering the publication of a report summarizing the main challenges faced by the sector, providing a repository of the research work conducted with the EU and ILO support, outlining some case studies and enabling few academics to publish papers (based on the result of the [call for contributions](#) launched in January 2021). This publication will highlight C189 Alliance partners various initiatives in favour of better labour rights and social protection for domestic workers. A decision will be made by the end of March 2021.

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