Women domestic workers and carers in the EU

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The Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality adopted an own-initiative report by Kostadinka KUNEVA (GUE/NGL, EL) on women domestic workers and carers in the EU.

The Committee on Employment and Social Affairs, exercising the prerogative of an associated committee in line with Article 54 of the Rules of Procedure of the European Parliament, was also consulted to give an opinion on the report.

Members recalled that the domestic work sector employed over **52 million people around the world in 2010**, according to ILO figures, and a further 7.4 million domestic workers under the age of 15, accounting for between 5% and 9% of all employment in industrialised countries. According to the International Labour Organisation (ILO), the majority of workers employed in this sector are women, accounting for 83% of the global domestic workforce in 2010 and translating into 2.5 million in the EU, **88% of them being women**.

The terms **'domestic workers'** and **'care workers'** include diverse groups of workers including, but not limited to, live-in workers, external workers, hourly workers in several households, family workers, daily or night care workers, babysitters, au pairs and gardeners, whose reality and conditions may vary significantly.

Common recognition of the profession: Members believed that there is a need for a common EU recognition of the profession and the value of domestic work and care as real work. They therefore called on the EU and the Member States to lay down **common rules** on domestic work and care.

The Commission should come forward with **a set of policy instruments**, both legislative and non-legislative, on domestic work and care, establishing **quality guidelines** for both sectors. Such initiatives should focus on the following aspects:

- the introduction of a **general framework for the professionalisation of domestic work and care**, leading to the recognition and standardisation of the relevant professions and skills and career building, including rights accumulated in accordance with the Member States' specificities;
- **urgently proposing** a Carers' Leave Directive and a framework for recognition of the status of non-professional carers, which offers them remuneration and minimum standards of social protection, and support in terms of training and specific actions to help them improve their living and working conditions.

The Member States should include domestic workers and carers in **all national labour, healthcare, social care, insurance and anti-discrimination laws**, recognising their contribution to the economy and society. To this end, the Committee urged the Commission accordingly to consider revising any EU directives which exclude domestic workers and carers from rights that other categories of workers enjoy.

Combating undeclared work: Members considered it essential to combat precarious and undeclared work, given that this phenomenon severely affects domestic workers, including particularly migrant women workers, thus worsening their already vulnerable position. Practices such as child labour should be eradicated and the perpetrators prosecuted.

Members hope that European Platform against Undeclared Work will prevent and discourage undeclared works and call on the Member States to **invest in more ways** of preventing, detecting and combating the

considerable amount of undeclared employment in the domestic work and care sector, especially with regard to cases of human trafficking and labour abuse and those involving companies providing domestic and care services using undeclared and bogus self-employment.

As regards **legal migration**, Members stressed the need for the Member States to establish bilateral agreements with those states that statistics show to be the sending countries of domestic workers and carers, in order to regularise the sending and receiving flow.

Human trafficking: the Commission and the Member States should promote the investigation of cases of trafficking for human exploitation, and more specifically for domestic work, to **improve the mechanism of identification and protection of these victims** and to involve NGOs, trade unions, public authorities and all citizens in the detection process of the trafficking and severe exploitation phenomena.

Protection of domestic workers: the report called on Member States to establish effective and accessible complaint mechanisms and means of ensuring compliance with national laws and regulations for the protection of domestic workers. They demanded resolute action to be taken against undertakings in any sector whose business model relies on exploiting illegal workers.

Member States were asked to:

- to make the necessary efforts to **step up inspections**, and to find innovative inspection methods which respect privacy;
- States to organise **campaigns among the general public bodies** to improve visibility and enhance understanding of the benefits of regularised domestic work and care;
- to launch **campaigns to raise awareness of the rights and duties of domestic and care workers** and employers and the risks and impact of exploitation in the domestic work sector;
- to consider incentives for employers to encourage the use of declared domestic workers and carers.

Lastly, the report recommended that a **consensual contract** be drawn up for domestic and care work in each Member State, following a social dialogue between social workers, employers and female workers.