Women domestic workers and carers in the EU

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The European Parliament adopted by 279 votes to 105 with 204 abstentions a resolution on women domestic workers and carers in the EU.

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: Parliament 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. It 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**, 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 Commission was asked to encourage Member States to establish systems for **professionalisation, training, continuous skills development and recognition** of women domestic and care workers' qualifications, including literacy. For their part, Member States should:

- take decisive action in the sectors of domestic work and care by recognising this work as an occupation in its own right and by ensuring that domestic workers and carers have genuine **workers' rights and social protection** through labour legislation or collective agreements;
- ratify ILO Convention No 189 concerning **decent work** for domestic workers,
- ensure an appropriate level of **health and safety at work**, for example maternity protection, and take action to prevent work-related accidents;
- 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 Commission should consider revising any EU directives which exclude these workers from rights that other categories of workers enjoy.

Combating undeclared work: Parliament 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 lent their support to the efforts made by the European Platform against Undeclared Work and called 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 labour abuse and services involving companies using 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 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 process. The instruments and mechanisms established to address trafficking, such as referral mechanisms or temporary residence permits, should be expanded.

Protection of domestic workers: Parliament called on Member States to establish accessible complaint mechanisms and measures for labour inspection, enforcement and penalties with due regard for the special characteristics of domestic work, in accordance with national laws and regulations. It 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;
- organise **campaigns among the general public bodies** to improve visibility and enhance understanding of the benefits of regularised domestic work and care;
- 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;
- put in place, in collaboration with social partners, information channels on the rights of domestic workers and carers (helplines and websites providing assistance);
- consider incentives for employers to encourage the use of declared domestic workers and carers.

Lastly, Parliament called for **good representation of social partners** at European and at national levels, and in particular trade unions, to intensify sectorial collective bargaining in line with national practices in order to effectively advance and enforce decent working conditions in these sectors.