

## PSYCHOSOCIAL RISKS AND WORKING CONDITIONS OF MIGRANT WOMEN IN CARE, CLEANING AND DOMESTIC WORK

### Introduction

This case study explores the exposure of migrant women workers to psychosocial risk (PSR) factors in personal and household services (PHS), which include home-based care, cleaning, and domestic work. It emphasises the importance of an intersectional approach, as migrant women often work in this sector under insecure and frequently informal conditions (EU-OSHA, 2013; ILO, 2022a & 2024; European Commission, 2015). In addition, women migrant workers engaged in digital platform work within the care, cleaning, and domestic sectors may experience heightened exposure to PSRs (EU-OSHA, 2023; ILO, 2024).

The case study gives examples of initiatives aimed at improving protection and working conditions for migrant PHS workers, such as efforts to formalise employment, incorporate them into labour inspection and risk assessments, and through collective agreements that have significantly contributed to regulating work and enhancing conditions in a sector marked by informality, job insecurity, poor working conditions, and exposure to stress, violence, and harassment.

### Key takeaways and transferability

- The examples demonstrate the importance of practical initiatives for employers and social partners, ranging from the delivery of culturally sensitive and peer support programmes to help build trust among migrants, to access to information about labour rights, and safety and health at work.
- Reducing exposure to PSRs can include providing information in languages spoken by migrant women workers and in accessible formats for workers with low levels of literacy, providing opportunities for regularisation to ensure protection of the rights of PHS migrant workers, including in digital-based platform work.
- Promoting innovative ways to engage with migrant women workers and ensuring they have control over their working hours, understand what can be included in their contracts of employment, and are aware of their rights, such as pay levels, are further ways to reduce exposure to PSR factors. For example, interactive scheduling of cleaning, domestic, or care work working hours can help to reduce stress and work-life conflict, and improve psychological well-being.
- Diversity management programmes, such as cultural competence training for supervisors, can improve teamwork and mixing of work groups, leading to better awareness of PSRs, reduced discrimination and isolation, and the building of respect and trust.
- Finally, there is a key role for labour inspection in providing guidance for labour inspectors about identifying PSR factors in PHSs and in working with employers to create awareness about working conditions and how to reduce PSRs. Providing accessible risk assessment tools for employers in private homes is a further way to reduce exposure to PSRs.
- All of the examples are transferable to other national contexts, taking account of national laws and regulations.

### The situation faced by migrant women in PHS

Migrant women workers in PHS work are particularly vulnerable to PSRs due to double discrimination (EPRS, 2023), especially at the intersection of gender, migration status, race/ethnicity, low-skilled work, and the undervaluation of their labour. These issues are worsened by informal employment, precarious work, and limited access to rights and protections. Informal and undeclared/undocumented workers face heightened risks because of restricted healthcare and protections. Having an undocumented

status increases the chances of exploitation and reduces the ability to challenge abusive conditions (ILO, 2016). PHS work often remains invisible and undervalued, especially in terms of emotional and caregiving skills, and is typically performed in private settings. In addition, some women hold multiple low-paid and precarious roles in care and cleaning, leading to chronic fatigue and burnout. Care workers also experience emotional stress from the demands of emotional labour while caring for the ill, elderly, or disabled without adequate support.

Social isolation and lack of support are exacerbated where there is also separation from family members – migrant care workers frequently work to send remittances back home for children and other family members. Isolation from social networks may also occur because of language barriers or long working hours. Furthermore, migrant workers usually have limited social protection and access to mental health support, reproductive health services, and other essential health services, as well as legal support such as legal aid. Overall, PSRs are exacerbated by gendered migration policies, lack of labour protection for some groups of migrant workers, and labour market segmentation where migrant women work in '3D' jobs – dirty, dangerous, and demeaning.

### ***Migrant women in the care economy***

Migrant women working in the care economy face additional inequalities because of their gender and migration status, which intersect with precarity and job insecurity (ILO, 2022a & 2024). In some European countries, migrant workers provide as much as 70 % of the care for older people (ILO, 2024). However, many migrant women engaged in care work experience insecure, low-valued, and low-paid work (Williams, 2021 & 2023; ILO, 2022a; PSI, 2022; Yeates et al., 2022). In care and domestic work, there is a strong correlation between high physical and emotional job demands and workers' low well-being at work, along with significant exposure to violence and harassment (Vianello, 2019). Research carried out with migrant women workers in the eldercare sector in Sweden identified challenging work situations, with many reporting experiences of discrimination and humiliation from the people they care for, and vulnerability in the workplace (Lill, 2023). In Austria, as in several other countries, precarious work exists because the care model emphasises self-employment; the risks are heightened because self-employed caregivers are not subject to any collective agreements or associated labour law regulations (European Labour Authority, 2021).

### ***Migrant women cleaners***

Cleaners, especially migrant women cleaners, are exposed to PSRs that include job insecurity, a lack of control over work processes and tasks, low pay, and exposure to difficult working conditions such as dealing with challenging clients and sexual harassment (EU-OSHA, 2009; UNI, 2023; EU-OSHA, 2025). These conditions can lead to increased stress. The cleaning sector has a high percentage of female, migrant, and older workers. Psychosocial risks (PSRs) in this sector include poor work organisation, violence, harassment, including sexual harassment, high job demands, and insufficient resources. Workers often have little influence over the organisation, pace, and scheduling of their work, which can be monotonous and repetitive (EU-OSHA, 2025). Opportunities for career advancement are limited, and support from immediate supervisors is often lacking. In addition, workers rarely participate in planning or developing their work to mitigate PSRs. Other challenges include stigma, lack of recognition, disrespect, discrimination, low job security, limited social protection, unsociable hours, and working in isolation.

Research by the UNI trade union federation highlights a range of PSRs faced by migrant women cleaners, who predominantly work in non-standard shifts (UNI, 2023). Overall, 70 % of night-shift cleaners and more than 50 % of early morning and evening shift workers reported experiencing insufficient sleep. In addition, approximately 45 % of female cleaners working at night reported feeling unsafe during night shifts. One-third of cleaners reported experiencing harassment at work, and a similar number faced harassment during their commute to and from work. Difficulties with work-life balance, including relationships with partners and children, remain a significant issue for cleaners working atypical hours. UNI has called for an 'urgent ethical responsibility of all parties involved in the cleaning sector – including cleaning companies, their clients and policy-makers – to promote daytime cleaning actively' (UNI, 2023:3).

EU-OSHA (2025) points to a comprehensive and participatory approach to simultaneously preventing musculoskeletal disorders and PSRs, as cleaning work is physically demanding, and a lack of control

over work can increase the risk of musculoskeletal issues. In addition, exposure to musculoskeletal risk factors, such as fast-paced work, can also contribute to PSRs.

### **Migrant women domestic workers**

Domestic workers providing services in private households are predominantly female, with a significant number being undocumented migrants (EFFAT, 2025; IDWN, 2020; FRA, 2011). They often lack bargaining power and rights at work, frequently working without formal employment contracts in informal employment relationships. This limits their control over work quality and employment conditions (Eurofound, 2013; EFFAT, 2015; Mousaid, 2017). Moreover, a lack of rights at work, limited trade union representation, and personal, emotional, and servile relationships expose domestic workers to substantial PSRs such as repetitive tasks, low control over work schedules and materials, and high workloads resulting from tight scheduling. These risk factors are amplified by the widespread absence of OSH protections for domestic workers, alongside physical and psychological stressors, including MSDs, and exposure to gender-based violence and harassment (GBVH) from employers within the private sphere of the home (EFFAT, 2015; Mousaid et al., 2017; Charles et al., 2009).

Exposure to PSRs is further increased when domestic workers live in, due to isolation, long working hours, lack of breaks, overwork, demanding tasks, and limited protection. Moreover, if migrant workers do not speak the local language or have low literacy, accessing OSH information becomes challenging. There may also be a loss of privacy and autonomy for women providing live-in domestic work, which blurs the boundaries between personal and work life. A lack of knowledge of the local language is closely linked with undeclared work status and limited access to labour rights and social protection (Bahna & Sekulová, 2019).

### **Digital platform work**

These issues are particularly significant given the recent increase in platform work within female-dominated sectors and jobs such as care for older people, childcare, and cleaning (Rodríguez-Modroño et al., 2022; ITUC, 2024; de Stefano, 2018). Digital care and domestic platform work possess unique features because work is organised through third-party labour intermediaries without direct oversight from employers. The expanding use of digital platforms and AI software to supervise cleaning workers can negatively affect them, causing greater work intensification, time pressure, loss of job control and autonomy, risky and unsafe behaviours, heightened job stress, and workplace accidents (EU-OSHA, 2025). Platform cleaning workers frequently face poor working conditions, including unsanitary environments, discrimination, excessive demands for high ratings, and abuse (EU-OSHA, 2025; ITUC, 2024). This situation impacts workers' employment rights, leading to PSRs such as job precarity, income instability, unpredictability of work, and increased risks to safety and well-being (ITUC, 2024; Macdonald, 2021; Pulignano et al., 2023). For example, reliance on the internet also heightens the risk of gender-based cyber harassment (ILO, 2024). Therefore, it is essential to enhance the visibility of these PSRs in digital care and domestic platforms.

## **Examples of initiatives to reduce exposure to PSRs for migrant PHS workers**

'A migrant woman's status – i.e. whether she is regularly or irregularly resident – is likely to shape her migration experience. Those who migrate for work are expected to "fill the gaps" in the labour market. Often this means working in low-paid and unregulated sectors of the economy, where they are likely to be over-qualified. Employment and legal status are interrelated: both have an impact on the migrant woman's access to public services. However, many migrant women, especially those with young children, face barriers to accessing the labour market' (EPRS, 2023:1).

Strategies to reduce exposure to PSRs have focused on ending undeclared work and addressing the labour rights and exclusion of migrants, and unemployed and low-skilled workers from employment and OSH protection. These strategies have included support services to create self-organised networks of care workers, such as the Austrian CuraFAIR project. Initially, the project raised awareness and provided support to Romanian care workers, and has since developed into a central contact point and networking hub for migrant care workers (Volkshilfe für 24-Stunden-BetreuerInnen und Freiwillige). In addition, the participation of cleaners in work design has helped to reduce exposure to PSRs, reducing stress and work-life conflict and building trust and job satisfaction (Van Hootegem et al., 2020). In many countries, NGOs provide support to migrant care workers, and trade unions have played a key role in

advocating for the rights of migrant health and social care workers. The examples that follow show a selection of initiatives aimed at reducing exposure to PSRs for migrant PHS workers.

## **Labour inspection of domestic work: ILO Domestic Workers Convention No 189**

The ILO (2022b) has developed education materials and guidance on labour inspections in domestic work to help labour inspectors become familiar with the domestic work sector and to help them design strategies to enforce and promote compliance with labour regulations. It covers the main topics outlined in the ILO Domestic Workers Convention No 189<sup>1</sup> (ILO C189) and Recommendation No 201, adopted in 2011. It highlights the specific risks faced by domestic workers. For example, a checklist for comprehensive communication to protect the rights of migrant domestic workers covers, among other areas, measures to ensure that information on labour rights and obligations is provided at all stages of the migratory flow: before departure, during the stay, and upon return to the home country. It also recommends establishing protocols between receiving and sending countries, such as information on the rights of migrant PHS workers, employers' obligations, hotlines providing information on labour rights, and protection and prevention measures, in relevant languages, and assurance that inspectors are aware of cultural differences and deal with them sensitively.

### **ILO Domestic Workers Convention No 189**

ILO Convention No 189 establishes fundamental principles and minimum labour standards for domestic work. They include measures to ensure compliance with laws and regulations protecting domestic workers, including through labour inspection. Rights and entitlements of domestic workers include protection from forced labour, the right to join trade unions and bargain collectively with employers, protection against any abuse, violence, discrimination, and harassment, including of a sexual nature; the right to equal treatment with other workers in respect of working hours, overtime compensation, daily and weekly rest periods, paid annual leave, and minimum wage, the right to receive information on the precise terms and conditions of employment in an appropriate, verifiable, and easily understandable manner, and the right to carry out their work in conditions of safety and health, including for the living conditions for live-in domestic workers. A strong focus is given to ending abuse, violence, and harassment: 'Each Member shall take measures to ensure that domestic workers enjoy effective protection against all forms of abuse, harassment and violence' (Article 5).

Convention No 189 acknowledges that domestic work is undervalued and that persistent discriminatory attitudes towards domestic workers affect their rights and safety at work. Article 13 states that: 'Every domestic worker has the right to a safe and healthy working environment; each Member shall take, by national laws, regulations, and practice, effective measures, with due regard for the specific characteristics of domestic work, to ensure the occupational safety and health of domestic workers.' The labour inspection system has a role in implementing measures, enforcement, and penalties, taking into account the specific nature of domestic work.

## **A risk assessment tool for domestic work in Spain**

Spain formally ratified the ILO Domestic Workers Convention No 189 in March 2023, aligning labour protections, including rest days, working hours, and OSH objectives with formal employment standards. This legal recognition empowers domestic workers (who are over 90 % migrant women), aiming to reduce overwork, abuse, and underpayment. Royal Decree 893/2024<sup>2</sup> gives domestic workers the same rights in the area of occupational safety and health (OSH) as other workers in Spain. It specifies that employers must carry out a formal risk assessment, provide medical check-ups every three years, carry out basic safety training, and provide personal protective equipment (PPE). The Royal Decree also includes protections against PSRs for domestic workers, including the right to protection from and

<sup>1</sup> The Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189) has been ratified by 50 ILO member countries. To date nine EU Member States have ratified ILO Domestic Workers Convention No. 189 (Belgium, Finland, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Malta, Portugal, Spain, Sweden). For the text of C189 see: [https://normlex.ilo.org/dyn/nrmlx\\_en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::p12100\\_ILO\\_CODE:C189](https://normlex.ilo.org/dyn/nrmlx_en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::p12100_ILO_CODE:C189).

<sup>2</sup> BOE (2024) Real Decreto 893/2024, de 10 de septiembre, por el que se regula la protección de la seguridad y la salud en el ámbito del servicio del hogar familiar. Ministerio de Trabajo y Economía Social (Royal Decree 893/2024, of 10 September, regulating health and safety protection in the field of domestic service), <https://www.boe.es/buscar/pdf/2024/BOE-A-2024-18182-consolidado.pdf>.

prevention of violence and harassment. It recognises that migrant women perform the majority of domestic work and that this is work that is undervalued, leading to further discrimination.

In implementing the Royal Decree, the Spanish National Institute of Safety and Health at Work (INSST) has developed a risk assessment tool and guidance for domestic services (EU-OSHA, 2025). The risk assessment tool<sup>3</sup> was created to help households employing domestic workers meet their legal obligations. It is practical and user-friendly, allowing employers to select tasks performed by a domestic worker and then identify risks, including PSRs such as violence, harassment, and sexual harassment. A risk report can then be generated, outlining preventive measures, responsibilities, timeframes, and follow-up actions. Employers are required to complete the risk assessment tool within six months of its launch. Labour inspectors may request the risk report. Further guides are planned by the Labour Inspectorate and the Ministry of Equality, including a technical guide for employers on conducting risk assessments to help them meet their legal obligations, scheduled for 2026, and a protocol on harassment and violence, scheduled for 2025.

### ***Formalisation of informal cleaning and domestic work in Belgium***

Without legal protection, many domestic workers and cleaners face significant exposure to PSRs. One way to address domestic workers' exposure to PSRs is through regularising their undocumented status, for example, as carried out in Italy in selected sectors, such as domestic and care work (Eurofound, 2020). Another approach has been to formalise work through government schemes, which include the service voucher system in Belgium, which the government finances and formalises, based on a triangular employment relationship (between the domestic worker, the 'service voucher company' – that is, the employer – and the customers). In 2001, Belgium introduced legislation for a service voucher system aimed at creating job opportunities for vulnerable groups and reducing undeclared work in the domestic services sector. This has led to domestic work being recognised as a formal employment sector through a system of contracts with companies providing cleaning services in private households. The initiative has enabled domestic workers to enjoy the same labour and social security rights as other workers and to organise in trade unions with collective bargaining agreements, resulting in improved social protection and access to professional training (Van Peteghem, 2015; EU-OSHA, 2022; IDWFED, 2021). Despite high satisfaction with the initiative, the sector in Belgium faces several challenges related to workers' well-being. There is a high rate of long-term sick leave; many workers report back pain (68 %), arthritis and muscle pain (67 %), and neck or shoulder pain (62 %). In addition, there is limited or no knowledge about toxic and prohibited products, which can negatively impact workers' health (EU-OSHA, 2022).

### ***Make a difference: improving the psychosocial working environment for cleaning teams in Denmark.***

Cleaning teams working in schools, many of whom are migrant women, participated in an eight-month programme, in 2009, designed to reduce their exposure to PSRs by improving their inclusion and integration into the workforce. The programme, conducted over eight months, aimed to improve language skills through Danish lessons and vocational training in cleaning techniques and safety. It also sought to build trust and inclusion through teamwork and collaborative activities, such as structured workshops on job satisfaction and teamwork, more frequent staff meetings and social gatherings, and mixing new and long-term migrant workers with Danish staff.

The research team evaluating the programme employed a mixed-methodology approach, combining interviews with the Copenhagen Psychosocial Questionnaire. They found improvements in the psychosocial work environment following the programme, including enhanced communication, trust, collaboration, social support, and recognition (Hardman Smith et al., 2013). The interviews with the cleaners highlighted improvements in communication, trust, and collaboration. At the same time, the questionnaire revealed progress in areas such as social support from supervisors and colleagues, the development of a social community, increased trust in teamwork, and a better understanding of their work and emotional demands. These examples highlight specific interventions that offer valuable lessons for future psychosocial work environment initiatives in workplaces mainly employing migrant women, which may also be relevant in the broader context of multiethnic workplaces.

<sup>3</sup> Available at <https://www.prevencion10.es>.

## **Promoting the occupational safety and health of migrant workers in Croatia**

An example from Croatia makes explicit that PSRs are part of risk assessment for migrant workers. The Croatian initiative on the inclusion of migrant workers recognises migrant workers as a vulnerable group due to their characteristics (language barriers, cultural beliefs) and the type of job they do ('dirty, dangerous, and demanding'). In 2018, the Government of the Republic of Croatia adopted an annual quota of work permits for foreigners (Narodne novine, No 122/17), while the Aliens Act (Narodne novine, No 130/11, 74/13, and 69/17) defines the conditions of entry, movement, residence, working conditions, and rights of migrant workers. Emphasis has been given to providing direct information and advice, and strengthening measures to prevent work-related accidents and illnesses.

Guidance has been drawn up on the 'Implementation of protection at work for foreign workers in the Republic of Croatia' (Ministry of Labour, Pension System, Family and Social Policy). The guidance sets out obligations on employers: to carry out a risk assessment, including PSRs, to conduct training, provide information and counselling, pay attention to jobs with special working conditions, work equipment, and personal protective equipment, and obligations regarding safety, signs, written notices, and instructions. All materials, notices, and instructions must be translated into a language and script that the foreign worker understands.<sup>4</sup>

### **Collective bargaining and social partner agreements**

Collective bargaining between trade unions and employers has resulted in several agreements covering this group of workers in EU Member States. For example:

- **Regulating platform work in the domestic and cleaning work sectors.**

In 2020, a collective bargaining agreement was signed between the Danish trade union 3F (Private Service, Hotel, and Restaurant sector) and the digital platform Hilfr ApS, covering domestic work such as cleaning services in private households. The agreement regulates the terms and conditions of work for cleaners and domestic workers whose activities are channelled through the labour platform Hilfr.dk. It introduces a new worker category, granting employment status within the agreement. Freelancers can apply to become employed by the platform and be covered by the collective agreement. After completing 100 hours of work, workers automatically become employees under the agreement unless they actively opt out. The agreement stipulates an hourly minimum wage, benefits in cases of sickness, protection against dismissal, and rights to holiday and working time protections in accordance with Danish law. It also includes a provision that 50 % of the wage must be paid to the worker if a job is cancelled within 36 hours of the scheduled start. Additionally, it features an innovative data protection clause, which may serve as a model for future collective bargaining on data protection and unacceptable behaviours. The informed consent of the workers is needed to post their data on the platform and workers "may, at any time, request that derogatory, false and offensive comments, pictures or characters be removed from [their] profile and other places on the platform that can be associated and clearly attributed to [them]."<sup>5</sup> This type of request should not adversely affect the workers' working conditions. This protection is crucial in ensuring that workers are not penalised by negative or biased comments or feedback made by customers or other parties, which are posted online and which can be offensive and highly detrimental, particularly when algorithms are applied to decide whether other jobs will be offered.

Overall, the agreement highlights the necessity to address PHS in platform work, with insights into how workers can be protected from labour abuses and data abuses, and improve employment rights, data protection, and collective bargaining, while also allowing workers autonomy to work as a 'freelancer'. This is crucial protection to ensure that workers are not penalised by negative or biased comments or feedback received from customers or other parties, something that can be highly detrimental to workers, particularly when algorithms are applied to decide whether other jobs will be offered.

<sup>4</sup> <http://uznr.mrms.hr/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/UPUTE%20ZA%20PROVO%C4%90ENJE%20ZNR%20ZA%20STRANE%20RADNIKE.pdf>.

<sup>5</sup> Collective agreement Between Hilfr ApS. CBR.no.: 37297267 and 3F Private Service, Hotel and Restaurant. Protocol 1. [https://d5ngtx2qwf2f0.cloudfront.net/bf0af299-df2c-4ffc-b42f-a479b2b0358e/pdf/hilfr\\_collective\\_agreement.pdf](https://d5ngtx2qwf2f0.cloudfront.net/bf0af299-df2c-4ffc-b42f-a479b2b0358e/pdf/hilfr_collective_agreement.pdf)

### ▪ **Collective bargaining to provide protection and rights for domestic workers**

In Italy, the National Collective Agreement regulating domestic work relationships between employers' associations FIDALDO (ASSINDATCOLF, Nuova Collaborazione, Adlc, AdId, and Domina) and trade unions (Filcams-Cgil, Fisascat-Cisl, Uiltucs-Uil, and Federcolf) was agreed upon on 8 September 2020.<sup>6</sup> It regulates work for domestic workers, addresses challenges related to COVID, improves working conditions, provides access to training, introduces measures to enhance well-being, and increases monthly wages by EUR 12, along with an allowance for care workers caring for children under the age of six years or other dependents. In addition, the agreement includes a declaration stating that violence and harassment in the domestic workplace constitute abuse and a violation of human rights, and parties to the agreement state their commitment to promoting initiatives to 'counter any behaviour incompatible with human dignity' (Article 28). Risks faced by women victims of violence and harassment are addressed as part of other health and safety risks at work. Overall, the social partners commit to making formal work more attractive to domestic workers, a sector where the majority work informally (Pillinger, 2024).

The Italian Trade Union Confederation, CISL, has provided support to domestic workers through a solidarity social insurance fund, and the union has lobbied the government to improve working conditions and agree on a professional qualification and training framework for domestic workers (Pillinger, 2014). CISL has introduced the 'Colf e Badanti' (domestic workers and carers) service to respond to requests for advice and assistance in the context of hiring a carer or domestic worker, including advice about contractual requirements and the preparation of payslips for domestic workers.<sup>7</sup>

### ▪ **Collective bargaining and union advocacy to protect the pay of migrant PHS workers**

Unions in several countries have carried out awareness-raising campaigns for migrant PHS workers, exemplified by an information campaign run by the Food, Beverages, and Catering Union and the Swedish information campaign Hemfrid-Tusse ('Think about what you pay') TV advert (European Labour Authority, 2021). Also in recognition of the systemic low pay in female-dominated sectors where many migrant women predominate, the Kommunal & SALAR Collective Agreement 2020-2023, included a one-off lump sum payment to 500 000 workers, mainly covering health and social care and kindergarten workers, of SEK 5 500 (around EUR 500), plus a 0.9 % pay increase on top of the 5.4 % industry standard.

Measures to protect workers' safety and health were agreed in a sector where long working hours are the norm. They include compulsory rest breaks after a maximum of five hours of continuous work, which was also agreed to safeguard against fatigue and burnout. In addition, employers commit to examining ways to offer more full-time jobs. Kommunal has also launched an online service – Kollkollen – enabling workers to check whether a company is applying fair pay and conditions agreed with the union. Agreements have addressed daily rest rules, such as the recent agreement between Kommunal, the Swedish municipal workers' union, and Almega Vårdföretagarna (Swedish Healthcare Employers Association) signed in 2025<sup>8</sup> on daily rest regulations for private sector workers in healthcare, elderly care, and personal assistance, fully implementing the 11-hour daily rest requirement under the Working Hours Act.

### ▪ **Sexual harassment-free zones to protect workers in a Spanish hotel chain**

A joint commitment on ending sexual harassment between the IUF global union and the Spanish hotel chain called RIU,<sup>9</sup> signed on 4 November 2021, complements a second agreement on trade union rights and collective bargaining covering a workforce of more than 24 000 workers in 24 countries. In this sector, which recruits large numbers of migrant women workers in cleaning and housekeeping, RIU management is committed to ensuring that its hotels become sexual harassment-free zones. The joint commitment refers to violence and harassment in the world of work in line with ILO C190. It recognises that sexual harassment disproportionately affects women who, for example, may work in isolation in their roles in cleaning and housekeeping, but can also affect men, and especially LGBTQIA+ workers. The agreement commits RIU to ending sexual harassment at work, taking into account the importance

<sup>6</sup> Contratto Collettivo Nazionale di Lavoro sulla disciplina del Lavoro domestico:

[https://www.rapportolavoro.it/contratti/cms\\_magazine/uploads/CCNL\\_LavoroDomestico\\_08.9.2020.pdf](https://www.rapportolavoro.it/contratti/cms_magazine/uploads/CCNL_LavoroDomestico_08.9.2020.pdf).

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.cisferrara.it/en/cisl-colf-e-badanti/>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.epsu.org/epsucob/2025-february-epsu-collective-bargaining-newsletter-no4/sweden-new-daily-rest-rules-agreed>.

<sup>9</sup> IUF & RUI (2021) IUF-RIU Hotels & Resorts Agreement to eradicate sexual harassment, [https://www.iuf.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/IUF\\_RIU-Agreement-to-eradicate-sexual-harassment-at-workplace-e.pdf](https://www.iuf.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/IUF_RIU-Agreement-to-eradicate-sexual-harassment-at-workplace-e.pdf).

of OSH and the need to protect the dignity and rights of workers. It addresses the associated PSRs in the management of safety and health at work, as well as the importance of adopting measures to prevent and control identified risks. Meetings took place immediately after signing the agreement, a reporting mechanism has been established, and training has been provided for trade union representatives and managers across the group. A joint working group oversees the implementation of the commitment, comprising representatives from unions and managers across the RUI group.

### **Advocating for PHS workers' rights: trade union initiatives and collective bargaining**

There is evidence that workplaces with worker representatives are more likely to have preventive measures in place for PSRs (EU-OSHA, 2012). The workplaces of migrant women care and domestic workers are often fragmented, with work frequently taking place in (multiple) private homes. Consequently, there is a low level of trade union representation, and there is not always an employer's organisation to negotiate with. In recognition of this problem, some trade unions have developed programmes to support workers through awareness-raising and resources, representation, and advocating for improved rights, including addressing working time, protection from sexual harassment, and workplace safety. For example:

#### **▪ The United Migrant PHS group of the FNV Federation in the Netherlands**

In the Netherlands, third-country nationals engaged in PHS work are organised in the 'United Migrant PHS Workers' group of the Federation of Dutch Trade Unions (FNV). The FNV provides support through its website, for example, by providing a model employment contract for PHS workers who work up to three days per week, along with guidance on what to include in a contract and rights such as working time, holiday, and sick leave pay (EFFAT, 2015).

#### **▪ A House of Dignity for Domestic Workers**

A campaign launched in 2025, 'A House of Dignity for Domestic Workers'<sup>10</sup> by EFFAT (the European Federation of Food, Agriculture and Tourism Trade Unions), highlights the problems associated with poor working conditions, lack of recognition of domestic work as a job, and exclusion of domestic workers from OSH legislation. One of the primary objectives of the House of Dignity campaign is to include domestic work in the EU Framework Directive on Safety and Health and associated Directives (EFFAT, 2025). The European Parliament has also shown support for this. For example, on 5 July 2022, the European Parliament (2022) adopted a resolution titled 'Towards a common European action on care,' calling for a targeted revision of Directive 89/391/EEC to ensure the inclusion of domestic workers within its scope. At the same time, some Member States are already addressing this exclusion, as the examples below from Spain and Belgium demonstrate.

According to EFFAT, there are three actions that the EU could take immediately to improve the conditions of domestic workers (EFFAT, 2025).

- promote EU social dialogue for the EU PHS sectors, which is a fundamental pillar of the European social model;
- encourage Member States to ratify and implement ILO Convention No 189 on domestic workers, providing a strong framework to recognise, value, and protect them;
- include domestic workers in the scope of the Framework Directive on Health and Safety and associated Directives.

An EFFAT webpage provides various campaign resources.<sup>11</sup>

### **Success factors**

- Some of the examples in this case study illustrate a range of practices that address PHS from a gender and intersectional perspective, not as add-ons but as integral elements of PSR risk factors;

<sup>10</sup> A House of Dignity for all Domestic Workers in Europe delivered to Commissioner Schmit | EFFAT - European Federation of Food, Agriculture and Tourism Trade Unions, <https://effat.org/featured/a-house-of-dignity-for-all-domestic-workers-in-europe-delivered-to-commissioner-schmit/> and <https://effat.org/a-house-of-dignity-for-domestic-workers/>.

<sup>11</sup> <https://effat.org/a-house-of-dignity-for-domestic-workers/>.

- They illustrate how workplace-level interventions can improve communication, social support, recognition, autonomy, and working conditions, which are key elements of reducing PSRs for migrant women in care, cleaning, and domestic roles.
- Successful initiatives, such as those introduced in Belgium and Spain, have led to domestic workers having the same OSH rights as all workers, resulting in greater attention being given to the issue in labour inspection and ensuring that workers have information about their rights.
- Several examples highlight the benefits of inclusive participation, whereby workers contribute ideas to enhance the way that work is carried out. Participation of workers can help improve the voice of the most marginalised workers, such as migrant women working in insecure jobs, which in turn can contribute to building better work processes and scheduling.
- These are key issues for social partners who have a role in implementing strategies to recruit, organise, and represent PHS workers, as illustrated by examples from Denmark, the Netherlands, Spain, and Sweden. In particular, the Danish 3F agreement emphasises the need to address PHS in platform work, with insights into how workers can be protected from labour and data abuses.

## Challenges

- Migrant women workers are among the most vulnerable workers, facing multifaceted exposures to PSRs.
- Labour inspection and union organisation are challenging because many workers are employed in isolated and fragmented settings, such as private homes, where employers are often not regular members of associations.
- Policies do not always address an intersectional perspective, which means that addressing the low value and the undervaluation of the work carried out by migrant women in PHS is not always taken into account.

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