

Concept Note

South Asia Sub-Regional Bipartite Knowledge Sharing Workshop on Domestic Workers and Home-based Workers

**Working conditions, policy interventions, and trade union organizations
Park Village Resort, Kathmandu, Nepal**

29-30 November 2017

1. Background

Occupations in the informal economy stand as a primary source of livelihood for women and men in developing countries in the absence of quality jobs. Within the informal economy, women workers are concentrated in jobs with no or low pay and high vulnerabilities. Apart from agricultural employment, a predominant number of women workers in the South Asian sub-region are engaged in domestic work and home-based work (both sub-contracted and self-employed home-based work). Domestic workers and home-based workers are two different categories of workers but they are often confused and referred interchangeably as they are both female dominated occupations, and both works are intimately connected to the prevailing social and cultural specificities¹ of their respective country in the sub-region. The work carried out by women in these sectors are seen as extension of roles carried out by women without pay, and they are not recognized as “real” work and remain invisible.

Internationally, they are recognized as workers as seen in international standards. ILO Home Work Convention, 1996 (No. 177) defines home work as work performed by a worker in his or her home or in other premises of his or her choice, other than the workplace of the employer for remuneration, which results in a product or service specified by the employer, irrespective of who provides the equipment, material, or other inputs used. Homeworkers are also commonly called as industry put-out workers or subcontracted home-based workers. The Convention provides that ILO member States should adopt, implement and review a national policy on home work aimed at improving the situation of homeworkers and that the policy on home work should promote, as far as possible, equality of treatment between homeworkers and other wage earners.

ILO Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189) defines domestic work as the work performed in or for a household, and a domestic worker as a person engaged in domestic work within an employment relationship. The Convention provides that ILO member States

¹ There are several restrictions over women’s mobility in the countries of the sub-region, which limit the women’s rightful and equal claim over work places. The dominant perceptions of domestic work as an extension of women’s work at home, unpaid care work, the sole responsibility of social reproduction on women, the lack of alternative decent livelihood opportunities are a few of the many reasons pushing women to take up invisible occupations which lack basic state regulation. In the case of home based workers and domestic workers, a lack of alternative livelihood opportunities, of care support structures, of access to public infrastructure and of collective bargaining and negotiating power, compel the women to accept whatever the working conditions may be.

should take measures to ensure the effective promotion and protection of the human rights of all domestic workers. Types of tasks they perform vary. However the work typically includes various household tasks such as cleaning, washing, cooking, and looking after children or other family members who require care.

With continuing efforts by home-based workers' organizations to promote decent work and the increased efforts by trade unions in supporting domestic workers to organize to increase their voice and bargaining power, some progress have been made in creating public awareness to recognize them as workers in South Asia, however, they lack the basic protection over working conditions and social protection as workers and they stand as low-paid occupations for women workers. Consequently, they are among the most disadvantaged groups of workers with high incidences of poverty and they struggle to move out of poverty. According to information from workers' organizations, there are incidences where home based workers turn to domestic work when there is a lack of demand for their work, and where women work as domestic workers during a particular time of a day, and simultaneously also engage in home based work at their respective homes to sustain their livelihood.

Although these two sectors provide livelihood opportunities for millions of women in the sub-region, adequate attention has not been given to improve their living and working conditions and the progress varies across countries in the sub-region (see Table 1: Statistics and policy interventions). The Home Work Convention (C177) and the Domestic Work Convention (C189) are yet to be ratified by countries in the sub-region. The realization of poverty alleviation, gender equality and decent work in the sub-region will not be possible without addressing decent work deficits faced by domestic workers and home-based workers.

Table 1: Statistics and policy interventions

Countries	Home-based workers		Domestic workers	
	Number of workers	Policy level intervention	Number of Workers	Policy level intervention
Afghanistan	NA	NA	NA	NA
Bangladesh	2 million (WIEGO statistical brief 2014)	No policy or legislation	331,000 (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, Labour Force Survey 2005-2006)	Domestic Workers Protection and Welfare Policy (DWPWP) 2015 adopted
India	37.4 million (NSSO 2011-2012)	Draft Home-based Workers' policy was formulated by civil society organizations in collaboration with Government. However, the policy is awaiting adoption since 2007.	3.9 million (NSSO 2011-12)	Draft National Policy for domestic workers waiting for approval since 2011. Three states in India have Domestic workers' Welfare Board constituted through legislative means.

Nepal	920000 (Nepal Labour Force Survey (NLFS)/Central Bureau of Statistics, Government of Nepal)	No policy or legislation	33,000 (Central Bureau of Statistics of Nepal, Labour Force Survey 2008)	No policy or legislation
Pakistan	1.43 million (Pakistan's Labour Force Survey 2008/2009)	Province level policy interventions. The Punjab Province and the Sindh Province, have adopted a Home Based Workers' Policy in 2017	8.5 million (Federal Bureau of Statistics of Pakistan, Labour Force Survey 2008/2009)	The Domestic Workers (Employment Rights) Bill 2015, approved in 2016.
Sri Lanka	NA	No policy or legislation so far	60,400 (Labour Force Survey, 2007, the estimates by Department of Census and Statistics of Sri Lanka)	No policy or legislation

For increasing the visibility of these categories of workers and advocating for decent work, it is critical to promote inter-sectorial solidarity among workers of these two invisible sectors through sharing of experiences and the development of common action points including those at the policy level.

In this context, the ILO Country Office for India and Decent Work Team for South Asia in New Delhi plans to organize a sub-regional knowledge sharing workshop to strengthen sub-regional solidarity, enhance organizations of these workers and improve regulatory environment and their working and living conditions.

2. Objectives

1. To facilitate knowledge sharing on policy level developments for domestic workers and home based workers sectors of work among countries in the South Asian sub-region.
2. To facilitate information sharing on the organization and mobilization of workers in these two sectors which include issues, challenges in organizing, strategies adopted, and good practices.
3. To draw country specific action plans for both domestic works and home based workers separately by representatives of governments and by representatives of workers' organization, to promote policy interventions by former and to promote inter-sectorial and sub-regional solidarities by latter.

3. Participants

The consultation is expected to bring together representatives from governments, workers' and employers' organizations and other organizations working on issues related to domestic workers and home-based workers in South Asia. It is planned to invite experts and relevant resource persons from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. The total number of participants will be 65.