

# IRENE

- INTERNATIONAL
- RESTRUCTURING
- EDUCATION
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- EUROPE



## Mondiaal



**Planned for 8,9,10 November 2006**

### **International Seminar on Domestic Workers**

**Place: Amsterdam, Head Office FNV, FNV Mondiaal** (Dutch Trade Unions)

The ICFTU supports the organisation of this seminar.

## **Protection for domestic workers!!**

*"Domestic workers' employment situation is considered not to 'fit' the general framework of existing employment laws. This is because most work done by them is generally invisible, done in houses (not considered as workplaces) of private persons (not considered as employers). So, domestic workers are not normally considered as employees, their work is undervalued, and their working conditions remain, in essence, unregulated. In fact, some countries not only do not consider household helpers as workers and exclude them from protection under their national labour codes, they do not provide them with protection under any other national law. In some countries they are denied the right to organise in trade unions. This of course leaves them vulnerable to abuse."*<sup>i</sup>

Domestic workers stem from the poorer parts of the population, migrate within countries, migrate to other countries, are predominantly women, but too often they are children.

Trade unions working on the national and international level and the NGOs, which network nationally and internationally, can give the strong impetus for common strategies towards legal protection of domestic workers like:

- ✓ fight for an ILO convention
- ✓ fight for workers' rights for all domestic workers
- ✓ fight for 'work permits for domestic workers' in receiving countries
- ✓ fight for 'protection for migrant workers, by sending countries'
- ✓ stop child labour.

Domestic workers join organisations in all regions of the world, of which some have formed regional connections. Within the trade unions there is a growing attention for unprotected, informal workers, including domestic workers. The need and notion of connected work is there. The results expected of international seminar:

- ✓ Continuation of network activities between the different NGOs and trade unions
- ✓ Exchange and harmony of strategies towards the ILO, from NGOs and trade unions
- ✓ Strategies to make 'domestic work' a priority area of the trade unions
- ✓ Exchange of experiences of organising and supporting domestic workers
- ✓ Be a platform for further initiatives.

**IRENE, the international network on labour and development**, will be the **secretariat** for the international seminar on domestic work.

An **international steering group** is build up at the moment, the two organisations which took the initiative for this event, IRENE and CAW, the Committee for Asian women, both member of WIEGO, will invite others to work up to an international seminar on 'Domestic Workers'.

**Would you be interested in participating in the steering group or in the seminar, please contact IRENE.**

In April 2005 IRENE was one of the partners in organising the **European conference "Out of the Shadows" on 'organising and protecting domestic workers in Europe: the role of trade unions'**. The ETUC was the lead organisation, IRENE coordinated and invited speakers and participation from NGOs together with PICUM the other partner in realising this event. Domestic workers in Europe partly stem from the countries they work in, partly they have migrated to the country they work in.

There is hardly any legal protection for all domestic workers. They are often not seen as 'workers'. One reason why one also can't enter the EU as a migrant worker on the status of 'domestic worker'. Domestic workers are relegated to 'illegality' even if there is a huge demand for their work. (Care work of old parents or young children, next to many household tasks). A large and growing number of domestic workers in Europe come from countries outside the EU, a major part of them live here with the only right - > to obey their employer(s). See the report at: [www.etuc.org/a/2041](http://www.etuc.org/a/2041) (English version) or [www.etuc.org/a/2043](http://www.etuc.org/a/2043) (French version)

**IRENE** has a long history on working with trade unions, NGOs and networks.

Women workers in the informal economy is one of IRENEs focal points.

See <http://www.irene-network.nl/>

Click on "workers in the informal economy".

**CAW, the Committee for Asian Women**, has a long history on working of the problems of women workers in the informal economy. In 2003 CAW decided give a special focus to domestic workers, the reason to focus on specific sectors of the informal economy is that it will give more concrete ideas and action plans. The 'Domestic Workers Exchange Program' resulted in October 2004 to the establishment of the '**Asian Domestic Worker Network**' to urge the governments to recognize domestic workers, to respect their workers' right.

The Committee for Asian Women is an Asian regional organisation by women, for women and of women. CAW demands employment, equal labour standards and participation in decision making for all women workers. CAW has 39 network groups in 14 countries in Asia.

<http://www.cawinfo.org>

**WIEGO, Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing**, is a global research-policy network that seeks to improve the status of the working poor, especially women, in the informal economy. It does so by highlighting the size, composition, characteristics, and contribution of the informal economy through improved statistics and research; by helping to strengthen member-based organizations informal workers; and by promoting policy dialogues and processes that include representatives of informal worker organizations.

<http://www.wiego.org/>

- △ Please inform us when you interested in this international seminar "Protection for domestic workers!!"
- △ Inform us about your organisation and activities with domestic workers
- △ If possible, do send us your materials and documents on domestic workers.

**More information? Contact:**

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<sup>i</sup> This quote and the information on the ILO are from the report of the ETUC conference, co-organised by IRENE and PICUM:  
**'OUT OF THE SHADOWS' – Organising and protecting domestic workers in Europe: The role of trade unions.'**