

Visibility and access

Young domestic workers want to be less isolated and more visible in the community and in the homes of their employers. They consider their greater visibility to be crucial to their protection from harm.

In particular, they want:

- to be registered with neighbourhood authorities and their employers visited regularly;
- the media to raise awareness about their situation and information about their rights to be widely circulated;
- to be free to leave their employers' houses, and to have regular contact with peers and their families.

Most of all, young domestic workers want the opportunity to come together, to organise, to develop associations and to have their voices heard. Wherever possible, young domestic workers and their groups should be able to affiliate to trade unions and to invoke their protection.

“We have a strong voice and the ability to speak out. But, if we do not speak out, who will hear us? We need to speak for the rights of every domestic worker. We have the right to tell others what is happening to many of us.”

(Angela, Philippines)

Visit our website:

www.antislavery.org

and blog:

<http://standwithus-youngdomesticworkers.blogspot.com/>

March 2010

“We should be given the chance to meet friends outside our work places. Without outside contact, we can never know from whom to seek help”

(Ali, Philippines)

“The Señora told me that I could leave only when she gave me permission, and when in the house, to stay in the kitchen.”

(Rosa, Peru)

Decent Work for Domestic Workers: Recommendations from young domestic workers

‘The great majority of respondents agree with the need to give special attention to the needs of young domestic workers’ (ILO ‘Yellow report’ 2010).¹

For three months, more than 150 current and former child domestic workers from Africa, Asia, Central and South America were consulted about the ILO’s proposed standards on domestic work. During the discussions the young people expressed their excitement and hope that the new standards could make a real difference to their lives.



Anti-Slavery International and Children Unite are asking ILO constituents to consider the recommendations in this document in their discussions on the proposed standards.

Young domestic workers have expressed 4 key concerns:

1) Don't employ underage workers!

No-one should be a domestic worker below the national legal minimum working age. Young domestic workers above this age (usually 14 or 15 years) can work, but their employment should be subject to special protection.

2) Protect us at work!

Written employment agreements are the best way of ending exploitation and getting young domestic workers back into education.

3) Don't stay silent!

Young domestic workers need urgent protection from physical, sexual and emotional abuse. Local leaders and law enforcers should look out for and assist young domestic workers in abusive situations.

4) Make us more visible!

Often isolated, young domestic workers should be locally registered and given opportunities to organise.

¹ ILO, Decent work for domestic workers, Report IV(2), ILC 99th Session, 2010, page 403.

Between December 2009 and February 2010, 167 current and former child domestic workers in Costa Rica, India, Peru, Philippines, Tanzania and Togo were asked for their views on the proposed ILO standards, and how they could best be protected from exploitation and abuse.

153 girls and 14 boys took part in consultations in the form of workshops and focus group discussions, facilitated by local organisations with considerable experience in providing direct services to domestic workers: Asociación Grupo de Trabajo Redes (AGTR, Peru); Defensa de los Niños y Niñas International (DNI, Costa Rica); Kivulini Women's Rights Organisation (Tanzania); National Domestic Workers Movement (India); Visayan Forum Foundation (Philippines); WAO Afrique (Togo).

Working age

The views of young domestic workers are clear: employers should stop using underage domestic workers, and should do more to protect those young people who are entitled to work.

Young domestic workers should not be doing work which is beyond their strength and ability, such as taking care of young children, carrying large containers of water, cooking or moving heavy furniture.

"Children have a good understanding at this age (above 14 years), others don't have parents so they depend on themselves; they have to work in order to get income" (Salima, Tanzania)

"Some children above 14 should be allowed to work depending upon the family background, otherwise 18 years is the right age for working" (Deepa, India)

Written employment agreements

Across the world, young domestic workers are unanimous in their call for written agreements to be introduced and extended to them to regulate their employment and formalise their protection.

These agreements should set:

- Pay
- Working hours
- Tasks to be undertaken
- Rest days and annual leave
- Medical provisions in times of sickness
- Time for school, study and vocational training.

"My parents agreed with my employer that I should come and work. I don't know what they agreed upon" (Samuel, Tanzania)

"There should be a clause in all contracts that obliges employers to respect adolescents and prohibit physical, sexual and emotional abuses against us" (Marta, Costa Rica)

Written agreements should apply in extended family settings too, since many employers of young domestic workers are also their family members.

Young domestic workers argued that written agreements are essential in making it clear to employers where their responsibilities lie. Such agreements would assist young domestic workers in understanding and articulating their rights. They would also help in making young domestic workers more visible to the relevant authorities and service providers.

"When we just agree by word of honour, the employer, in the end, will have the final say. It is difficult to challenge the weight of their word when things get worse. They have a reputation in the community and we are just newcomers to their homes"
(Janey, Philippines)

Protection from abuse

Young domestic workers want to see measures that protect them from physical, sexual and emotional abuse in the workplace (their employers' homes).

In particular they want:

- to maintain contact with their own families, so that their families know where their children are and can monitor their safety;
- local community monitors (such as neighbourhood officials) to be aware of where they work and to check in on them regularly; and
- help with developing skills to protect themselves from abuse.

In cases of abuse, young domestic workers want:

- accessible and safe ways to report abuse (such as telephone helplines), where they will be believed and their case handled sensitively;
- prompt legal action taken against abusers; and
- access to temporary shelter, and to immediate medical and psychological care.

Live-in domestic workers are particularly vulnerable to abuse. If a young domestic worker is living-in she should have her own room and be able to freely leave the house when she chooses.

"Instead of beating us, slapping us, making us kneel down in the gravel, wounding us with blades, putting pepper in our private parts, denying us food as punishment for making mistakes we would rather you gave us advice and taught us good manners."
(Séverine, Togo)

"My sister told me that her employer came close to her and told her: 'Mamita, I want to have relations with you.'"
(Marie Cruz, Peru)

"Once, I had tea with my employers. They told me to go in the corner and drink."
(Anjali, India)

"A new law would give us strength to report abuse."
(Jennifer, Philippines)