

Subject line: The Ratification of ILO Convention 189 is a Triple-Win for Your Government

Dear Minister Signe Risalo,

We are writing to you on behalf of the ILO C189 Alliance, a coalition of European employers, trade unions, European and international institutions and civil society organisations directly and indirectly involved in the domestic work sector¹.

We have come together around the 10th Anniversary of ILO Convention 189 on Decent Work for Domestic Workers with the goal to mark this important milestone, as well as take stock of the progress made and address outstanding issues. To date, your government has not yet ratified the Convention.

Despite the global mobilisation that followed its adoption², improving domestic and care workers' rights remains more than ever a pressing issue in Europe. The Covid-19 crisis has underlined how domestic workers have been keeping people safe during the pandemic by providing care and assistance in their households. We believe Covid-19 is an opportunity to build resilient personal and household services' systems and guarantee social protection for all workers.

Estonia is making continuous improvements to their personal household and services sector, especially with the recent amendments to the Social Welfare Act in 2018. Ratification of C189 supports workers providing services, and also helps families to purchase services through the formal economy. This convention will also support Estonia's future plans to improve home care³.

EU Member States are usually leaders on workers' rights. However, when it comes to domestic workers, live-in care workers, and homecare workers, the gaps are evident. There is an urgent need for action to ensure that domestic workers are not excluded from our social model. By taking the initial step and ratifying ILO Convention 189, your government can make major change to the lives of domestic workers who represent on average 4% of the workforce in the EU.

There are nearly 9.5 million domestic workers – also termed personal and household services (PHS) workers at EU level – in the EU 27 and 90% are women⁴. Employment in this sector is estimated to grow due to demographic changes in coming years. Workers who perform paid domestic work are not a homogeneous group of workers, with workers having diverse work arrangements, employment relationships, and tasks they perform, as well as nationalities, residence statuses and personal characteristics. This sector relies on migrant labour, and

¹ Partner organisations include: European Commission, EASPD, EFFAT, EFFE, EFSI, UNI Europa, International Domestic Workers Federation (IDWF), Platform for International Cooperation on Undocumented Migrants (PICUM), and the ILO Office for the European Union and the Benelux countries.

² Such as ILO-EU cooperation through various projects on domestic work and the Council decision of 28 January 2014 authorising Member States to ratify the Convention in the interest of the European Union.

³ Ad-PHS project (2020)

⁴ Lebrun; JF. (2020).

unfortunately, many of the workers can be exploited without access to fundamental employment rights.

Of the 9.5 million domestic workers in the EU, at least 3,1 million are working undeclared⁵. Even among those who are declared, an estimated 2 million do not enjoy the same labour rights and social protection as other workers in their respective country⁶.

Ratifying the ILO Convention 189 is a triple win for governments, businesses and workers, as undeclared work undermines governments' tax base, creates an uneven playing field for business, and leaves workers without rights.

While it appears that you have improved the situation of domestic workers, there is much more to do. Your government's ratification can be the first step to raising the profile of the sector at EU-level and create the structures for sustainable and equitable change within a growing sector.

We would like to engage in a discussion with you on how to drive the ratification process forward.

We look forward to hearing back from you.

Best wishes,

Aude BOISSEUIL
General Delegate
EFFE

Aurélie DECKER
President
EFSI

Oliver ROETHIG
Regional Secretary
UNI Europa

Kristjan BRAGASON
Secretary GENERAL
EFFAT

Michele LEVOY
Director
PICUM

Luk ZELDERLOO
Secretary General
EASPD

⁵ Undeclared work is defined as any paid activities that are lawful as regards their nature, but not declared to public authorities. It should be noted that at international level, undeclared work is usually referring to as “informal work”.

⁶ Lebrun, JF. (2020).