Conference report: The national conference on paid work in Swiss households

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Dear colleagues,

You are reading the 23th newsletter of the Research Network for Domestic Worker Rights, including information on the implementation process of the ILO Convention, campaigns, and news from the world of research.

1. Updates on RN-DWR

1.1 Minutes of the General Assembly

Minutes of the General Assembly of the Research Network for Domestic Worker Rights, June 16, 2017, 2.30-5pm

Present: Charito Basa, Claire Hobden, Costanza Gacanti, Daniela Cherubini, Giulia Garofalo Geymonat, Helen Schwenken, Jennifer Fish, Lisa-Marie Heimeshoff, Lucia Amorbi, Marcelina Bautista, Marina de Regt, Marissa Begonia, Marlene Seifarth, Martina Millefiorini, Mary Goldsmith, Nerisa F. Valerio, Oksana Balashova, Sabrina Marchetti, Simca Simpson Lapp, Sonal Sharma, Valeria Ribeiro Corossacz (various persons sent their apologies via email or had to leave earlier form the conference, but are happy to stay active)

Chairs: Claire Hobden & Helen Schwenken
Minutes: Lisa-Marie Heimeshoff

AGENDA

1. Information on RN-DWR
2. Newsletter
3. Future Plans for RN-DWR

1. Information on RN-DWR

The coordinators Helen, Claire, and Lisa report on the activity of the RN-DWR of the past years. They present information on the mission of the RN-DWR. The aim of the network is to connect researchers through the network, ensure ethical research in the field of domestic work, cooperate with domestic workers in research aims, and be involved in the policy development at the ILO level.

The network is open to researchers and is not supposed to be a closed shop, as long as research is done responsibly. While initially the network focused on Convention 189, it needs to be developed further now. We will discuss more later in the meeting of how to do that.

2. Newsletter

The main mean of communication of the network is the newsletter. In conver-
Several issues of domestic work are currently being discussed. In order to develop the network forward, there are five suggestions of topics on which several RN-DWR members work. The idea is that several members of the RN-DWR could collaborate on these topics.

a. Employers

Claire Hobden presents the issue of employers and their relationship to agencies. This includes as well the perspective of households which are struggling because of high fees they are paying to agencies for finding a domestic worker. If there should be collective bargaining, the existence of employers’ organizations is important.

For instance, in Taiwan a big employers’ lobby exist. If employers want good quality services, they need to provide good quality working conditions. Sabrina Marchetti stresses that it is a very interesting issue. There is currently a project on trafficking which takes into consideration the employers. She argues that the discourse on employers can be difficult, because instead of supporting the claim that higher wages and better working conditions are necessary for ensuring a high quality of care, some employers might say that domestic workers have a good work and already sufficient salary (compared to more precarious workers). Often people in Italy only discuss the vulnerability of elderly people and calculate the vulnerability of elders against the vulnerability of DW. Sabrina underlines that our research network is on rights and has a critical perspective. Giulia Garofalo Geymonat has been active in disability rights, where the issue of care and domestic work is quite important from the perspective of employers. Mary Goldsmith argues that it is important to understand who the employers actually are and what their interests are. Claire Hobden says that in the U.S., there are coalitions between domestic worker groups and disability groups being built. Marcelina Bautista outlines that in Mexico, there are campaigns such as Fair Home, in which they are working with employers, because the employers do not have information on the rights of domestic workers and do not know how to provide these rights. Often then domestic workers can sign a contract, which is quite important. Simca Simpson Lapp explains that often employers are not conscious of being an employer. When households become aware that they are actually like a company and can provide benefits, this can change the situation for domestic workers. Sonal Sharma presents the example of employers in India that are represented (as well as workers and the state) in so called welfare boards. He stresses that it is an issue of class and the privilege that you have. That’s why there is no will. If one wants to negotiate as workers, of course employers have to be involved, but he does not think that it is about the quality of service but about privilege. Marissa Begonia says that it is about ignoring their obligation as employers. Sometimes employers pretend that they do not know domestic worker rights. There are however also positive examples. Some employers give domestic workers time of to be active on the international level. Those employers have understood and more employers need to be like them. Interested members of the network can turn to Claire Hobden (Claire.hobden@gmail.com).

b. Refugee Issue

Helen Schwenken explains that she works in a research project on the labor market integration of refugees in Germany and has the hypothesis that female refugees might be put into the domestic work/care sector for work. Charito Basa supports the idea of looking at refugees. She stresses that it would be important to have somebody involved who works with refugees directly. In relationship to refugees, there are issues connected to refugees, there are issues connected such as child refugees/unaccompanied minors as well as trafficking. Martina Milleforini says that in Europe there are not that many refugees who go into domestic work, rather people coming with family reunification do that. Lisa-Marie Heimeshoff has heard that in Germany, increasingly also male refugees are being trained to enter nursing and care work. Mary Goldsmith points out that one can understand becoming a domestic worker as a feminization for men, to discipline refugees as a punishment by society for being a refugee. There is a stigma attached to domestic work. In history, there are cases in which women were forced into domestic work as punishment. Sabrina Marchetti agrees that refugee migration is interesting in respect to domestic workers rights. Usually, refugees have different goals.
and do not necessarily want to go into domestic work. Charito Basa says that self-esteem plays a role. It is not just about rights, but also to convey self-esteem to domestic workers, because often the work is not respected. In order to do this, one can discuss questions about how life of domestic workers was before and how it is now. There is a need to address trauma of domestic workers, their psychological problems due to abuse. Research needs to include human rights as well. Helen Schwenken suggest a call for researchers working on the topic in one of the next newsletters. Contact: Helen Schwenken (hschwenken@uos.de)

c. Care economy and domestic work

Mary Goldsmith explains that the political debate has in some regional contexts shifted from domestic work and domestic worker rights to ‘care economy’. C189 is now in the background, taken over by the care economy concept. Here it is important to ensure that domestic worker rights are not subordinated to care employers and take also the perspective of domestic workers into account. Simca Simpson Lapp stresses to right to care and the role of the state. In Uruguay, the state is responsible to provide care for vulnerable population. However, the state might then want to circumvent C189 standards and push domestic workers into self-employment. Mary poses the question what the ramifications are for domestic workers organizations. For instance, in Argentina primary caregivers might not be considered domestic workers anymore. This effects the union organizing of domestic workers. Also there would be hierarchies developing. It might lead to stigmatizations. Simca stresses that there are now former housewife organizations which function as employers’ organization. They used to work for social security for housewives. In Argentina, for instance they have contributory pensions for housewives.

Possible contribution of the network: Claire Hobden points out that there will be two conferences on the topic soon. It will be in the newsletter when the topic becomes relevant. Helen Schwenken suggests to apply with a panel to a big conference and submit papers together. This could also be done for the refugee issue. Contact: Mary Goldsmith (marygoldsmithc@gmail.com)

d. Online Recruitment

Sonal Sharma outlines that increasingly employers are recruiting through apps and online. The Overseas Development Institute (ODI) is doing research now on the Uberization of domestic work. This seems to be a growing phenomenon, but the questions remain how long do these organizations exist and whether they are sustainable. It would be interesting to discuss the character of these online forums and the implications for domestic work. Marlene Seiffarth gives her insights from Germany, where there are more and more of these platforms. Helplink, for instance, an app, has a staff of 200. It is a multinational company and has 10,000 domestic workers working for them. Marina de Regt says that they say they are protecting domestic workers’ rights. Claire Hobden has talked to a colleague at the ILO, familiar with IT, who is of the opinion that these apps are not sustainable and many of them eventually fail.

It would be interesting to see where they are. Marlene Seiffarth explains that they have tons of revenues and profits. Sarah Fari in London is doing research on it. Claire Hobden suggest to do a small survey and get to know more from different countries. Sonal is going to propose a form. Contact: Sonal Sharma (sonal24888@gmail.com)

e. Violence at work

Jennifer Fish explains that IDWF is interested in finding out more about violence at work, which is a topic at the ILO. A report on the topic might support IDWF. HRW and some other organizations have done research. It would be interesting to find out what are dimensions of violence at work. Claire explains that research done on this issue could go into the tripartite negotiations of violence at work at the ILO. The ILO recently sent out a questionnaire recently to the trade unions for the standard setting process in this area. Valeria Ribeiro Corossaz says that domestic workers often do not want to address this, esp. sexual violence at work. Jennifer Fish will contact IDWF and ask for more information and their need for knowledge and then
inform the members of RN-DWR. Contact: Jennifer N. Fish (JFish@odu.edu)

f. The network

It would be nice to have a coordinator for the Middle East region. Marina de Regt could try to identify somebody. Marlene Seiffarth suggest that we could find ways, such as googledocs to work collaboratively on issues that come up. Helen Schwenken suggests that we find a conference in 2018, such as ISA 2018 or another big conference where a lot of people go to to meet again. Those who identify such a conference are kindly asked to share with the coordinators and to launch calls for sections or panels early enough.

1.2 RN-DWR Newsletter and Coordination

From the next newsletter onward, the team of the DomEQUAL project will take over the newsletter and the coordination of the network from me. After around six years of editing the newsletter, I will focus on finishing my PhD thesis. I’d like to thank everybody in the RN-DWR for their input and their support. I am looking forward to receiving the newsletter as a reader and to continuous exchange within the network. The new team consists of Sabrina Marchetti, Daniela Cherubini, Anna Di Bartolomeo, and Giulia Garofalo Geymonat. Their individual profiles can be found at https://domequal.eu/team. The email address of the network remains RN-DWR@uos.de.

Best, Lisa-Marie Heimeshoff

2. Conferences and Calls

CFP: International Sociological Association’s XIX World Congress

The XIX World Congress of the ISA takes place from 15-21 July 2018, Toronto/Canada. Submissions can be made online until the end of September 2017. Please note: In case a number of RN-DWR members are attending the ISA World Congress, we will hold a network meeting (which worked well in 2017 in Vienna). The call for papers contains some interesting sessions on care and domestic work, amongst others:

- Global Perspectives on Care and Care Work I: Marketization, Migration and Gender, https://isaconf.confex.com/isaconf/wc2018/webprogrampreliminary/Session9200.html
- Global Perspectives on Care and Care Work II: Marketization, New Forms of Governance and Gender, https://isaconf.confex.com/isaconf/wc2018/webprogrampreliminary/Session9621.html


Conference Report by Sabrina Marchetti: DomEQUAL Symposium

On the 15th and 16th of June 2016, Giulia Garofalo Geymonat and Sabrina Marchetti, based at Ca’ Foscari University of Venice, organized a symposium to celebrate the 6th anniversary of the ILO Convention on Decent Work for Domestic Workers in the framework of the ERC project “DomEQUAL: A Global Approach to Paid Domestic Work and Global Inequalities.” The symposium has gathered activists, trade unionists, domestic workers’ representatives, and researchers from around the world with to discuss the advancements that have been achieved in domestic workers’ rights in recent years, as well as the many things that have yet to be accomplished. Amongst others, Myrtle Witbooi, Eileen Boris, Ip Fish, Mary Goldsmith, Jennifer Fish, Elizabeth Tang, Ai-Jen Poo, Claire Hobden, Kostadinka Kuneva, Zita Cabais, Marissa Begonia, and Helen Schwenken participated. Here the full program...
of the event: https://de-de.facebook.com/events/1022018401262901/

The Symposium has also offered the opportunity to launch the e-book "Domestic Workers Speak: A Global Struggle for Rights and Recognition" which contains articles written by domestic workers’ rights activists from around the world (the book is free to download at this link: https://www.opendemocracy.net/beyondslavery/dws/giulia-garofalogeymonat-sabrina-marchetti/global-landscape-of-voices-for-labour-right).

On the last day of the Symposium, Neil Howard and Cameron Thibos from OpenDemocracy/Beyond Trafficking and Slavery have presented the video they made with interviews to some of the keynote speakers of the event (https://www.facebook.com/BTSoD/videos/630925620443583/).


In May 2017, around 80 care workers, agency representatives, scholars, experts and activists discussed timely developments and issues in the field of paid work at private households at the first National Conference Paid Work in Swiss Households in Zurich, Switzerland, organised by the University of Zurich’s Economic Geography Working Group and the Denknetz working group “Precarity”. Half of the conference was dedicated to the current situation of paid work at households with a focus on “24-hour care”, which refers to individual live-in care of the elderly. The field of 24-hour care remains to date unregulated and uncontrolled, since the federal labour law does not protect work at the private household. Moreover, workers often travel to Switzerland for brief periods of time in order to perform 24-hour care. Pay, however, is low and the conditions of work precarious. The Swiss National Science Foundation project “Care Markets: The role of care agencies in the commodification of elderly care” examined these issues. In the context of the conference, the research team Karin Schwiter, Huey-Shy Chau, and Katharina Pelzelmayr presented their research results.

The second half of the conference explored the regulatory context of 24-hour care, presented an innovative scheme regarding the regularisation of domestic workers, the project “Papyrus”, and gave space for networking and the elaboration of creative action. In small groups, activists and scholars discussed specific issues and ideas about how to proceed and collaborate in the future.

After the conference, interested participants followed up on Switzerland’s progress report on ILO convention 189 and have been closely observing the Swiss Federal Council’s next steps regarding a potential regulation of 24-hour care. Presentations are available online: http://www.geo.uzh.ch/en/units/wgg/news-hidden/2017_03_17_Care_Markets_Abschlusskonferenz.html

Conference Report by Raffaella Maioni: Domestic workers and carers: decent work starts at home, Rome, Italy, June 16, 2017

On 16 June, the sixth anniversary of the ILO’s adoption of the Domestic Workers Convention of 2011, a meeting promoted (see picture this page) by Acli Colf in collaboration with Caritas Internationalis was held in Rome at the Casa Internazionale delle Donne.

The meeting aimed to focus attention on domestic work, whose dignity begins with its recognition as real work. “Acli Colf has always strived to achieve equal recognition of domestic work with other professions,” reaffirmed Raffaella Maioni, the national director of Acli Colf. “The contribution by Lorenzo Gasparetti, president of Cassa Colf and the secretary general of Domina, also called for a reliable medium- to long-term economic policy that envisages the possibility of deducting not only a portion of social security contributions, but also total labour costs, including remuneration and social security contributions.

During the meeting an assessment was made of changes affecting domestic and care work, based on a speech by Professor Sarti. In particular, Rocco Lauria, the director of INPS (National Social Security Agency), provided a 2017 update on the domestic sector in
Italy, which confirmed the feminisation of the sector, the growing number of Italian women working in the sector, and the reduction in the number of domestic workers compared with the number of carers. It emerged that the total number of domestic workers registered at INPS in 2016 decreased by 3.2% (down 27,366) compared to 2015. The three-year period 2014–2016 registered a decrease in the number of foreigners (down 3%), amounting to 650,358, while the number of Italians (up 1%) rose to 216,813. The number of women registered the highest figure in the last six years, namely 88% (763,880). Among the most represented regions, those in eastern Europe accounted for almost half of the total number of foreign workers, amounting to 391,800 (45.2%), followed by Italy (216,389), the Philippines (70,375) and South America (60,167). It would be interesting to further investigate various aspects, including the increase in the number of Italian women, to determine whether they are "new Italian citizens" or women who have obtained Italian citizenship.

Maria Capozzi from Acli Colf in Turin, who has been a domestic worker for thirty years, pointed out that it is also difficult for Italian women to assert their rights. Tatiana Nogailic (AssoMoldave) and Svetlana Kovalska (president of the Association of Ukrainian Women Workers in Italy) highlighted that in addition to their rights not being recognised, foreign women workers feel far away from their countries and families. Kovalska explains: "As women, mothers, wives and daughters we always feel guilty. We would like to do more for our loved ones. This is why we always try to work so much in order to send money back home. Unfortunately, many women workers don't even manage to go and see a doctor, to take preventive measures and look after their health, because they have to work. This is a serious problem, which is borne out by the percentages of cancer cases that affect many of our fellow domestic workers."

Maria Suelzu from Caritas Internationalis focused attention on the conditions of foreign domestic workers at the international level, where a great deal of exploitation continues. This issue was also dealt with by Leezia from Caritas India, who described the difficult situation of Indian domestic workers. The good news is that the first draft of framework legislation is being prepared to regulate the sector in India.

"Even though we are often focused on humanitarian emergencies," says Oliviero Forti, the migration director at Caritas Italy, "we also need to recognise that forms of slavery and abuse encroach more silently via this kind of work, to which we should dedicate greater efforts."

Elizabeth Tang, the secretary general of the International Domestic Workers Federation, reiterated the importance of domestic workers increasingly organising themselves: "Organising ourselves in an international federation has been important in the promotion of grassroots movements and the implementation of ILO Convention 189, which is not merely a piece of paper, but rather fosters laws and regulations at national level, especially in countries where domestic workers are not even able to organise themselves in associations and trade unions."

On this day, Acil Colf formally announced that it has joined the IDWF to promote – together with another 61 organisations at global level and more than 500,000 affiliated workers – the rights and dignity of around 2 million domestic and care workers who are in Italy, and for 67 million at global level.

3. Publications


More information on her website: http://jennifernataliefish.com/


Langat, Anthony (June 14, 2017). "We must prevent Kenyan migrants from being slaves rather than workers." Equal Times. Online: https://www.equaltimes.org/we-must-prevent-kenyan-migrants#.WYQn_OILdAQ.


This PhD thesis is a study of personalization processes in domestic services provided informally by migrant workers. Personalization is the opposite of (1) identity essentialization, (2) standardization (of the labour process and its output) and (3) distancing (of the service provider from beneficiaries). Consequently, the study investigates the impact of personalization on (1) workers and beneficiaries’ mutual perceptions of identity, (2) on workers’ autonomy on the job, (3) and on workers and beneficiaries’ work-related emotions. Fieldwork among migrant providers and native beneficiaries of domestic services in Belgium and in Warsaw (Poland) confirms the high frequency of personalization in this occupation, and the absence of the distanced ‘self-entrepreneurial’ model of provision identified in other contexts (Lutz 2011; Romero 1992).

Torres, Estrella (June 15, 2017). What will it take to protect Filipino domestic workers from abuse and exploitation in the Middle East? Equal Times. Online: https://www.equaltimes.org/what-will-it-take-to-protect#.WYQn9ulLdaQ.


4. Campaign News

Trinidad and Tobago

The ILO held a workshop for the domestic workers’ union in Trinidad and Tobago, where domestic workers developed a business plan for their cooperative. For more information see the report on the ILO’s website: http://www.ilo.org/global/topics/cooperatives/news/WCMS_559676/lang--en/index.htm.

Switzerland


Contacts: Research Network for Domestic Worker Rights

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