

# **Recognizing Domestic Workers as Economic Agents: Global Challenges**

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# Current Global Status of Domestic Work Sector – General Trends

- ✓ Possibly the single largest sector providing employment in the developing countries
- ✓ Predominantly comprised of women workers (about 80% in Asia-Pacific countries, according to ILO, 2016)
- ✓ Characterised by extremely low levels of skills (especially in the poorer and lower income developing countries like Pakistan)
- ✓ Almost no barriers to entry – of age, skills, gender etc. almost anybody from the age of 8 or 9 years onwards can become or be forced to become a domestic worker, especially in developing countries like Pakistan

# Current Global Status of Domestic Work Sector – General Trends

- ✓ Informal and totally unregulated in most countries globally, including developed and developing countries (the few exceptions being South Africa, Argentina)
- ✓ The most excluded and invisible category of workers (from labour regulation/laws, and state, sector or employer support)
- ✓ Characterised by extremely low wages, extremely long working hours and no clear description of duties to be undertaken

# Prior Research on Domestic Workers

- ✓ Early research (relating to industrial era) largely undertaken from a sociological/anthropological perspective (e.g. most essays in Fauve-Chamoux (2004).
- ✓ More recent research also from a similar perspective (e.g. ILO, 2016)
- ✓ Recent research focussed largely on cross-country migrant workers - no research on rural-urban migrants in developing countries
- ✓ Recent research focussed on issues like access to health and social security (Jayaweera, 2016); access to and extent of legal protection (ILO, 2013; Shahid, 2007); and worker profiles and living and working conditions (ILO, 2016)

# Limitations of Prior Research on Domestic Workers

- ✓ Given the disciplinary perspective (sociological/anthropological) most prior research is largely qualitative and descriptive in nature
- ✓ It is small sample based, cross country migrant focussed, ignores rural-urban migrants and thus is not amenable for developing broad generalisations
- ✓ More importantly given the disciplinary focus, prior research tends to underemphasize the economic nature of domestic work – often labelling it as being ‘non-productive’ labour – a notion dating back to Adam Smith (1776) as cited by Sarasua (2004)

# Agenda for Future Research on Domestic Workers

- ✓ It is now high time to recognize the economic contribution of the domestic work sector in all countries – to find ways and means of recognizing, measuring and recording this contribution
- ✓ Among the first steps toward this goal would be to conduct systematic large sample based academic research on domestic work sector and workers from an economic/business perspective

# Agenda for Future Research on Domestic Workers

- ✓ Research that recognizes domestic work as an economic activity and workers as economic agents, with all its ensuing implications for:
  - domestic worker mobility (particularly rural-urban) and their mobilization
  - Work contracts
  - wages
  - worker productivity
  - skill requirements and training provision
  - recognition and inclusion in relevant labour regulations
  - appropriate institutional support and ultimately for achieving the goal of decent working and living conditions for domestic workers around the world including Pakistan.