



HIDDEN AT WORK

Labour and sexual exploitation and harassment
of women in the (private) work sphere

Which women did the project target?

The project targeted women migrants working in the informal private sphere, such as domestic workers, babysitters, live-in care workers or women working in any other kind of family business. They are particularly vulnerable to labour and sexual exploitation and violence and harassment.

They work in isolated places in other people's homes, often without valid (working) papers and on informal 'contracts'. They depend on their employer not only for income but also for housing and sometimes residence permit. Often, they are from countries outside of the EU.

What is the Hidden at Work project about?

Hidden at Work was a two-year (2021-2022) project that focused on the prevention of gender-based violence, specifically at the informal workplace. The project addressed labour and sexual exploitation and harassment of women at work by reaching out to women in these situations and informing them about their labour and human rights and how to claim them.

Which countries did the project focus on and with which partners?

The project activities took place in three EU member states – the Netherlands, Austria and the Czech Republic – and at the European level. The project was coordinated by [FairWork](#) and implemented together with [LEFÖ IBF in Austria](#), [La Strada Czech Republic](#) and [La Strada International](#). The project partners actively shared expertise, experiences and best practices with each other and with other relevant European organisations.



How did we address labour exploitation in the private sphere?

In the two years of the project, more than 100.000 women who may be facing labour and sexual exploitation and harassment were reached via online campaigns and workshops. Information materials adapted to their specific situation and needs were developed and disseminated. More than 500 women facing exploitation in the private sphere were supported by the project partners. Most of these women worked as domestic workers, with nationalities including Ukrainian, Filipino, and Indonesian as well as EU citizens such

as Hungarian and Bulgarian. The project partners trained around 100 professionals who are likely to detect exploited or harassed women at work in recognising signs of labour exploitation and referring them to support services. In-depth insights into the problems of the target group and the obstacles they experience in practice were used to advocate for improvements in relevant legislation and its implementation.

For more information about the activities and results visit the Hidden at Work webpage: [Hidden at work - FairWork](#)

What are the main obstacles for this hidden group of workers to claim rights?

The women in these vulnerable and exploitative situations face a number of challenges when claiming their rights. Often, they are not identified as persons in need of protection and support or remain invisible, unnoticed and do not receive the information, assistance and support they are entitled to. This is partly the result of a lack of awareness among police and the judicial system to identify vulnerable and exploited workers.

The dependence on their employer, lack of alternative work and housing options, lack of social networks, language barriers, and lack of knowledge of laws and regulations make it difficult for migrant workers to report unacceptable (work) situations. This is especially because most European

countries lack adequate safe reporting mechanisms to address exploitation and access justice, with undocumented migrants facing arrest, detention, and deportation if they approach the police to report violence or abuse.

In the area of access to justice, challenges relate to the lack of access to legal aid and adequate information for migrant workers and/victims, lack of adequate investigation and prosecutions of violations, delays and long duration of criminal and civil proceedings, and, in the case of foreign victims, their return or deportation to their country of origin before a verdict is reached. Moreover, it remains difficult to hold employers accountable and to ensure that they pay remedies to workers.

What needs to change? What are our demands?

We want (the rights of) these women to be recognised and we promote more access to rights for domestic workers and those in irregular situations. We call for the ratification of relevant ILO Conventions (e.g. C190 and C189) and demand that governments promote labour rights and address the issue of diplomatic immunity for diplomats who abuse their domestic workers. We also promote more legal (labour) migration pathways and independent access to employment for migrant domestic and care workers, and changes to visa regulation schemes.

We further raise awareness and call for more outreach by relevant stakeholders to identify people in vulnerable situations. We also call for safe reporting and effective complaint mechanisms. For those identified as victims, we call for (unconditional support) and access to remedies. Lastly, we promote binding measures to hold employers accountable in cases of exploitation and advocate for binding EU and national due diligence legislation.

We will continue to demand attention for – and raise awareness about – the rights of these hidden women in our ongoing advocacy and direct assistance work.

For more information, please contact: info@fairwork.nu



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