



International Domestic  
Workers Federation

# Migrant Domestic Workers speak about the Labor Laws

PODCAST

18/12/2022

## TRANSCRIPT

**Host:** Good morning! Good evening! Good afternoon, everybody who is listening to us today! We are joining you as the International Domestic Workers Federation. We are currently in Qatar meeting a lovely wonderful group of Migrant domestic worker leaders from various countries of origin who are all very inspiring. On the news, we have been seeing that there are a lot of reforms happening so we would love to understand and learn more about this. So today, with us we have Roula, Anna, Maria, Caroline. It is a pleasure to have you all with us today. Thank you for coming.

I would love to start with you Roula. You were telling me a little bit about the situation of freedom for domestic workers in Qatar. What is the situation on the ground? What is allowed? What is not allowed?

**Roula:** First of all, Freedom we don't have freedom. So, we cannot express one's opinion. First of all, when you come here, you cannot keep your document. That's one thing, you miss freedom to have your own documents. Second one is [the] phone. If you don't have your phone, you don't have freedom to call or to talk to your people, to talk to your friends, to know what is happening out there. So, you'll be in the dark. And then the third one is shelter. Most of the domestic workers they sleep in bad conditions. They don't have a private room, so some of them sleep in the kitchen, some in the storage where they put food. In those places, anyone can come anytime. Most of these people, they sleep late so you cannot go and sleep in the kitchen and some people are still eating in the living room. Some [employers] are out, they will come at night and they will enter in the kitchen to look for something to eat. So, you can imagine. Most of these domestic workers, they use the phone in the toilet because they don't have a break. They are not allowed to use the phone. So, the bright ones, they hide the phone and they use it in the private room. So, you will excuse yourself after working for two hours or three hours. You will have a small break of 15 minutes so you go online or you talk to your people. That's how most of the domestic workers lack freedom.

**Host:** It looks like for domestic workers to go about the regular life, the regular daily life, there are so many barriers to what they can or cannot do. And some of them are about the law some of them are about the culture some of them are about language barriers, etc. It is very important for us to think about labor laws that are supposed to be granted for every worker but my understanding is that domestic workers are still struggling with very basic provisions of the law. So, I will go to Anna. Anna, what is the situation of the rest days or the holidays or the time to recuperate: What is the situation on the ground for domestic workers? Are they able to access some of these basic labor rights?

 Geneva, Switzerland

 [info@idwfed.org](mailto:info@idwfed.org)



International Domestic  
Workers Federation

**Anna:** Well as we all know; Qatar has already implemented domestic workers' rights and one of them is days-off. But not of all of them [workers] have the privilege to have days off. We are not only talking about Fridays but at least employers or sponsors can give domestic workers 24 hours rest and it's up for the domestic helpers to stay inside or get out spend time with friends or relatives. And the same time, not all of the domestic workers are given privilege to have the holiday.

**Host:** So, Anna is it that there isn't a one standardized contract: Some domestic workers can have a day off, others cannot have a day off at all, and it all depends on the sponsor?

**Anna:** Well, under the contract it's stated that there is one day off. But sometimes it depends with the sponsors or employers that they don't want to give their domestic helpers days off. I think we should really implement... It's already implemented but there are only sponsors who don't want to value the rules.

**Host:** This is very interesting, because the case in a lot of other countries in the Middle East is the absence of the laws but in Qatar, there are laws – it is written in the contract - and yet also you run into a situation where a lot of migrant workers do not have a rest day, for example. Maria coming to you, how is the status of the implementation of all of these reforms and Qatar? Are you seeing progress? Is it being pursued? Can you tell us a little bit about the reality on the ground the life of domestic workers in relation to these laws?

**Maria:** Now, actually Qatar already has a domestic worker law since 2017. It was already implemented and some of them (employers) have already given their domestic workers the day off. But some of them don't have days off, especially for those employers who don't have the access to know the domestic worker law. So, I think what we need is the full implementation of the domestic worker law so we can have our privilege to have a one day off a week just to refresh ourselves, a time to break from our whole day, whole week of work. So that's it.

**Host:** It's very interesting also that the rest day you're asking for can be split into two different things: the rest day can be spent outside of the

house but it can also be an indoors rest day. But employers, when you are in the house; they pretend that you're on the clock. It doesn't matter what time it is, if it's Friday or not Friday, you continue working. So, what can the government do to increase the implementation because the government already established this law so when we think about the implementation. Imagine our audience now listening here and they're thinking so what should happen so these laws that are on paper become a reality?

**Maria:** Actually, some of employers have already accepted the domestic worker law, they have already given their workers a day off even though some of them [employers] said that they [workers] will stay in the room, they will rest for 24 hours during Fridays but some of them just allow their domestic worker to go outside have fun with their friends, with their families who are working also here in Qatar. But the government must see to it, that they will disseminate information to the employer that this law is existing and they must have the full implementation to have a better relationship with the domestic worker because, you know, also as human beings, we need to have a rest day to refresh our mind for mental health, to refresh our body for physical health, so that's very useful.

**Host:** Absolutely! Caroline, what is happening if you can tell us a little bit about the efforts to raise this awareness? Maria was saying that some employers are not aware of the law some, while other employers are aware of the law and ignore it, but that there needs to be a lot of collaborations happening to disseminate this knowledge. Can you tell us a little bit more about what are the ongoing awareness raising activities and what type of connections need to be established to see through that this implementation happens?

**Caroline:** We need more connections from the government ministries, especially the ministry of labor. We need to discuss more about the law of the domestic workers because it was just established in 2017. And we domestic workers struggle to disseminate information with these employers. So, I think and I'm sure, like I'm 100% sure, that we need more time on sitting and discussing with the Ministry of Labor because they are the ones who will



implement this law. They are the one who made the law, and we domestic workers, of course, we know our rights. We need to fight for our rights but the connections from the government [are necessary] because we cannot just go outside and speak outside and make noise outside, because here in Qatar, it's not allowed. We can we get deported if we do that. So, the best thing for me is to sit with the ministry of labor and discuss how we can disseminate information and how we can make the sponsor follow these rules and the law that has been established last 2017.

**Host:** Absolutely. Because also a lot of times we are told that once people know their rights things will become better but that is not enough. Because what if I know my rights and I'm locked into a house with my employer 24/7 and the implementation is not happening. It's not only about my awareness but very much about what Caroline you were saying the making the right connections making the effort to collaborate so you can see through that all of these legal reforms bear fruit.

Part of the barriers that migrant domestic workers are encountering are related to their migration. They are coming with a different status into a different country some people are citizens some people are not citizens. And those who are not citizens also compose different groups there are migrants that have more freedoms and migrants who are under the Kafala system or the sponsorship system. These are the workers we spoke about today. December 18 is the International Migrants' Day, so I would like to get your message to people who are listening to us today. How was your own migration journey? This is something that you have in common but your experiences of it were diverse. Did you know what you know today coming into Qatar? Who would like to share with us?

**Caroline:** Qatar is not the first country I've come to work for. So, I've worked in the UAE before. My experience in the UAE is not that really nice because my sponsor, actually, the mother of my sponsor, sent me to jail accusing me of stealing her money and jewelry. So, I got to jail for three days. After three days, I got out because my colleagues from Ethiopia, she spoke that she saw who took the

money, who took the jewelry. So that's the time that they sent me out of the chains. But imagine being in jail without any communications, you don't know where to ask help because they are Emirati. They will not listen to you as you are the first timer. This was my first time to work abroad and I was only 23 at that time. So I really had no idea where to ask for help and I don't know my rights and how can I fight for my rights. And they didn't allow me to call my family to call my Embassy and my fellows in the UAE. So, I was thinking if I will be able to see my family back home, will I be like able to hug my mom, my family... It's really hard for me to be in those four corners without anything you can do. Anything! It's like you were just thinking that you will be rotting in this room.

So, after three days, my sponsor came and he took me out because they finally knew who took the money and then they asked me if I want to continue working with them. But I was afraid and I felt unsafe in this house. So, I told them "I don't want to work, just send me home immediately." So, from the jail, they booked my ticket, they sent me to the airport with only my uniform. So, I landed in the Philippines with my uniform without anything! Actually, I just asked someone if I can use her phone so I can call my family. So that time when I called my family to pick me up at the airport at this time tomorrow, they were worried. They were asking me "why?" So, I just told them I will tell you tomorrow. So, without anything, I didn't have any money in my pocket because from jail they sent me to the airport. I landed in the Philippines and of course I felt safe as I was in my own country and then after a few months I decided to apply here in Qatar.

So, my mom totally disagreed and told me I will not be going anywhere but I talked to her and I explained to her that I need to work for my future. I don't want to just stay here because I have my ambitions. I want a better future for myself and, of course, for my family. So, I decided to come here to Qatar. So, Qatar is the second country and I think I can say it's a good country for me because here in Qatar I get all the benefits and the rights that were not given to me in the UAE.

That's the thing. It was that time that I told myself I



International Domestic  
Workers Federation

need to know my rights, I need to know my obligations as a domestic worker. Because I don't want that to happen again to me and to my fellow domestic workers so even though I have all the full benefits, full rights, as a domestic worker, because I have my day off and I can go home every year, but I was thinking about my fellow domestic workers. So, that's why I am here today to speak on behalf of all the domestic workers that you should not be afraid to fight for your rights. You should not be afraid to fight for what you believe in because this is our right. We came here for work and domestic work is a decent work so we should be aware of everything. You should not let anyone step on your rights, like you need to fight for them because this is this is the way to make a living. A sponsor should be aware that their house is our workplace and it should be free from violence. That's it. Thank you.

**Host:** Absolutely. It is so empowering also to see women who have been in very difficult situations. Imagine being aged 23 in a foreign country and living under the same roof as the people who reported you under horrible untrue allegations and then being sent back home in your uniform. Horrifying! And yet being here today, being well today, and being at the forefront of leading movements of domestic workers towards their rights. Twenty-three I believe is the age of Maria's child, right?

**Maria:** Twenty-five.

**Host:** Tell me about your journey and your hopes for your children as well?

**Maria:** For me, this is my first working outside my country. So, when I came here, I was only 33. I had already three kids, I was married but I needed to help my family's finances. So, I needed to step up. So, when I came here, I was facing a blank wall. I didn't know what to do as migrant worker. I just knew I will do a job as a domestic worker but I didn't know how to do it. I was a blank wall but I wanted to be assertive for myself, that I can do it. So, I learned everything. Everything! I was new in domestic work and I learned about it as a migrant worker. I am proud to be a domestic worker. It is a decent job and I love my job! So Qatar is my second country

What I want to say is that from 2003 I was here. So,

in 2017, the domestic worker law was implemented and I hope and I pray that the full implementation of Qatari law will be achieved. So, that in the future

if ever my children or the children of my sister or children of my friends come here, they will have a better life and it will be a better experience, a better future they can experience. They will not experience what I have experienced.


**Host:** Absolutely. They don't have to go through everything that you have been through. Thank you, Maria. As we are wrapping up, I would love to hear from you Anna, and going back to the law about your own migration journey. Since we have the International Migrants' Day upcoming in December, what is your message for other fellow migrants around the world? What is something, an experience, that you would like to take out from your own journey and share it with other uh other migrants?

**Anna:** What I'll tell all the migrants around the world is that nothing is impossible if you believe in yourself, if you trust yourself, love yourself. It is never too late to be who you are, for all to restart again. When I came here, I was told there was no day off, I will be wearing uniform from Monday to Sunday, but - thank God - when I came here, my sponsor was good. My agent was the one who educated me about Qatar rights. Because what I thought I will find here, was not here. It was another [situation]. It was like an eye-opener for me. So, I would like to tell our migrant workers that there is nowhere easy to be at his time. The best thing is to work hard. And for Qatar, they are doing the best they can to fight for all the migrants. Thank you.

**Host:** Thank YOU! So, be who you are, take pride in your job, take pride in your profession, and do not forget your fellow sisters, other migrant domestic workers once you break through, so you can also be with them, organize with them.

**Anna:** And for domestic workers, those who are "maids," just know: your job is just like any other job.

**Host:** "Your job is just like any other job" and it is a decent job and deserves all of the protections in the world. Thank you so much for being with us today. It has been a great pleasure and honor to have been able to speak to you thank you so much. Bye!

 Geneva, Switzerland

 [info@idwfed.org](mailto:info@idwfed.org)