



WE Party Conference

Kettering 7 – 9 September 2018

Motion Title: Protecting Migrant Domestic Workers against Abuse and Servitude

Proposed by: WE Islington Branch

Proposer: Guilene Gaspais

Type of motion: Policy Motion

Motion text:

1 The Women's Equality Party reaffirms its commitment to end violence against women and girls.
2 There are over 18,000 Migrant Domestic Workers in the UK, 75% of whom are women, who
3 experience unfair working conditions as well as abuse (physical, psychological and sexual) because
4 of a punitive visa system that ties the domestic workers to their employers. Despite strong opposition
5 that it would institutionalise abuse, the Government made significant changes to the domestic
6 worker's visa in April 2012. The changes meant that Migrant Domestic Workers coming to the UK
7 were tied to their employer for a maximum of six months, with no right to renew or extend their visa
8 beyond this time. In April 2016, after a long campaign, the Government made limited changes to the
9 visa system, accepting that workers should be allowed to leave their employer without being
10 criminalised — but only during the period of their six-month visa. A recognised victim of trafficking
11 can increase the length of their visa for up to two years.

12 The Women's Equality Party calls upon the Government to:

- 13 1. Restore the rights of Migrant Domestic Workers to the pre-2012 system and end this form of
14 modern slavery.
- 15 2. Allow Migrant Domestic Workers to renew their work visa annually from the UK and build five
16 continuous years of presence in the country, which will open rights to Indefinite Leave to
17 Remain.
- 18 3. Introduce mandatory group information meetings for workers who remain in the UK for more
19 than 42 days to ensure that they are aware of their rights to withdraw their labour and change
20 employer if they are in an abusive working relationship.



Motion rationale:

21 Prior to the amendment of the rules in 2012, domestic workers travelling to the UK with their
22 employers were allowed to remain in employment for as long as their services were required. Their
23 right to change employment had been introduced into the Immigration rules so as to ensure
24 protection from abuse. Domestic workers were also allowed to settle in the UK after five years.

25 The Tied Visa system set up in 2012 is based on the Kafala system in place in a certain number of
26 countries in the Middle East. It is primarily used for unskilled labour. It links the worker's visa to a
27 sponsor in the country, thus restricting their freedom by heavily regulating the conditions allowing
28 them to change employers, sometimes defining where they are allowed to live or when they can
29 leave the country. Human rights organisations have consistently documented how the Kafala
30 system leads to abuse¹².

31 Since the implementation of the Tied Visa system in 2012, organisations working with Domestic
32 Workers have seen an increase of abuse cases reported to them³.

33 In 2015, James Ewins was commissioned by the Government to review the conditions of the
34 Overseas Domestic Workers visa and consider whether they were appropriate, given the
35 Government's commitment to tackling modern slavery.

36 The Ewins report called for all overseas domestic workers to be given the right to change
37 employers. Its second recommendation would allow domestic workers to apply for further leave to
38 remain in the UK for up to 30 months.

39 The Government did not implement Mr Ewins' recommendations, despite being under considerable
40 pressure to do so by the House of Lords and some MPs in the House of Commons. Instead, in April
41 2016, the Government changed the immigration rules in order to allow domestic workers in private
42 households to change employer (for any reason) during the valid period of their six-month visa.
43 They also amended the immigration rules to increase the length of visa granted to a recognised
44 victim of trafficking from six months to two years.

45 These limited changes do not tackle the level of abuse that Domestic Workers experience in their
46 daily lives.

47 Domestic Workers, frightened of being deported, prefer to disappear instead of reporting their
48 employers, putting them even more at risk of trafficking and abuse.

49 The reinstatement of the right to change employer is meaningless without the right to renew visas.
50 This doesn't prevent domestic workers from being abused, as has been demonstrated by the

¹ <https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/04/06/lebanon-migrant-workers-abuse-account>

² <https://www.hrw.org/news/2015/03/16/uk-modern-slavery-bill-fails-vulnerable-women>

³ http://www.kalayaan.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/QuestionnaireNGOs_EN-17-05-2018-K-ASI.pdf



51 charity The Voice of Domestic Workers and the testimonials they have gathered from abused
52 domestic workers⁴.

53 Currently all work visas are eligible for extension (under different conditions), except for the
54 Overseas Domestic Workers Visa (unless the Domestic Workers can prove that they have been the
55 victim of trafficking or slavery). The Women's Equality Party calls on the Government to align the
56 Overseas Domestic Workers Visa with other work visas available to immigrants coming to the UK
57 so that Domestic Workers are equal to the rest of the society.

⁴<https://www.thevoiceofdomesticworkers.com/single-post/2018/06/16/6-Years-On-The-Tied-Overseas-Domestic-Worker-Visa>