

The power of MIGRANT WORKERS is in the Union

Global Unions Statement
on December 18 - International
Migrants Day 2024



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December 18 is International Migrants Day. On this day and beyond, the Global Unions reaffirm their unwavering commitment to support migrant workers in their fight to freely exercise the fundamental human right to organise, unite and mobilise in solidarity. Together, we will continue to fight for unity, for a world where the rights and dignity of all workers, regardless of their migration status, is recognized and upheld in laws, policies and practices.

The Global Unions honor the vital contributions of migrant workers across our public services, industries and communities. Without them, society will collapse. They are our nurses, care workers, doctors, teachers, construction workers, domestic workers, farmworkers, hotel workers, transport workers and the list goes on. Migrant workers, many of them women, had to leave their families and home countries behind in search of decent work. During the pandemic crisis, we have seen their essential role in supporting our healthcare systems, transport facilities, food supply chains and all other basic services.

Yet migrant workers often face unsafe conditions, low wages, and systemic barriers to organizing. They endure exploitation, discrimination and violence at their workplaces and in communities. The climate crisis, on going wars and conflicts and rising xenophobia further exacerbate the situation.

Across the globe, the rise of authoritarianism and the far-right with its divisive, anti-migrant, violent and xenophobic rhetoric and policies are targeting migrant workers and their families. Efforts to pit one group of workers against another fueled by racist, far right, and neo-liberal ideology have never advanced the rights, protections and well-being of the working people. On the contrary, divisions within the working class only serve the interests of the few rich and multinational corporations. We need more solidarity, not less, to counterbalance the unequal power relations between those who have too much, and those who have too little, for a just and equitable world.

Many migrant workers are driven into precarious, informal, and often invisible jobs, making them vulnerable to exploitation. Migrants' invisibility often obscures human rights abuses, including rampant wage theft, unfair recruitment practices by abusive employers and recruiters, unsafe or unhealthy working conditions, confiscation of identity documents, and restriction of freedom, in collusion with some unscrupulous authorities. The exclusion of migrant domestic workers and agricultural workers from labour laws leave them with no weekly rest days, no maternity protection and no social protection. In some countries, immigration rules undermine workers' labour rights, such as the kafala or sponsorship system, mandatory live-in arrangement for domestic workers and care workers, and exploitative temporary labour migration schemes that restrict migrant workers' freedom to change employers which often leads to bonded labor. This cycle of exploitation enriches exploitative employers, while plunging many migrant workers into spirals of vulnerability and debt bondage. The human right to freedom of association allows workers to overcome fear and to rise collectively against wage theft and other rights violations that strip migrants of their voice, justice and dignity.

Migrant workers are on the frontline of efforts to combat climate change, building critical infrastructure and providing basic services while working in hazardous conditions. Yet they are among the first to suffer its devastating impacts. A just and equitable transition to a low carbon economy must prioritise the occupational safety and health, dignity and decent conditions of all workers regardless of their country of origin and their migration status, along with defending universal access to quality public services, education and housing. Without systemic change and with the business-as-usual practices, the transition to a green economy will simply perpetuate the same profit-driven model that has long exploited both workers and nature, creating the climate crisis we live in now. We urge the strengthening of labour laws and enforcement mechanisms to combat exploitation, wage theft, and unsafe working conditions, while promoting inclusive policies that integrate migrant workers into climate action plans.



In the face of these multiple crises, the Global Unions strongly assert that the right to organize, to form and join trade unions and to bargain collectively is fundamental to leverage migrant workers' agency to address unbalanced power dynamics in all the social spheres, particularly in our workplaces, and to transform the underlying social and employment conditions that entrench poverty, fuel inequality and limit democracy. When migrant workers – whether documented or undocumented, in regular or irregular status, in the formal or informal economy – are able to organise into unions, educate, campaign and build solidarity spaces, organized labour is better equipped to push back against authoritarianism, nationalist populism and the far right.

The Global Unions strongly call on governments, employers, multinational corporations, and international organisations to recognise and protect the rights of migrant workers, particularly their right to organise and collectively bargain without fear of intimidation or retaliation.

We call for the elimination of discriminatory practices, xenophobia, and violence against migrants, and to promote gender equality and respect in both workplaces and society. Upholding international labour standards, such as ILO Convention C87 on Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise, ILO Convention C98 on the Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining, and ILO Conventions on Migrant Workers C97 and C143, is essential to ensuring the fair treatment, safety, and dignity of all migrant workers.

On International Migrants Day, the global labour movement calls on the international community, together with our unions, civil society allies, communities and activists to:

- **Uplift and value the contributions of all migrant workers;**
- **Denounce all forms of exploitation, discrimination, and xenophobic attacks against them;**
- **Fight for the right to freedom of association and collective bargaining for all migrant workers, regardless of their immigration status or sector work, as fundamental to protecting their rights and supporting their agency;**
- **Organise migrant workers into unions and ensure they can take on representation and leadership roles;**
- **Promote ratification and effective implementation of ILO Conventions on Migrant Workers C97 and C143 and the UN Migrant Workers Convention;**
- **Call for support and unity among workers, communities and activists;**
- **Provide for easier access to justice mechanisms, in particular legal aid, necessary support and immigration status to stay in the destination countries to pursue cases;**
- **Encourage affiliates to work with communities to build trust and confidence among migrant workers; and**
- **Create solidarity spaces within and across borders to galvanise our unity to expose and push back against rising authoritarianism in its old and new forms, and the far right with its neo-liberal, divisive, racist, nationalist populist and xenophobic agenda.**

The power of migrant workers is in the unions. The global labour movement represents more than 200 million workers across the world fighting for workers' rights, their families and communities. We will not stand down against the far-right forces that attempt to divide us. Together we rise in strength and unity!

