



International  
Labour  
Organization

# Domestic Work – Decent Work

A 'Smart Guide' for Domestic Workers in Thailand

\*\*English Edition\*\*



Promoting Respect & Decent Work  
for Domestic Workers in Thailand

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Are you a domestic worker  
or planning to become one?



## KNOW YOUR RESPONSIBILITIES AND YOUR RIGHTS!

YOU ARE A VALUABLE MEMBER OF THE HOUSEHOLD  
ENTITLED TO DECENT WORKING CONDITIONS,  
FAIR PAY AND RESPECT

*The best person to look after your own interests is you!  
The information in this booklet is provided  
to help you protect yourself.*

*Look for these helpful signs throughout the booklet*



*The green check marks offer useful tips*



*The Red "X" warns you about dangers*

## Foreign or Thai, Woman or Man, Young or Old You have responsibilities – and rights!

A **domestic worker** is an individual - woman or man - who, in return for payment, carries out assigned duties inside and around the home for others. Domestic workers can be Thai or foreign (e.g. Burmese, Laotian, Cambodian).

- Many domestic workers are women and their duties are often seen as ‘women’s work’ since traditionally women do most of the cooking, cleaning and caring for the home and its occupants especially children, the sick and the elderly.
- In Thailand, men also work in private homes. Typically they are hired to work as drivers, security guards, gardeners and handymen.
- Domestic workers are often asked to help with duties in the family-run businesses too.

### Your responsibilities:

Domestic work is valuable work as it allows members of that household more time to pursue their other activities.

In return for a fair wage and working conditions, your employer has the right to expect that you will do a good job and are honest and committed to fulfilling your duties as best as you can.

You are expected to exercise common sense and use your best judgment. Safety is most important - for yourself, the people you care for and the home in which you work. You should promptly report any injuries, damage to property or other incidents that occur.

## Your right to respect, fair pay, safe work, rest time and privacy:

When we talk about 'rights' we mean human rights - a right to be treated in a dignified way like any other human being in life and at work. Rich or poor, young or old, male or female, we all have these rights.

In return for your labour, you have a right to expect - and receive - fair pay and decent working conditions. You also have a right to keep in touch with your family and friends and that includes the right to leave the house and visit other people and places during your time off.



No matter what type of work you do, you are entitled to the respect for, and protection of, your human rights, to live and work in a decent and dignified way, free from harassment and exploitation!

## Things to agree with your employer:

### Your duties and work contract:

- What are your daily duties? Can additional tasks be added without asking you?
- To whom do you report? Is there one boss or more than one?
- If you are a foreigner, will your employer arrange a work permit and visa?
- Will the employer write everything down in a job contract that you can keep with you?



## Your Pay:

- How much will you be paid? The minimum daily wage varies from province to province. Ask other domestic workers or phone 1506 for up-to-date information.
- How often will you be paid - weekly, monthly? Will it be on the same day each time and will the employer provide a written record to you of the payments?
- Will you receive only part of your salary in cash while the rest is deducted for other things? For example, will the employer deduct part of your pay for food or accommodation? If so, for what and by how much?
- If you work overtime will you be paid extra? How much?
- Are you expected to pay any debts to the employer? For what and how much? When will the debt be cleared and will the employer provide a written record of payments that you can keep with you?



## Your work days and rest days:

- What are your hours of work and hours of rest?
- When is your day off? Once per week? Can you choose the day?
- How many days of holiday will you be given each year? How about public holidays and religious holidays? Are you still paid during this time-off?
- Are you allowed visitors during the workday? During time-off?



## If you live in your employer's home:



- Are you allowed to leave the house when you are not working like during a day off or after work?
- You have a right to some privacy in the house. Do you have your own private room (that you can lock) and do you have your own shower/toilet?
- Will you prepare the meals for everyone? When will you eat - and will you eat the same food as everyone else?
- At night, are you expected to sleep with, and care for, the children of your employer? Are you expected to provide special care for sick, disabled or elderly family members?
- Are you responsible for keeping the house safe and secure 24 hours per day? Is there a curfew at night? What time? Are there other 'house rules' you should follow?
- During school holidays some employers will allow a domestic worker's children to visit and stay temporarily. Is this possible? Would your wages be deducted for this?



Domestic work is conducted in private homes out of public view, and live-in domestic workers can feel isolated. Therefore, you need to be given your own space – a place to rest and relax. It is a place where you have privacy.

## If you live out of your employer's home:



- Will your working hours be the same each day? How many hours are you expected to work in a day?

- Will you be given a meal break and will you eat the same food as the rest of the family in the house?



- During school holidays or in emergencies can your children stay with you during the day while you work?



## Your physical and mental health:

- Are you given any safety training in how to avoid accidents? Are you given instructions on what to do if you, or the people you care for, have an accident?



- If you get sick will you be able to seek medical care?

- If you need to rest and recover, will you still be paid wages for workdays missed?

- Who is the boss? It can be stressful when several people are giving you directions and making demands at the same time. Clear this up as early as you can. Young children should not be giving instructions to adults - you are a role model and they should be taking guidance from you!



- Will your employer provide health and accident insurance? If so, will you be expected to repay these fees? (If you are a registered foreign migrant with a valid work permit, you should already be covered by insurance).



- If you become pregnant, will your employer allow you to continue working as long as you feel able and will they reduce your duties accordingly? Will they provide you with a paid maternity leave?





## On the move and looking for a job

### Moving safely to find work:

**Learn your own way around.** During your travels, and once you arrive at a new place, become familiar with your surroundings. If you ever feel uncomfortable, trust your instincts and leave the area. Find the location of the nearest Wat or temple, as well as police stations and hospitals. These places could offer sanctuary if you need to escape an abusive person or other threat.



**Find out as much as you can about your employers and their home before you begin working there.** If possible, ask other people you trust. Does the employer have a good or bad reputation for working conditions or payments? If you are going through a broker, try to find out about the broker's reputation too. How isolated will you be? Do you have any friends or people you know living nearby to whom you could turn in time of need? Do you know how to get home from your workplace?

### Keeping in touch with family and friends:

**Tell your family** the name, phone number and address of the employer (and broker if you used one). **Stay in regular contact with your family or friends while working away.** Agree that if they do not hear from you within a certain time they will seek help to contact you (see the contacts of those who can help at the back of this booklet).



**Make new friends** in a new location. Make an effort to meet other people like other domestic workers. Try to meet up with them as often as you can - form a network! Collect their mobile telephone numbers and send each other short text messages regularly.



## An important warning about human trafficking:

**Don't trust strangers!** Even friendly ones - male or female! As obvious as it sounds, many people are fooled by someone they meet during their travels who befriends them with promises of an 'easy job with good pay' in someone's home. He or she could be lying about the pay and working conditions. The person could be working as a job broker and would receive a commission from the home owner for finding a new domestic worker. This person's motivation is to recruit you as fast as possible.



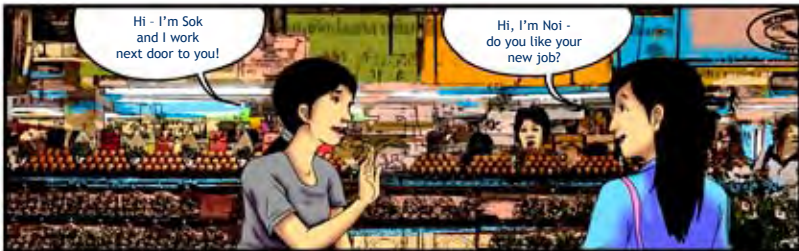
But the new employer could try to recover the commission paid to the broker by withholding some of your wages and/or your documents (Passport, ID card). Some employers have even locked up their workers during this time.

Never give your original documents to a broker or an employer even if they tell you it is for safe keeping - give them copies. The originals are yours, and they are valuable and difficult to replace. Without these documents you could become a prisoner as you need these to get home or sometimes even just to leave the workplace. You should also make extra copies for yourself in case you lose them.

**Do you need help now?  
Turn to the back pages of this booklet.**

I am a domestic  
worker. I have  
responsibilities but I  
also have rights....

I deserve to be treated  
fairly...like any other  
worker...and I demand  
that my dignity be  
respected...











Sunday...



## When to seek outside help



As a domestic worker, you have the right to seek outside help and assistance if:

- One of your rights has been violated by your employer.
- Your workload is too heavy, or you never have time to rest.
- Your duties are too difficult, compared to the pay and training you received. For example, you do the work of a professional nurse or cook.
- You have been unfairly dismissed from your job as a domestic worker and/or your employer has withheld your wages.
- You have been physically or sexually assaulted or harassed by your employer, one of the other family members, or another person working in the house.
- Your identity/work documents have been withheld by your employer
- Your employer or people working for your employer, have forced you to work against your will, or have denied you your right to leave the house during non-working hours

## Special notes for foreign migrants

- Under Thai law, migrant domestic workers may travel only within the province in which they are registered.
- If they do not obey this rule, the Thai government can immediately withdraw its permission to let them stay and work in Thailand and they may be sent back to their native countries.
- Domestic workers may travel to other provinces but only in the company of the employer or the spouse of the employer.





Moving from a rural area to a new city can be rewarding and exciting but it can also be frightening. Be cautious and always consider your own safety first. Regardless of your status you are entitled to receive help if you are ever in danger. It is your right as a human being. The authorities are obliged to protect you.

## Special notes for young migrants



**No child, Thai or foreign, below the age of 15 is permitted to work as a domestic worker in Thailand**

A young person over the age of 15 years and below 18 can be employed - but they should be given only light work. This is an international labour standard of the International Labour Organization and described in the labour laws of Thailand.

If you are in this age range, ask your employer about opportunities to go to school and to learn new skills.

Because young migrants are more vulnerable to human trafficking, labour and sexual exploitation, the Royal Thai Government warns migrants below the age of 18 that they should not attempt to travel to Thailand in search of work unless they are accompanied by a parent or legal guardian (e.g. not just an adult friend).

## Other cautions:

Most employers value the services provided by their household workers. Many offer a fair salary, time off each week, rest time during their work days, some privacy (e.g. their own room) and health and accident insurance.

Some employers, however, take advantage of a domestic worker's isolation by withholding wages, refusing to give any time off or even the right to leave the house. Foreign workers find themselves very vulnerable to this kind of abuse if they don't have work or residency permits for Thailand.

## How to know if you are being treated unfairly:



**In severe cases, abuse can be linked to forced labour and/ or slavery** - for example, if your employer refuses to pay you or let you leave the house, or uses coercion, deception or force (by threatening you, assaulting you, sexually abusing you). An employer should also not withhold your personal documents (ID, Passport, Work Permit). These are your personal possessions and they are important.



If you suffer any of these abuses you are entitled to report them to the Thai authorities and they are obliged to act on your behalf. Other groups (like the ones who gave you this booklet) may also be able to assist you.



**If you are arrested (because you don't have a visa or work permit), you still have the right to be paid for work you have completed!** If in doubt, contact one of the groups listed in the back of this booklet for more help (when you can).

FOR HELP ON THE REGISTRATION PROCESS AND WORK PERMITS FOR DOMESTIC WORKERS CALL [1506](tel:1506) (payphone/mobile in Thai only).

IF YOU ARE IN IMMEDIATE DANGER CALL [1300](tel:1300) (payphone/mobile in Thai only). Do not worry about your 'legal' or registration status. You will be helped.

# Help and Assistance in Thailand

## TRADE UNIONS & NON-GOVERNMENT ORGANIZATIONS (NGOS)

If you need help but are afraid to approach the authorities, you may contact one of these organizations for advice and assistance WITHOUT FEAR of arrest or deportation.

Organization	Phone #	Languages	Location
MAP Foundation	053 811 202 053 271 551	Burmese, Shan, Thai, English	Northern Thailand
Labour Rights Promotion Network (LPN)	034 434 267	Burmese, Thai	Samut Sakhon
Foundation for Child Development (FCD)	02 435 5281	Burmese, Lao, Thai	Office in Bangkok
Thai Action Committee for Democracy in Burma (TACDB)	02 216 4463	Burmese, Thai	Office in Bangkok
Human Rights and Development Foundation (HRDF),	053 223 077, 081 595 7578	Burmese, Mon, Shan, Thai, English	Northern Thailand
Home Net	02 513 9242	Thai and English	Office in Bangkok
Foundation for Women	02 433 5149	Thai and English	Office in Bangkok
Karen Domestic Workers' Association	081 348 3479	Po Karen, Sakaw Karen, Thai	Call from anywhere
Federation of Trade Unions - Burma	081 642 2296	Burmese, Karen, Mon, Thai	Call from anywhere
Labour Congress of Thailand (LCT)	02 758 3300	Thai	Office in Bangkok
Thai Trade Union Congress (TTUC)	02 384 0438	Thai	Office in Bangkok
National Congress of Private Industrial Employees (NCPE)	02 932 9870	Thai	Office in Bangkok
State Enterprises Workers' Relations Confederation (SERC)	02 537 8973	Thai	Office in Bangkok
Thai Labour Solidarity Committee (TLSC)	02 251 3173	Thai	Office in Bangkok

## GOVERNMENT AUTHORITIES

If you are in IMMEDIATE DANGER, you should contact the following authorities for assistance.

Organization	Phone #	Languages
For Immediate Help	1300	Thai
Police	191	Thai
Tourist Police	1155	Thai, English
Help with contract violations and work permits	1506	Thai
Lao PDR Consulate in Bangkok	02 539 6667-8 ext 109	Laotian, Thai, English
Cambodian Consulate in Bangkok	02 957 5851-2 (Monday - Friday)  02 957 5886 (labour issues)  081 826 8551 (after hours and emergency only)	Khmer, Thai, English



**PHONING HOME:** If you are staying in Thailand and want to phone home to another country, you must first dial an international access code <from Thailand dial - 001> then your country code <855 for Cambodia> <856 for Lao PDR> <95 for Burma/Myanmar> and then your local area code and number.

## Phone Numbers of Family and Friends:

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

7.

Notes:

The organization that gave you this booklet may also be able to give you advice or assistance

This publication is part of the  
Travel Smart – Work Smart Campaign,  
a decent work initiative of the  
International Labour Organization  
in Asia and the Pacific

Are you a Domestic Worker in Thailand?  
Young or old, Thai or foreign, woman or man

You have responsibilities – and rights!

Knowing these can help you avoid abuse and  
profit from your employment.

This booklet gives you advice on how to work and travel  
safely in Thailand, how to avoid abusive agents and employers,  
and where to go if you need help

Don't Be Scared – Be Aware!  
It's not too late – even if you face abuse now!  
Take Action!



*Work Smart – Stay Safe!*

This guide is offered free of charge to domestic workers and migrants  
through a network of partners

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