

Migrant workers in Taiwan rally for better pay, more time off

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Taipei, Dec. 13 (CNA) Migrant domestic workers took to the streets of Taipei on Sunday, calling for better legal protections, such as inclusion in Taiwan's minimum wage regulations and two days off per week.

At the rally held ahead of International Migrants Day on Dec. 18, the 100-plus workers from the Philippines, Indonesia and Vietnam gathered in front of the Legislative Yuan, along with representatives of labor rights groups, holding placards and banners.

"We want legal protection," one placard read, while another stated "We are not slaves."

They also called for the enactment of a household service law to protect the rights of migrant domestic workers.

Jasmin, a home helper from the Philippines who has been working in Taiwan for six years, said that her job is mainly cleaning up three to 10 times a day after elderly people who have bladder and bowel incontinence, but she is also required to do other household chores.

In the absence of legal protections, she said, domestic workers who suffer occupational injuries, emotional stress, and illness are often abandoned by their employers and job brokers.

Feni, an Indonesian caregiver who arrived in Taiwan three years ago, said she gets little rest, as she had to do household chores during the day and take care of her employer's parents at night.

Furthermore, she is allowed only one day off per month, on condition that she completes all her tasks before she leaves, and she is required to return to the house before 9 p.m. to start working again, she said.

According to a brochure handed out at the rally by the Migrants Empowerment Network in Taiwan (MENT), migrant domestic workers in Taiwan are paid NT\$17,000 (US\$600) a month at present, well below the minimum wage of NT\$23,800.

They are allowed one day off per week, but their employers can "buy off" that day by paying them NT\$567, the brochure said.

In addition, under Taiwan law, migrant domestic workers are not eligible to receive overtime wages, severance pay, occupational injury compensation, or retirement benefits, MENT said.

MENT coordinator Hsu Chun-huai (許俊懷) told reporters that in 2004, the organization proposed a Household Service Act, but it failed to reach the Legislature, and the Cabinet has not come up with an alternative bill since then.

He said MENT will try again next year to submit the proposed bill when the new legislative session starts. According to Hsu, the proposed bill has the support of Legislator Hung Sun-han (洪錫安) of the ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), who is expected to sponsor it.

Hsu expressed optimism about the fate of the bill next time around, citing growing public awareness of the vital role of domestic workers and an increase in the allocation of government resources for long-term care.

As of the end of October, about one-third of the 700,000 migrant workers in Taiwan were employed in the household service sector, according to data from the Ministry of Labor (MOL).

In a press statement in 2017, the ministry said the Labor Standards Act did not apply to migrant domestic helpers because they had different work hours and patterns than migrant workers in the manufacturing and business sectors.

The working conditions of migrant domestic helpers, including salary and work hours, are guided by contracts between them and their employers, the MOL said.

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