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# INVISIBLE NO MORE: Domestic workers organizing in Massachusetts and beyond

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# **INVISIBLE NO MORE:**

**Domestic workers organizing in Massachusetts and Beyond**

**By Natalicia Tracy, Tim Sieber, and Susan Moir**

**A research report from the Brazilian Immigrant Center  
and the Labor Resource Center at the  
University of Massachusetts Boston**

**October 2014**



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## PREFACE

### **Domestic Worker Organizing Today: Winning Significant Gains for Low-Wage Workers**

Domestic workers across the country are making it clear that, even in a difficult political environment, it is possible to make gains for low-wage workers. For the first time in many, many decades, domestic workers are finding ways to win. They are creating policy change that will improve the lives of hundreds of thousands of workers in tangible and substantial ways. The 2014 Massachusetts Domestic Workers' Bill of Rights is the most expansive codification of rights for this long-overlooked part of the labor force ever to be enacted.

In one sense, there is nothing new about domestic workers organizing for better wages and working conditions. From the days of the Atlanta washer-women's strike at the end of the 19th century through the household employee organizing of the 1960s and 70s, women have joined together to challenge an industry in which, traditionally, they have been poorly compensated and routinely overworked.

But today's domestic worker movement, while building on the past, is also breaking new ground.

It has generated new political protagonists – the immigrant nannies, housecleaners and elder caregivers who now make up a substantial segment of the work force and whose commitment to organizing is the foundation of today's victories. It has been strategically innovative, winning campaigns for domestic worker bills of rights in four states, with more to come. It has welcomed and built upon the support of allies from organized labor, immigrant and workers' rights groups, leaders from a range of faith communities, and ethically oriented employers. And it has networked and organized with women from around the world to win the very first international convention for domestic workers' rights.

Today's domestic workers' movement is a sustained and growing effort that draws upon and fertilizes the transformative vision and innovative organizing of communities of color, immigrant communities, low-wage workers and women of color. Domestic workers have stepped into their power. Their victories are expanding the realm of the possible, not only for themselves, but also for all who are committed to worker justice and dignity.

*Linda Burnham, Research Director,  
National Domestic Workers Alliance*



Photo Credit

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*“One of the problems that we encounter is that we ourselves don't think highly of what we are doing. Many of us are embarrassed at doing this work, and end up doing things that really make us angry later on for not speaking up. The changes need to start with us. We need to be proud of what we do. It's a job. It pays our bills. It helps us take care of our families, and we need to demand that it be treated as such.” – Sonia Felix*

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## Domestic Workers' Long Struggle for Respect and Labor Rights

The exclusion of domestic workers from recognition as real workers has deep, age-old roots in race, gender and economic discrimination. For centuries after European settlement of the United States, only people with less than full citizenship -- slaves, indentured servants, poor immigrants, and disenfranchised minorities and women-- did the work of cleaning others' houses and raising others' children. When workers in the United States finally won the right to organize in the 1930s, domestic workers were explicitly excluded from labor protections and the historic disrespect for the value of domestic work became enshrined in law.

With the end of slavery and the rapid spread of industrialization after the Civil War, domestic work was the primary paid occupation available to women. By 1870, almost a million women in the United States-- half of the women employed outside the home-- made a living as domestic workers. By 1900, domestic workers made up 26.9% all of employed women, and by 1940, almost three million women were working as domestic workers, 22% of all women working. The demographics of the workforce varied widely by region. In 1910 Seattle, 52% of all household servants were white immigrant women. In Philadelphia at the same time, African-American women made up the majority.<sup>1</sup> In different ways, these were workers disadvantaged by their racial, class, and/or immigration status, as well as by gendered cultural assumptions that "women's" work has less value than work that was done by men.

Collective struggles by domestic workers' to attain their labor rights and to organize to improve working conditions emerged before the end of the 19th century and have continued to the present. The most well known event is the Atlanta Washerwomen's Strike. In Atlanta, Georgia in 1881, 20 African-American laundresses formed a labor organization they named the Washing Society. At that time, 98% of black women labored as laundresses and other household workers. The organizers of the Society went door-to-door and, within weeks, they had grown to over 3000 members. Black churches,

mutual aid societies, and fraternal organizations contributed moral and financial support. Cooks, child nurses and other domestic workers joined the Washerwomen in a ten-day strike for a raise to \$1 per dozen pounds of laundry. The leaders were arrested, landlords threatened rent increases and city leaders tried to impose an exorbitant business tax on the Washerwomen. The women held strong and won a raise. The strike was one of most successful direct action protests carried out by African Americans in the late 19th century and established laundresses as instrumental to the New South's economy.<sup>2</sup>

The Atlanta Washerwomen have rightfully become a symbol of domestic workers organizing against great odds and of the early struggles of women of color for economic justice and recognition. Many other examples of domestic workers self-organizing campaigns have been largely invisible. (See BOX: INVISIBLE HISTORY). The successes and setbacks of organizing domestic workers have closely paralleled the long standing conflicts between the radical and conservative wings of the US labor movement. The earliest labor organizations, the National Labor Union and the Knights of Labor, espoused inclusion of all workers and organized women members. With the ascendancy of the American Federation of Labor in the late nineteenth century, the conservative philosophy of its founder, Samuel L. Gompers, took hold of the US union movement. Gompers held that only skilled workers, that is white males working in industrial workplaces, could effectively bargain with the employers and that bargaining should be limited to the "bread and butter" issues of wages and working conditions. Labor organizations adhering to these ideas had no interest in organizing domestic workers. These views have been sporadically challenged, most notably by the Industrial Workers of the World--the Wobblies--of the early twentieth century and the Congress of Industrial Organizations of the 1930s depression era. Both the IWW and the CIO supported domestic worker organizing campaigns and chartered women's locals. [See BOX: The Housemaids' Defiance] However, "Gomperism" prevailed and dominated the workers' movement in the US for over a century.

## **INVISIBLE HISTORY: Domestic workers organizing for labor rights**

Donna L. Van Raaphort documented the history of domestic workers organizing in the US and the popular culture's disparagement and ridicule of domestic workers in her 1988 book *Union Maids Not Wanted*.

Some of the most notable organizing campaigns included:

- The Working Women's Protective Union was formed in New York City in 1864 to assist domestic workers in nonpayment of wages. The Union successfully lobbied for one of the nation's first law's against employer wage theft.
- In 1866, washerwomen in Brooklyn went on strike for a raise from \$1 a day to \$1.25. In 1889, Black women domestics in Bibb City, Arkansas went on strike against their employers' ill treatment of them.
- Throughout the 1880's and '90's, popular magazines reported on regional organizations of domestic workers including the Domestic Servants Union in New York City, the Servant Girl's Union in Toledo, the Household Union in Holyoke, Massachusetts
- In 1897, Mary Hartropp, a young domestic in Kansas City, Missouri, organized the American Servant Girls Association. The Association had 5000 members in thirty locals.

- At the 1901 founding of the Working-women of America, members rejected the term "servant girl" and sought to elevate the status of paid domestic workers. The group disbanded after being taken over by reformist employers.
- Just before World War I, Jane Street of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) organized 6000 domestic workers into the Denver Housemaids IWW Local 113. Street's work inspired locals that were organized in Tulsa, Duluth, Seattle, Salt Lake City, Cleveland and Chicago. Street signed her correspondence, "Yours for a speedy abolition of domestic slavery." The locals disbanded when the federal government used the Espionage Act to destroy the IWW.

Newspapers and magazines of the nineteenth century also document many occasions of domestic workers organizing mutual aid clubs to protect against employer abuse and support each other during period of unemployment.

Sources: Van Raaphorst, D.L., *Union Maids Not Wanted: Organizing Domestic Workers 1870-1940*, New York: Praeger, 1988; "Report on condition of women and child wage-earners," Senate Documents, Vol. 94, 1909-10; Foner, P., *Women and the American Labor Movement*, New York: Free Press, 1979; Hayden, D., *The Grand Domestic Revolution*, Cambridge, MIT Press, 1981; "Letter from Jane Street to Mrs. Elmer S Bruse," <http://www.iww.org/history/library/Street/letter>.

In the 1930s, domestic workers' exclusion from labor organizing and recognition as "real workers" became institutionalized and enshrined in law. As the Roosevelt administration crafted its New Deal legislation to protect—for the first time in the country's history—the rights of workers in the United States to organize and bargain for their rights at work, labor-friendly politicians from the north and Southern Democrats made a "Devil's Bargain" to maintain Jim Crow labor market segregation. In exchange for Southern support in Congress, the new labor laws, including the National Labor Relations Act, the Social Security Act, and the Fair Labor Standards Act, would exclude domestic workers and agricultural workers. The effect was

to protect the rights of white workers for wage and hour protections, collective bargaining, unemployment insurance and a secure retirement while excluding the majority of black workers (and many Mexicans in the West) from those legal rights.<sup>3</sup> This pattern of using the occupational proxy of domestic and agricultural work for racist intent continued in the coming decades when the same exclusions were applied in the Occupational Safety and Health Act in 1970 and the Family Medical Leave Act in 1993.

In spite of the historic legal and labor barriers facing them, domestic workers are on the move again and building organizations and alliances for a future

with the rights and protections accorded all workers.<sup>4</sup>

## The Movement for Domestic Worker Rights: Organizing Nationally and Internationally

As the US opened up its borders to wider international migration through the late twentieth century and employment options for African American women broadened, the domestic worker labor force became primarily immigrant women. Economic inequality increased during the same period and the growing professional and business classes in urban areas created a strong market demand for domestic workers. In response to these changes, a variety of domestic worker associations and worker centers emerged to defend and advance workers' rights.

Domestic Workers United (DWU) was formed in New York City in 2000 by members of the Women Workers Project of the Coalition Against Asian American Violence (CAA AV), an organization of Filipina domestic workers, and Andolan Organizing South Asian Workers, an organization founded by South Asian immigrant workers. DWU extended its outreach to Caribbean, Latina and African workers. In 2010, with a membership of 4000 domestic workers and a broad coalition that included employers, unions, clergy and community organizations, DWU led a successful campaign for passage of the New York state Domestic Workers Bill of Rights, the nation's first comprehensive legislation extending basic rights and protections to domestic workers.<sup>5</sup>

Three years earlier, the movement went national at the first US Social Forum held in Atlanta in 2007. Thirteen domestic worker organizations from around the country met daily at the Forum and left having formed the National Domestic Workers Alliance (NDWA). Today the NDWA encompasses 44 affiliate organizations in 26 cities and 18 states that represent over 10,000 nannies, housekeepers, and caregivers for the elderly. The NDWA provides capacity and support to member organizations across the country in their efforts to develop domestic



worker leadership and build broad coalitions for domestic workers rights.

NDWA's initial efforts have focused on supporting campaigns for state-level legislation for Domestic Workers Bills of Rights. New York's success has been joined by Hawaii and California in 2013, and Massachusetts in 2014. [See BOX: Organizing with Love] Campaigns are also underway in Connecticut, Illinois, and Georgia and early stage organizing has begun in several other states. In each state, broad coalitions in support of the Domestic Worker Bill of Rights have included the AFL-CIO and labor unions such as the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) and the United Auto Workers (UAW), faith communities, employers' organizations, workers centers, women's organizations, and immigrant advocacy groups. These coalitions have been essential in winning political support for change.<sup>6</sup>

The power of the NDWA has been increased especially through its partnership agreement with the national AFL-CIO. In 2011, in a historic turn away from the Gompers legacy of exclusion, AFL-CIO signed a landmark agreement with NDWA to collaborate on issues of organizing, winning rights for excluded workers and building long-term relationships. A national partnership with SEIU was signed in 2012.<sup>7</sup>

Internationally, domestic workers formed the International Domestic Workers Network (IDWN)



Photo Daniele Villela

*Domestic workers telling their stories, finding community, and building solidarity for activism. On October 26, 2013, 32 Brazilian and Latina domestic workers gathered at the Brazilian Immigrant Center for a tri-lingual workshop on storytelling, focusing on their work experiences. As Ai-jen Poo has argued, “narrative power” is one of the types of power that domestic workers have to use in their struggle for dignity and rights. The workshop was done in partnership with the Dominican Development Center and Trainer and Storyteller Norah Dooley of Boston.*

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in 2006. The first goal of the IDWN was to fight for an international convention that would establish that domestic workers are indeed workers by law. The IDWN succeeded when the International Labor Organization (ILO) in Geneva adopted C189, the “Convention on Decent Work for Domestic Workers” in 2011. Lobbying for the Convention was the first partnership activity of the AFL-CIO and the NWDA. (see BOX: The Global Domestic Workers Movement). In 2013, 180 domestic worker representatives from 56 organizations and 40 countries met in Uruguay to create the plan to convert the international organization from a loose network to a federation. The International Domestic Workers Federation (IDWF) is now a membership organization with 47 affiliates in 43 countries.<sup>8</sup> Members include domestic worker unions, associations and worker centers. Among the IDWF’s key activities are:

- Organizing of migrant domestic workers in India, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Thailand, Zimbabwe, Argentina and Ethiopia
- Enactment of domestic workers policies/legislations in countries, particularly India, Indonesia, Cambodia, Brazil and Chile
- Campaigning against excessive recruitment fees on Indonesian migrant domestic workers

- Conducting strategic development planning among its affiliates
- Holding capacity-building and gender training activities with its affiliates, e.g. in Nepal, Cambodia, Kenya, Tanzania and Guinea
- Coordinating international action day activities

## **The Domestic Worker Movement in Massachusetts**

Massachusetts’ own efforts began in the summer of 2010. Following the passage of the Domestic Workers Bill of Rights in New York, the staff of the Brazilian Immigrant Center (BIC) went to New York to meet with Domestic Workers United staff and seek their guidance on how to organize for a Domestic Workers Bill of Rights victory in Massachusetts. Later that year, the Massachusetts Coalition for Domestic Workers was formed by the Brazilian Immigrant Center, the Dominican Development Center, the Brazilian Women’s Group/Vida Verde Cooperative, Matahari Eye of the Day, and the Women’s Institute for Leadership Development. Greater Boston Legal Services would later join the coalition as legal counsel in October 2012. Between 2010 and 2014, the Brazilian Immigrant Center reached out to domestic workers, while supporting the movement through its Domestic Worker Law & Policy Clinic, and an innovative Domestic Worker Mediation Program, that trained 32 workers and employers as mediators to help resolve workplace disputes. BIC also created the first-ever legal manual on domestic worker law for workers and employers. Since 2012 and in collaboration with photographer Mario Quiroz, BIC has sponsored a photographic exhibit of portraits of domestic workers that has traveled to public libraries in 12 cities throughout Massachusetts.

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**“I borrowed a lot of money to come here, and I took a job where I had to work a lot, and use a lot of strong products, but I never complained because I couldn’t afford to lose that job. I would do anything they asked me to do.”**

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Within the Coalition, the years 2010-2014 were spent organizing in a variety of ethnic communi-

ties represented by the state's domestic workers, building a grassroots movement advocating a Massachusetts Domestic Workers Bill of Rights. A statewide Domestic Worker Congress was held in Boston in June 2012. The Congress outlined all the issues that needed to be addressed as the Domestic Workers Bill of Rights for Massachusetts was being drafted. The Bill was officially submitted in January 2013 with over 40% of the House and Senate legislators signed on as co-sponsors. An overflow crowd of domestic workers, advocates and labor supporters attended a positive public hearing on the bill in November 2013. The final law was passed and signed in June 2014. In a testimony to the Coalition's organizing, no other pro-labor legislation has passed the Massachusetts legislature in a single session in recent memory. Labor and community support were essential in the success of the legislative and public campaigns. The Bill had the support of more than 80 endorsing organizations including the state AFL-CIO, all its constituent Labor Councils, four statewide SEIU Locals (1199, 32BJ, 615, and 888), as well as many faith communities, immigrant organizations, legal groups, and workers centers. The Massachusetts Domestic Workers Bill of Rights is the strongest won the US so far and will be fully implemented in 2015. [See BOX: The Massachusetts Domestic Workers Bill of Rights—the nation's strongest].

## **The Brazilian Immigrant Center's 2013 Brazilian Housecleaner Survey**

The domestic workers movement has produced valuable research in its efforts to collect better data on domestic workers and improve public messaging of its goals.<sup>9</sup> With a commitment to research and policy analysis on the Brazilian community in Massachusetts and in anticipation of implementation of the Bill of Rights, the Brazilian Immigrant Center undertook a 2013 community participatory research study by domestic workers about their working conditions. The research was done in collaboration with the University of Massachusetts Boston and with the support of the Sociological Initiatives Foundation.<sup>10</sup>

### **Occupational Health Issues Reported by Domestic Workers**

A 2005-6 survey of 163 Brazilian housecleaners in Massachusetts found that those surveyed resided in 32 cities and towns across the state. Ninety-six percent were female. They worked an average of 40.5 hours per week and cleaned an average of 15 houses per week. Many were exposed to a variety of ergonomic, chemical, and biological hazards while cleaning home and/or office environments. According to housecleaners' reports, their work is fast paced, requires awkward postures, involves repetitive movements, use of force, and heavy lifting. They also handle cleaning products that can affect their skin and respiratory system, and they come into contact with surfaces contaminated with viruses, bacteria, and fungi. The most common symptoms reported were back pain, and pain in muscles, legs, neck, shoulder, hands, fingers, and feet. As domestic workers organize for a greater voice in their working conditions, they will see progress on the study's recommendations for greener cleaning agents, greater access to personal protective equipment and changes in work organization

C. Eduardo Siqueira & Andrea Gouveia Roche, "Occupational Health Profile Of Brazilian Immigrant Housecleaners In Massachusetts" *New Solutions: A Journal of Environmental and Occupational Health Policy*, Vol. 23(3) 505-520, 2013

### **Research questions address housecleaners' concerns**

The Brazilian Housecleaner Survey was a worker-led survey of working conditions among Brazilian housecleaners, a large segment of domestic workers in the Greater Boston immigrant community. This survey took its place as a small-scale contribution to a long-standing genre of participatory action field investigations by domestic workers of working conditions in their own industry. Past domestic worker led surveys helped to build the movement, and to collect valuable data for use in drafting legislation and in public messaging.

## “The Housemaids’ Defiance”

**Lyrics by the Denver Housemaids’ Union (IWW)**

**Music by Jack Judge and Harry Williams (ca. 1916)**

We are coming all together;  
We are organized to stay.  
For nigh on fifty years or more,  
We’ve worked for little pay.  
But now we’ve got our union,  
We’ll do it never more.

Chorus

It’s a long day for housemaid Mary;  
It’s a long day’s hard toil.  
It’s a burden too hard to carry,  
So our mistress’s schemes we’ll foil.  
We’ll be silent no longer.  
We won’t be kept down.  
And we’re out for a shorter day this summer,  
Or we’ll fix Denver town.

We’ve answered all your doorbells,  
And we’ve washed your dirty kid.  
For lo these many, weary years,  
We’ve done as we were bid.  
But we’re goin’ to fight for freedom,  
And for our rights, we’ll stand.  
And we’re goin’ to stick together  
In One Big Union band.

We’ve washed your dirty linen,  
And we’ve cooked your daily foods.  
We’ve eaten in your kitchens,  
And we’ve stood your ugly moods.  
But now we’ve joined the union,  
And we’re organized to stay.

You’ve paid the going wages.  
That’s what kept us on the run.  
You say you’ve done your duty,  
You cranky son-of-a-gun.  
We’ve stood for all your crazy bunk,  
And still you rave and shout  
And call us inefficient  
And a lazy gad-about.

Chorus

<http://politicalfolkmusic.org/wordpress/denver-housemaids-union-the-housemaids-defiance/>

Why housecleaners? Women are half of the 140,000 Brazilian immigrants currently in Massachusetts. Almost 30% work at some point as domestic servants. Most are housecleaners, the major female occupation among Brazilians, the largest and fastest growing of the state’s foreign-born groups.<sup>11</sup> Up to 70% of Brazilians are also undocumented and insecure immigration status traps many in domestic service, a mostly unregulated industry within the informal economy where worker exploitation is common.<sup>12</sup> For today’s more working-class immigrant stream, most of whom have entered the country “uninspected” (that is, through unauthorized border crossing), this is even more true than for the middle class migrants studied in the first major wave of Brazilian immigration to the US in 1980s New York.<sup>13</sup>



The Survey sought to describe the working and living conditions of Brazilian housecleaners in the major Brazilian communities of Massachusetts and the housecleaners’ perceptions of the most problematic of their working conditions much as two earlier studies had done.<sup>14</sup> The Survey also looked at whether workers with undocumented immigrant status are more likely to be darker in skin color, and of lower social class, than others, and secondly, that these workers are more likely to be the workers who are the most aggrieved over social and economic disrespect and exploitation in the workplace. Among Brazilian immigrants, many studies already recognize the close association between lower social class, African or mixed-race descent, and undocumented status.<sup>15</sup> The 2012 NDWA national survey of domestic workers, which covered 14 states and including Massachusetts data,

concluded that “undocumented workers face lower wages and worse working conditions,” noting a 17% “wage penalty” in terms of average compensation, and that, “race/ethnicity and immigration status appear to intersect...creating significant disadvantages for undocumented Latinas” [which include Brazilians].<sup>16</sup>

Finally, the survey assessed a variety of health-related complaints that appear to result from repetitive stress injuries and exposures to toxic chemicals in cleaning products common to housecleaners and whether there is an association between health problems and the length of time housecleaners have worked in the industry.

Initial survey questions were drawn from the 2012 National Domestic Workers Alliance national survey, the 2005 domestic worker survey instrument used by the Collaboration for Better Work Environments for Brazilians (COBWEB) project.<sup>17</sup> The completed survey focused on issues not examined in earlier studies of Massachusetts’s domestic workers. Many of the key questions arose from the historic first Congress of Massachusetts Domestic Workers held in Boston in 2012. In breakout sessions for the purpose of identifying key issues to be addressed in a proposed Domestic Worker’s Bill of Rights, the 110 participants recorded their main complaints about their work life. The strongest worker complaints were directed at unwarranted interpersonal disrespect and devaluing of their work they experienced from employers, often accompanied by mistreatment, exploitation, and denial of labor rights – even existing rights they are already entitled to – as well as their basic human rights. Domestic workers believe deeply in the importance of their work, and feel pride in offering quality service as professionals in caring for their employers’ homes, families, children, and elderly.

### **Survey methods: a community-led social survey**

Participants who played different roles in the Housecleaners Survey had shared definitions of the surveyed population.

- A domestic worker is a person who works within their employer’s household. Domestic

workers perform a variety of household services for an individual or a family, from providing care for children and elderly dependents to cleaning and household maintenance, known as housekeeping.

- Housecleaners typically are live-out domestic workers who periodically visit their clients’ homes, usually weekly or bi-weekly, to clean interior domestic space. This commonly encompasses vacuuming and dusting of all living areas, scrubbing and polishing of kitchen and bathroom appliances, surfaces, and floors, and sometimes areas occupied by family pets. Since work boundaries are not well defined, and highly variable depending on employer, however, housecleaners also are often asked to do other chores that might include laundry, washing dirty dishes, changing bed linens, childcare, or running errands. Brazilian housecleaners often work in groups, whose “owner” coordinates their schedules, supervises their work, is in charge of financial relations with clients, and transports workers from site to site (up to 5 to 10 houses per day).

Ten current or former housecleaners were trained in survey research methods at an all-day session at UMass Boston in March 2013. Some of the surveyors had worked previously as field researchers on the 2012 NDWA national survey. The survey instrument was piloted at domestic worker meetings at the Brazilian Immigrant Center. In all, the 59-item survey contained 3 screening questions, 11 demographic questions, and another 45 questions on working conditions. The survey took 30-45 minutes to administer. Between May and September 2013, the field surveyors conducted face-to-face interviews with other domestic workers across the state in 54 Massachusetts cities and towns clustered in the three regions with the highest Brazilian populations: Greater Boston, including North and South Shore; Metro West; and Cape Cod. Surveys were conducted in Portuguese. One hundred and ninety-eight surveys were collected using a combination of convenience and snowball sampling methods. Respondents needed to be 18 years of age or older, have worked as a housecleaner in the previous month, and live in Massachusetts.



Photo by Andrea Gouveia Roche

*Brazilian women currently or formerly working as housecleaners at training session in survey research methods, with Project Director and trainer Natalicia Tracy (at center of photo in black jacket), at the Sociology Department of the University of Massachusetts Boston, March 2013. The training, the research instrument, and face-to-face interviews were all done in Portuguese.*

The 198 respondents were all women. Although husbands occasionally accompany their wives as partners when doing the work, there were no such instances among the respondents.

The other demographics of the respondents displayed a profile similar to other workers in their ethnic community, and to what has been found more widely for other Latin American immigrants:

- They are a young adult group in their prime working and childbearing years. Over half (56%) were under 40 years of age. More than a quarter were in their 40s, and only 15% fifty or older.
- Two thirds of the sample (66%) reported being married or cohabiting, and the other third were a combination of single at 17%, 9% divorced, 6% separated, or 2% widowed.
- Most were supporting other family members with their pay, presumably many of these children of the women, the majority of whom were mothers.
- This is a moderately well educated group. Almost half (47%) are secondary school graduates and more than a quarter (27%) had completed a college degree before migrating to the US. Another 27% were less well educated, having completed middle school or less in Brazil.

As recent immigrants, this was a population not very well schooled in English. About half (51.5%) said they “understand” English well or very well, and the remainder assessed their understanding as “fair” or “poor,” but many fewer rated themselves as high on reading or writing ability. Almost two in five, or 39.4%, said their reading ability was poor, and only a third termed it “good” or “very good.” In speaking, more than a quarter (27.8%) evaluated their ability as poor, and only 38.4% as good or very good.

As regards racial identification, most situated themselves within US racial terminology, inflected with Brazilian understandings of race:

- The majority (54%) self identified as “white,”
- Almost one in five (21%) self-identified as “Latino,” borrowing a North American term to connote a mixture predominantly white
- 16% self-identified as “brown,” a close analogue to the most frequently used Brazilian racial categories of *pardo* or *moreno*
- 7% self-identified as “black.”

When participants were asked how long they had been residing in the U.S., a surprising majority (58%) responded that they have been here for more than 10 years; 24% had been here between 6 and 9 years; 17% reported that they had been residing in the U.S. for less than 5 years.

## **The Working Life of Brazilian Housecleaners In Massachusetts**

The Brazilian Housecleaners Survey provides a social portrait of the lives of Brazilian domestic workers in Massachusetts and detailed information on wages and working conditions.

### **Low wages, lack of benefits and widespread wage theft**

A large number of respondents reported problems with the inadequacy of their pay and benefits and not being paid for some hours that they work. More than four out of ten (43.6%) also reported that what they earn does not give them enough money to meet basic expenses. Fully 81% of the

survey respondents used their earnings to support other people apart from themselves. In almost half the cases (45%), the worker supported an additional two or more people. Almost half (44.2%) also send remittances to Brazil to support family members.

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**“The employers always leave notes about what I should do, and many times tell me to do things that are not agreed to be part of my job.”**

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Various forms of wage theft were reported. Employers often do not feel the need to compensate workers for hours spent on extra tasks, often defined by the employer as a favor and requested outside the scope of regular work. Of the 25.6% of workers who reported having hours added in this way, almost two thirds (65.9%) said that they were not paid extra for them. The problem is that these “favors” are recurrent, not rare, and the workers have no fixed job contract specifying duties. Thirteen percent of respondents were not paid in one way or another for the full hours that they work.

In addition to wage theft, many housecleaners report other forms of employer manipulation and failure to pay fairly for work preformed.

- 1.3% reported illegal deductions taken from their pay
- 10% reported being paid with bad checks
- 86% reported being paid late
- 24% reported being charged for lost or broken objects in the home

Domestic workers’ employers, operating in the informal economy, rarely offer housecleaners any paid time off. Only 9.1% received any pay for national holidays that fell on their regular workday; only 7.8% were granted unpaid maternity leave; 98% had never received a paid sick day; and 93% had not received a paid vacation.

The widespread lack of job descriptions in the housecleaning sector creates many opportunities for employers to engage in various forms of exploitation that have severe impacts on the economic

### Organizing with Love

“Domestic workers - who care for some of the most important elements of our lives like our families and our homes – are among the most vulnerable workers in the United States today. There are an estimated 2.5 million women who labor as domestic workers. Domestic workers serve as nannies, housekeepers, and caregivers for the elderly. They often perform the duties of nurses, art teachers, counselors, tutors, assistants, and nutritionists as well.”

“The combination of these dynamics - the racialized exclusion of domestic workers from labor laws, the gendered devaluation of women’s work in the home, the decentralized structure of the industry and the economic pressures facing immigrants from the global South – makes domestic workers extremely vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. In this context, organizing is both difficult and absolutely essential.”

“During our campaigns, we learned that just about everyone is connected – in one way or another - to someone who works as a domestic worker.”

“Rather than framing our work as a narrow workers’ rights campaign focused strictly on the issues of domestic workers, we intentionally built the campaign around broader axes of structural inequality. We based our frames on our analysis of the root causes of the problems facing domestic workers including the devaluing of “women’s work” in the home, the legacy of slavery in the United States, and the lack of a social safety net in the United States and internationally.”

– Excerpted from Ai-jen Poo’s “Organizing with Love: Lessons from the New York Domestic Workers Bill of Rights Campaign”

Ai-jen is the Director of the National Domestic Workers Alliance. She was awarded a MacArthur “Genius” Fellowship in September 2014.

circumstances of these low income workers. Only 1.6% of the respondents had written contracts that specify duties and hours. A majority (59%) of housecleaners in the survey were confused about the scope of their job duties, a systemic problem for domestic work everywhere. Without a written contract it is easy for employers to add extra duties and extra hours to what is normally expected when the work day begins. This happens frequently to more than a quarter (25.6%) of the workers. Within the entire sample, many report working these extra hours only under duress, or severe pressure (10.6%). This kind of accretion of extra duties beyond the regular work, or “job creep,” is common in all kinds of domestic work. Some nannies, for example, whose work is to care for children, are asked to do housecleaning, and some housecleaners are asked to care for children. Typically these assignments occur randomly and unpredictably, as well, whether or not the worker has other commitments scheduled for after the usual work time.

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**“I would like to have some security of employment, to not be fired without being advised at least one week or one month ahead of time, because it would give me time to find another job.”**

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The lack of contracts also results in greater insecurity of employment and income. Over two thirds (68%) of the domestic workers surveyed report that their employers cancelled their job with little or no notice, due to family vacations or perceived lack of need for the scheduled service. Typically, there is no pay given for these cancellations, even if they only occur when the worker reports for work at the home.

**General working conditions: fast-paced, without breaks, with high exposure to toxic chemicals**

The work done by housecleaners is unrelenting, fast-paced, and pressured. If the housecleaner is part of a group under the supervision of a “schedule owner,” the team must rush at a fast pace at each house, without breaks, and any food or drink tends to be taken in the car rushing between jobs.



Even those who work alone report they work at a fast pace. Overall, almost two-thirds characterized their work as “fast paced,” and a majority (53.8%) reported working all day without any breaks, even for eating.

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**“I fell on the stairs with the vacuum and twisted my ankle. It really swelled up, but my boss told me to keep working until I was done. At the end of the day my boss deducted money from my pay to fix the vacuum.”**

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Few of the respondents have had any professional training. Knowing how to do domestic work is something learned on the job, often through trial and error, sometimes through the supervision given by schedule owners, and sometimes by employers. Most housecleaners among the immigrant community in the United States did not previously do housecleaning as a profession in Brazil. Almost nine of every ten (86.7%) reported they had never received any professional training for their work. This has implications for their vulnerability to safety and health dangers on the job. Lack of training is also closely related to the relative lack of knowledge that domestic workers have about their labor rights as workers, for instance, that domestic workers in Massachusetts have long been covered by the the minimum wage law and overtime provisions, as well as mandatory rest and meal breaks. [See BOX: The Contributions of Our Foremothers]

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**“It is really hard when we get to work, and our employer tells us they do not need us that day, and we are counting on that money to pay our bills.”**

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One of the most significant safety hazards that housecleaners experience in the workplace is from chronic exposure to toxic chemicals that are part of the commercial cleaning products they use in their work. These are chemicals designed for the level of use of the normal homeowner. Exposure of the homeowner to the chemicals is infrequent, and does not pose so much of a risk for this reason. The danger for housecleaners, however, is that they have intensive exposure to these chemicals, many times a day, and day after day. A majority of the respondents (57%) report that they are aware that they work with such dangerous products. Sometimes housecleaners are not aware of the harms these chemicals can pose for them. There are safer alternatives, such as green cleaning products, but almost five of six (84.3%) respondents report they do not know about such products and for that reason never or rarely use them. Fewer than half (42.3%) wear safety gloves regularly. Overall, three out of five (60%) do not routinely use protective equipment such as gloves or eye protectors, and 39% report they do not know what to do in case of an accident. These findings are similar to those from the occupational health and safety survey as reported by Siqueira and Roche in 2013 [see BOX: Occupational Health Issues Reported by Domestic Workers].<sup>18</sup>

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**“I want more information on workers’ rights and about green products.”**

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Economic insecurity for domestic workers extends to risks of injury or illness. Domestic workers are not covered under workers’ compensation law unless they work more than 16 hours for the same employer, which is rare for housecleaners to do. Even though Massachusetts has had universal mandatory health insurance for seven years, one of eight (13.4%) domestic workers in

### **The Massachusetts Domestic Workers Bill of Rights—the nation’s strongest**

The Massachusetts Domestic Workers Bill of Rights, passed by the legislature and signed by the Governor in 2014, will guarantee domestic workers these labor rights:

- The right to be paid for all working time
- Guaranteed (though unpaid) days of rest
- The right to sue if injured by coworker
- Limits on deductions for food & lodging
- The right to privacy for all workers
- Protection against labor trafficking
- The right to written evaluation
- The right to ask for a written employment contract for those working 16 or more hours
- The right to document retention & notice of rights
- The right to notice/lodging/severance before termination without cause for live-ins
- The right to protection against retaliation
- The right to (unpaid) maternity leave, without loss of employment – 8 weeks for birth or adoption of 1 child, 16 weeks for twins
- Access to the Massachusetts Commission Against Discrimination for discrimination complaints, including sexual harassment [this provision took effect September 24, 2014].

Unlike many states, Massachusetts labor law already granted domestic workers the right to minimum wage and overtime, although wage theft has still been rampant. The Bill of Rights will become effective on April 1, 2015 and will be enforced by the state’s Attorney General.

the survey reported that they lack health insurance of any kind. Those immigrants who are undocumented are not eligible in any case for health insurance that would be affordable to them.

### **Employer mistreatment: modest but unacceptable incidence**

Employer mistreatment and abuse of domestic workers was reported at a modest, but unacceptable, level. Because housecleaners have multiple employers, on the other hand, it increases their chances of victimization by someone. One in ten respondents reported being falsely accused of stealing in cases where family members misplace things and/or being verbally abused by being subjected to insults and name-calling. Four percent reported being subjected to racial slurs. Almost 3% had experienced threats of physical assault and/or sexual harassment. Firing was the most common form of mistreatment: over 4% of respondents were fired for staying home with a sick family member, over 10% for asking for a raise in pay, and 12% for being pregnant.

The Survey analysis strongly supported the conclusion found in previous studies that workers with undocumented status are more likely to be darker in skin color. The association between documentation status and greater incidence of employer mistreatment of workers, however, was only partially and quite weakly upheld. Non-white racial minorities were less likely to be given unpaid leave from work duties on national holidays and less likely to be allowed to take unpaid time off for visits to the doctor.

Analysis showed that workers newer to the profession of housecleaning suffered more injuries than those who have been working longer. The Survey asked about many potential types of injuries, including difficulty breathing; back injuries and other strains or pulled muscles; wrist, shoulder, elbow or hip pain; other soreness or pain; skin irritation; contracted infectious illnesses, such as the flu; injuries from needles and other sharp objects; and contamination from body fluids. All these injuries were experienced by at least some workers in the sample, and a full 29.3% of respondents experienced some type of work injury during the previ-

ous 12 months. One injury - back injuries including pulled back muscles - was positively associated with increasing years of service as a domestic worker. Almost a quarter of the respondents (23.7%) reported they saw their job as dangerous or hazardous in nature.

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**“I have experienced] abuse, screaming, and discrimination on account of being an immigrant and not knowing the language”**

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There was a downward trend in job injuries as workers worked longer. This may reflect the caution and training that comes from doing the job over a longer period. Workers with more experience may learn to protect themselves better. It also probably reflects the fact that newer workers mostly lack prior training in how to do the work in a way that minimizes harm from workplace hazards. Only 7% of the domestic workers surveyed had done domestic work prior to arriving in the United States as immigrants. Most had worked in white-collar service occupations in Brazil, such as sales and clerical work and some were schoolteachers, bank workers, social service professionals, store managers, government employees, accountants, administrative assistants, dental assistants, and university students. Their jobs in Brazil reflect the fact that Brazilian domestic workers in Massachusetts are fairly well educated. Prior to immigrating, more than a quarter had done at least some university study, or had degrees, and almost half were high school graduates. They are clearly a population very capable of and amenable to training, which simply has not been made available to them as domestic workers.

### **Research for action**

The findings of the 2013 Massachusetts Brazilian Housecleaners Survey are consistent with the recent national study by the NDWA<sup>19</sup> and the previous state-based study conducted in 2005-2006.<sup>20</sup>

- There is a high level of wage theft related to poorly defined job duties and hours, chronic “job creep,” and lack of contracts.

- Though housecleaner income is essential for support of workers' families, their incomes are very insecure. They are often discharged without notice when employers abruptly decide they no longer need their services, or left without work for weeks when families go on vacation without notifying them.
- There is a high level of exposure to toxic products and little knowledge or practice about alternatives or how housecleaners can protect themselves.
- There is an unacceptable incidence of harassment, disrespectful treatment, and arbitrary and punitive employer decisions.

The evidence that conditions for immigrant housecleaners in Massachusetts had not improved over the past decade supported the campaign of the Brazilian Immigrant Center and the Massachusetts Coalition for Domestic Rights to change labor laws in Massachusetts to provide domestic workers with the legal status of "real workers" and to educate domestic workers on ways to protect themselves against the hazards of the job. Modeled on the legislation previously passed in New York, California and Hawaii, "An Act Establishing a Domestic Workers Bill of Rights" was introduced to the Massachusetts legislature in January 2013. In the fall of 2013, the Housecleaners Survey was presented in testimony given by Brazilian Immigrant Center staff and domestic workers at a public hearing for the Bill of Rights before the Joint Committee on Labor and Workforce Development, at a colloquium at the University of Massachusetts Boston and at a subsequent legislative hearing.<sup>21</sup> The Massachusetts Domestic Worker Bill of Rights was approved by the legislature and signed into law by Governor Deval Patrick in June 2014. [See BOX: Domestic Worker's Bill of Rights].

In addition to those workplace problems identified in the Brazilian Housecleaners Survey that are addressed in the Massachusetts Domestic Workers Bill of Rights, the Brazilian Immigrant Center has used the findings to refine their educational campaigns for legislators, lobbying arguments, and public messaging for organizing domestic workers. The Brazilian Immigrant Center has formed an alliance with the US Department of Labor's Occupational Safety

and Health Administration's Region One office to develop the first-ever, two-hour Domestic Worker Safety and Health Course. The training, covering ergonomics, protection against blood-borne pathogens, toxic cleaning products, violence and discrimination in the workplace, and sexual harassment, along with information on the provisions of the new Bill of Rights, is being piloted in Massachusetts and Connecticut.

During September 2014, the findings were also submitted for study to the Connecticut Task Force on Domestic Workers, established by the Connecticut General Assembly to investigate working conditions for domestic workers for the purpose of defining appropriate new legislation advancing new labor rights for these workers.

## **Worker Centers, Community-Labor Partnerships & Contingent Workers: Current and Future Organizing Prospects**

Domestic workers are among a growing group of workers in today's economy who are temporary, part-time, and largely lack the protections of the National Labor Relations Act and other labor laws. Often termed "independent contractors," estimates are that there are more than 42 million of these contingent workers and that they may make up a quarter to a third of the US workforce.<sup>22</sup> Though some of these jobs are in the professional ranks, like domestic workers many labor as individuals or in small groups in isolated workplaces, under decentralized conditions that make organizing difficult. Like domestic workers, contingent workers may work without a contract and with no job security. Like domestic workers, terms of employment and working conditions are negotiated individually and job by job. Contingent workers are heavily situated in the informal economy where wages are low and workers are frequently immigrant and female, and may be undocumented. Until recently these workers and industries were largely neglected by organized labor.

Since the 1970s, community-based non-profit worker centers have come together to represent the interests of low wage and excluded workers. Over the past

## The Contributions of Our Foremothers

In 1935, the National Labor Relations Act finally made organizing a union legal for workers in the United States. But as part of the compromise with Southern legislators to get the NLRA passed, domestic workers and agricultural workers, the Black workers of the South, were excluded from the protections of the Act and left without the right to organize. How did it happen that domestic workers in Massachusetts gained the right to organize?

In 1970, the Women's Service Club of Boston and its indefatigable President Melnea Cass, championed the enactment of House 5797, An Act Making Domestic Employees Subject to the Labor Laws. The cornerstone of this act was the right of domestic workers to organize and freedom from retaliation for exercising these rights. The act also brought domestic workers under the protections of wage and hour law (minimum wage and overtime), unemployment law, and workers compensation law for workers working more than 16 hours a week.

The Women's Service Club initially was founded as a neighborhood knitting club to support service members of color fighting in World War I. By 1919, the club had over 300 members, purchased a building, and incorporated its name and mission of services and programs to the African-American community. Melnea Cass was its third president. After graduating as the valedictorian of her class, she took a job as a domestic worker. She became a grassroots organizer in her community registering African American women to vote, joined the Boston branch of the NAACP and eventually became its President. As a result of her

activism, she was affectionately known as "the First Lady of Roxbury."

After being elected President of the Women's Service Club, Cass continued to organize movements to expand employment opportunities for African American women. She organized the Homemakers Training Program which certified domestic workers so that they could receive social security and other governmental benefits.

On August 11, 1970, Cass wrote to Governor Sargent in support of House 5797: "On your desk is House Bill #5797 to be signed. It is a product of the Women Service Club's very diligent and consistent efforts to make this a reality. We have sponsored projects to assist those women and men, especially black, who for many years were relegated to household work because of discriminatory practices, customs, etc. They were exploited as you know. We are determined that this shall pass away and that these forgotten workers will share in the benefits of all other workers especially in their categories. Will you please sign this bill and give the Women's Service Club the honor of being present with you for a picture which will be history for many people, especially black women who will be affected."

The Massachusetts Coalition for Domestic Workers has a proud legacy as it makes the rights mandated in 1970 and in 2014 a reality in the lives of domestic workers.

Contributed by: Veronica Bopp, Volunteer, Greater Boston Legal Services, whose extensive research included original documents at the Massachusetts Archives, and Monica Halas, Greater Boston Legal Services.

twenty years, immigrant worker centers, including the Brazilian Immigrant Center, have proliferated within the expanding space for organizing the growing numbers of immigrants who are being exploited in low wage labor markets. An estimated 230 such centers exist in at least 32 states.<sup>23</sup> Place-based rather than workplace- or employer-based, worker centers

frequently organize along ethnic and class lines and where collective bargaining is not possible. The centers can and do intervene directly with employers to support and advocate for individuals or small groups in matters of wage theft, safety and health, discrimination, and worker compensation in case of injury.<sup>24</sup> They also offer training, education, mediation, and

legal representation; forward complaints to state and federal labor authorities; and bring public attention to both labor law scofflaws and model, “high road,” employers.<sup>25</sup>

The centers also engage in civic action at the local, state, and federal level, winning labor-friendly, more inclusive ordinances and laws such as Domestic Worker Bills of Rights and living wage protections. Over 60 centers also maintain hiring halls that function to regulate minimum wage and other working conditions within local markets, mainly in construction, but sometimes in domestic work.<sup>26</sup> To increase their visibility and power, worker centers have formed national networks, including the National Day Labor Organizing Network (NDLON), Interfaith Worker Justice, Restaurant Opportunity Center (ROC), the Food Chain Workers Alliance, and the National Domestic Worker Alliance (NDWA). Worker centers recently have also begun to be invited to join as affiliates of state and local labor councils.

Significant shifts in organized labor’s relationships and outreach to contingent workers began to evolve as the labor movement embraced proposals for progressive immigration reform. In 2006, the AFL-CIO launched the National Worker Centers Partnership that authorized worker centers to formally affiliate with state labor federations and labor councils. The labor-community coalitions that have resulted from these engagements have drawn organized labor into broad grassroots campaigns for immigration reform, voting rights, and economic justice. Worker centers have lent their weight and organizing skills to labor’s agenda, such as initiatives to raise the minimum wage and ensure paid sick days for workers. The rapid passage of the Massachusetts Domestic Worker Bill of Rights is a direct result of the partnership formed by the Brazilian Immigrant Center, the Massachusetts Coalition for Domestic Workers and the Massachusetts AFL-CIO. Labor’s engagement was instrumental in building the political support necessary for the win. The statewide AFL-CIO, its President, the Labor Councils across the state, and every SEIU local all contributed essential political support and resources to the successful campaign.

The partnership between the National Domestic Workers Alliance and the national AFL-CIO has also



had many benefits for domestic worker organizing. The AFL-CIO is US labor’s official representative to the International Labor Organization. The federation has included NDWA in its activities at the ILO, including advocacy for the 2011 Convention 189 on Decent Work for Domestic Workers, and has committed itself to support grassroots domestic worker organizing through collaboration and support from local and state labor councils. Such labor-worker center partnerships obviously benefit both sides. Worker centers gain from the labor movement’s deep legislative and policy experience and support at the local, state, and federal levels. The worker centers, in their own turn, connect labor to wider movements and new constituencies for organizing, and help raise the floor in working conditions, pay, and benefits for all working people.

Domestic worker organizations have spearheaded a national coalition of labor and community organizations to address broader social issues of care in our society. The Caring Across Generations Coalition advocates for a comprehensive approach that expands and supports a strong home care workforce and makes long-term services and supports affordable and accessible. They are bringing together social justice partners across a wide range of interests (organized labor, senior advocates, community-labor coalitions, women’s organizations, and domestic workers) to build a national movement of the “caring majority” through culture change work; local, state and federal policy advocacy; online campaigning; and field activities and civic engagement.<sup>27</sup>

In some organized industries, such as construction,

outreach to new ethnic constituencies to join union apprenticeship programs is a promising direction for growth in the organized workforce. Worker center hiring halls also continue to grow in number, especially for day laborers. Cooperatives and social enterprise models are another possibility for promoting collective organizing and impacting working conditions, pay and benefits among domestic workers and others. Massachusetts's law actually permits collective bargaining for domestic workers, a heretofore never used opening that offers promising possibilities for future organizing.

The current growing presence of worker center-

labor partnerships is marked by deep collaboration and complementarity that serve the interests of America's working families across the spectrum. It is a productive and promising development for both parties in a time of growing inequality and exploitation of all working people in our society. As demonstrated by the recent successes among domestic workers, new models of organizing bring not only better working conditions, but also dignity and visibility to workers. In these initiatives, partnerships have been quite effective in growing the labor movement, as can be seen in the fact that they have come under increasing attack by right-wing, anti-labor forces everywhere.

## **THE GLOBAL DOMESTIC WORKERS MOVEMENT**

The international domestic worker labor force of 53 million (83% female) is rapidly growing. One of every 13 female waged workers on the planet is working in the industry and the ratio is as high as one in four in Latin America and the Caribbean, and almost one in three in the Middle East. Most are international labor migrants, who, in a "chain of care," leave their own families behind so that they can support them at a distance by caring for others.

In September 2013, the global movement for domestic worker rights reached a new milestone in organizing when the International Labor Organization's "Convention on Decent Work for Domestic Workers" (ILO Convention 189) went into effect. The Convention was later augmented with passage of Recommendation 201 addressing organizing rights, advocacy, and research and policy development. These victories were the result of the hard work of the International Domestic Workers Network (IDWF) representing affiliates from 33 countries. In recognition of this achievement, the IDWF was awarded the George Meany/Lane Kirkland Human Rights Award by the AFL-CIO at its national convention in 2013.

Convention 189 articulates minimum standards for fundamental labor rights, including fair pay and benefits, working time, occupational safety and

health, social security, relations with private placement agencies, complaint and enforcement procedures, and special provisions for child workers, migrant workers, and live-ins. The list is remarkably similar to that found in US-based Domestic Worker Bills of Rights, highlighting how common the workplace issues are in all corners of the globe.

Recommendation 201 calls for the right to organize collectively, committing signatories of Convention 189 to: "Identify and eliminate any legislative or administrative restrictions or other obstacles to the right of domestic workers to establish their own organizations or to join the workers' organizations of their own choosing and to the right of organizations of domestic workers to join workers' organizations, federations and confederations."

Fifteen countries have ratified Convention 189 through new legislation and regulations as of 2014: Argentina, Bahrain, Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, South Africa, Italy, Nicaragua, the Philippines, Spain, Singapore, Thailand, and Venezuela. In 2013, an even stronger world organization, the International Domestic Workers Federation, with 47 affiliate organizations in 43 countries, was formed to continue the global movement.

The International Domestic Workers Federation website is at [www.idwfed.org](http://www.idwfed.org). Follow international developments on their Facebook page.

## BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES ON THE WOMEN IN THE DOMESTIC WORKER PORTRAIT PHOTOS

SONIA FELIX is a housecleaner who began at BIC as a volunteer, and became a leader in the Massachusetts domestic workers organizing initiative. She was active in her church, and the Boston-based arts group, Step Up for Social Change, before returning to Brazil in 2014 after a 13-year stay in the Boston area.

ANGELA SENA is a domestic worker, who does elderly care, and is Director of Cultural Affairs for the Central de Trabalhador Imigrante Brasileiro in Framingham MA. Before coming to the United States from Brazil, she finished a university degree and operated a business involved in caring for the elderly.

FATIMA CHRASKA was an elementary school teacher in Brazil, and has lived in the United States for 17 years. She has done all kinds of domestic work, including nannying, elder care, and housecleaning, and has participated actively in the Massachusetts and national domestic worker movements.

SONIA SOARES has been a domestic worker for 20 years in the US. Formerly in Brazil she was a mechanical engineer, and a high school mathematics teacher. After being involved in BIC, she was trained as a certified mediator for the Domestic Worker Mediation program. She testified on behalf of the pending Domestic Workers Bill of Rights as one of two worker representatives before the Massachusetts legislature's Joint Labor & Workforce Development Committee in November 2013.

LUCI SANTOS MORRIS is a domestic worker who between 2012-2014 was the Domestic Worker Community Liaison for the Brazilian Immigrant Center, and served as worker representative for BIC on the board of the National Domestic Workers Alliance (NDWA).

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## Resources

### Brazilian Immigrant Center

Domestic Worker/Employer Mediation Project;  
Domestic Worker Law & Policy Clinic; Immigrant  
Justice Project; Worker's Rights Project; Health &  
Safety Training  
14 Harvard Ave, 2nd Floor  
Allston, MA 02134 617-783-8001  
[www.braziliancenter.org](http://www.braziliancenter.org) [BIC@braziliancenter.org](mailto:BIC@braziliancenter.org)

### Legal Resources/Access to Lawyers

Greater Boston Legal Services (GBLS)  
(617) 371-1234 [www.gbbs.org](http://www.gbbs.org)  
Legal Advocacy and Resource Center (LARC) 617-  
603-1700 or toll-free 1-800-342-LAWS  
[www.larcma.org](http://www.larcma.org)

### Mass Legal Help

[www.masslegalhelp.org](http://www.masslegalhelp.org)  
National Lawyers Guild Lawyer Referral Service  
(617) 227-7008  
<http://www.nlgmass.org/lawyer-referral-service/>

### Massachusetts Bar Association Lawyer Referral Service

617-654-0400 or 866-MASS-LRS  
<http://www.masslawhelp.com/>

### Boston Bar Association Lawyer Referral Service

617-742-0625 or 800-552-7046  
<http://www.bostonbarlawyer.org/>

### Discrimination

#### Massachusetts Commission Against Discrimination

One Ashburton Place  
Sixth Floor, Room 601  
Boston, MA 02108  
617-994-6000  
<http://www.mass.gov/mcad/>

### Victim Rights Law Center

(for victims of sexual assault)  
617-399-6720  
<http://www.victimrights.org/>

### Wage and Hour Questions

#### Massachusetts Attorney General's Office, Fair Labor Division

One Ashburton Place  
Boston, MA 02108  
Fair Labor Hotline: 617-727-3465  
<http://www.mass.gov/ago/bureaus/business-and-labor/the-fair-labor-division-folder/>

### US Department of Labor, Wage & Hour Division

Phone: 1-866-487-9243  
<http://www.dol.gov/whd/>

### Workplace Health and Safety

#### Occupational Health Surveillance Program

<http://www.mass.gov/eohhs/gov/departments/dph/programs/occupational-health-surveillance.html>

#### Occupational Safety and Health Administration

OSHA Regional Offices, Region I,  
JFK Federal Building, Room E340  
Boston, MA 02203  
617-565-9860 <http://www.osha.gov>

### Workers' Compensation Benefits

#### Department of Industrial Accidents

Boston: 617-727-4900  
Fall River: 508-676-3406  
Lawrence: 978-683-6420  
Springfield: 413-784-1133  
Worcester: 508-753-2072  
<http://www.mass.gov/lwd/workers-compensation/dia/>

**The Brazilian Immigrant Center** is a grassroots community organization that supports immigrant workers on issues of workplace and immigrant rights. Through organizing, advocacy, education, leadership training, capacity building, civic participation, and policy analysis we promote our community's exercise of its civil and human rights. We join Brazilian and other immigrants in organizing with allies against economic, social and political exclusion in order to create a more just society for all.

**The Labor Resource Center (LRC)** at UMass Boston is an undergraduate education and research center. The mission of the LRC is to advance the interests of workers and their organizations through education and research. Our work centers on the belief that the labor movement, representing both organized and unorganized workers, is an essential force for economic and social justice. Our education and training programs enhance students' skills and knowledge as leaders, activists, and citizens. Our research initiative, "The Future of Work in Massachusetts," is focused on issues faced by low wage women workers, especially women of color.

