



► Promising practices for fair recruitment

December 2021

Establishment of the National Union of Malagasy Domestic Workers (SENAMAMA)

Key points

- The SENAMAMA union was founded on 4 September 2019, and now has more than 2,000 members
- SENAMAMA's founding members were returning migrant domestic workers. Their experience in the domestic workers union in Lebanon inspired them to take action at home
- The SENAMAMA union is the first organization of domestic workers in Madagascar
- SENAMAMA has gained recognition as a player in the promotion of decent work in Madagascar and is regularly involved in tripartite dialogues and discussions

Focus

FRI pillar: Empowering and protecting workers

Sector: Domestic work

Country: Madagascar

Responsible organization(s): Sendika Nasionalin'ny Mpiasa An-trano Malagasy (SENAMAMA) and International Domestic Workers Federation

aspiring to offer Malagasy workers better working conditions, by defending their rights and providing a platform for their voices.

It was during their overseas employment experience that the founding members began to carry out advocacy actions to advance workers' rights and build their network, including with the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the International Domestic Workers Federation (IDWF). Upon their return to Madagascar, the founding members were determined to capitalize on the experience and knowledge gained on workers' rights from both the ILO and the IDWF by creating the SENAMAMA trade union. Within the framework of the EU-funded [REFRAME project](#), the union benefited from the support and guidance of the ILO in collaboration with the IDWF, notably through capacity building workshops, organizational support, and support in

Description of the practice

The National Union of Malagasy Domestic Workers (SENAMAMA) was officially created on 4 September 2019 by two former migrant domestic workers

terms of communication tools and working equipment.

In Madagascar, domestic work remains a precarious occupation, poorly protected by current law. The majority of domestic workers are women and are often in vulnerable situations, including high risk of violence and abuse, sexual harassment or rape. The sector is still characterised by informality and working conditions that fall below the ILO minimum standards. For example, domestic workers are among the lowest paid, earning between US\$10 and US\$25 per month.

The majority of migrant workers from Madagascar work in the domestic worker sector. Kuwait, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and Lebanon are among the top destinations in this sector, even though the Government of Madagascar considers them "high risk countries" and issued a suspension decree targeting these destinations in 2013. Driven by poverty and lured by job opportunities and higher wages in these countries, hundreds of young Malagasy women still leave the country each year despite the ban being in place. Through their migration experience, the founding members of the union are familiar with the risks, challenges and abuses faced by Malagasy migrant domestic workers. Yet, because of their migration abroad, they have also experienced the critical importance of organizing domestic workers to protect and promote their rights.



Group photo during the first National Congress of SENAMAMA held on 1-2 June 2021, @SENAMAMA

It is within this frame of reference that the union aims to organize, inform and protect domestic workers in Madagascar or abroad, including those departing or returning, through advice, advocacy and representation in policy oriented discussion and dialogues and advocacy platforms.

Proof of impact/progress

Despite the restrictions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the SENAMAMA union has been active in the following areas:

- The organization took part in the process of revising the labour code and aligning it with the Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189). In particular, the union contributed to the definition of the term "domestic worker" and the introduction of a standard contract.
- Alongside the ILO, the union supported the government of Madagascar in the repatriation of more than 300 migrant workers from Kuwait, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and Lebanon, at the beginning of the COVID-19 health crisis.
- The union has recruited more than 2,000 members in 3 regions of the country (Analamanga, Vakinankaratra and Haute Matsiatra).

SENAMAMA's long-term goal is to enable domestic workers to acquire sufficient capacity and access to the relevant spaces to advocate for the protection of their rights, both in Madagascar and abroad, and to be able to influence policy discussions in areas that directly affect them.

In addition, following its first National Congress in June 2021, SENAMAMA was able to define its objectives and establish its action plan for 2021 - 2025. The main objectives identified are to increase the number of domestic workers registered with the National Social Security Fund and to raise awareness among employers regarding the affiliation of domestic workers to health coverage schemes.



Photo of an activity conducted by the union SENAMAMA and led by the president of the organization Myriam RAHARILANTOSOA © SENAMAMA

Other promising features

Participation and representation

Although the union's activities were severely restricted by the crisis linked to the COVID-19 pandemic, within two years the organization was able to carve out a place amongst other actors working to promote decent work in the country, and is regularly involved in tripartite dialogues and discussions alongside the government, employers and other trade union organizations.

In particular, the union is working closely with the Union of Autonomous Trade Unions of Madagascar (USAM) to assist and support domestic workers who encounter problems in their workplace. This represents an important step forward for this vulnerable group of workers, who historically have had no possibility of remedy against abuse.

Relevance

Since 2013, there has been a suspension of exit visas for migrant workers and a series of restrictions that greatly limit the migration of workers abroad. Domestic workers are particularly affected by these measures. The Malagasy government has since ratified the Migrant Workers Convention (No. 143),

the Private Employment Agencies Convention (No. 181), and the Domestic Workers Convention (No. 189), as well as the protocol to Convention No. 29. Since 2019, the government has undertaken a reform of the labour code, which takes into account its new commitments. With regard to labour migration, an improvement in the exit visa application processes for migrant workers is expected, focusing on transparency and administrative efficiency. In addition, a new law on private employment agencies, strengthening state regulation and improving their professionalism, and the finalization of Bilateral Labour Agreements. These new provisions will allow the lifting of restrictions on labour migration and, consequently, to ensure better monitoring for more protection of migrant workers. In this context, the SENAMAMA union will play a crucial role in informing and guiding these new departures.

Five years of the Fair Recruitment Initiative

- This promising practice is part of a series, and results from a stocktaking exercise undertaken five years after the launch of the Fair Recruitment Initiative (FRI).
- The FRI aims to ensure that recruitment practices nationally and across borders are grounded in labour standards, developed through social dialogue, ensure gender equality. Specifically, they:
 1. Are transparent and effectively regulated, monitored, and enforced;
 2. Protect all workers' rights, including fundamental principles and rights at work (FPRW), and prevent human trafficking and forced labour; and
 3. Efficiently inform and respond to employment policies and labour market needs, including for recovery and resilience.

Resources

[Résumé de pays : le recrutement équitable à Madagascar](#)

[Examen des lois, politiques et pratiques concernant le recrutement des travailleurs migrants à Madagascar](#)

[ILO General Principles and Operational Guidelines for Fair Recruitment and Definition of Recruitment Fees and Related Costs \(GPOG\)](#)

Contact details

International Labour Organization
Route des Morillons 4
CH-1211 Geneva 22
Switzerland

Conditions of Work and Equality
Department

E: fairrecruitmentinitiative@ilo.org