

## IMPROVING DOMESTIC CARE WORKER WELLBEING THROUGH TRAINING AND PROFESSIONALISATION – THE CASE OF EBINCOLF

### Introduction

Family care provision in Italy is deeply embedded in the welfare system. Home care workers play a crucial role in supporting family care work in Italy and are present in higher numbers than in most other EU countries. While the sector faces challenges related to the professional recognition of care work, Italy stands out as a somewhat unique case within Europe where around 42% of domestic workers are registered with social security, effectively making them formal employees.<sup>1</sup>

EBINCOLF<sup>2</sup> encompasses various types of domestic workers, who provide families with care-related services such as childcare, long-term care in situations of dependence and disability, as well as household support services such as cleaning, ironing, gardening and home maintenance. As EBINCOLF's initiatives are targeted at all domestic workers, this term is used throughout the case study, but the focus is specifically on the impact on home care workers and this is sometimes specified by using the term of 'home care workers' instead of 'domestic (care) workers'. Informal home carers are also an important target group for EBINCOLF's awareness campaigns and formalisation efforts and are therefore also covered in this case study.

A combination of early legal recognition, collective bargaining and enforcement mechanisms in Italy has given domestic care workers access to some basic labour rights and social security benefits.<sup>3</sup> The existing conditions provide an adequate foundation for developing and implementing occupational safety and health (OSH) initiatives and training, such as those provided and supported by EBINCOLF, the joint body established by the most representative national trade unions and employers' organisations in the domestic care sector in Italy. The current collective bargaining agreement includes protection from OSH risks such as those related to the use of equipment (telematic or robotic tools) and exposure to specific chemical, physical or biological agents.<sup>4</sup>

EBINCOLF presents an interesting joint approach to improving OSH by various stakeholder groups in the domestic care sector through the formalisation and professionalisation of the sector. This case study has been developed using two complementary approaches: desk research, and qualitative interviews. Two experts were interviewed: an Italian researcher in labour law and European social law, and a senior representative of the employers' associations in Italy's domestic work sector.

The case study is part of a research project<sup>5</sup> carried out with the aim of providing an overview of research on the OSH of home care workers.

<sup>1</sup> Seiffarth, M. (2022). Potenziale für „gute Arbeit“ im Privathaushalt? Regulierung und Interessenvertretung migrantischer Pflegekräfte in Italien. WSI Mitteilungen, 75(5), p. 386. <https://doi.org/10.5771/0342-300X-2022-5-386>

<sup>2</sup> See: <https://ebincolf.it/>

<sup>3</sup> Seiffarth (2022, pp. 389-391).

<sup>4</sup> Brocardi. (2020). Articolo 28 Contratto Collettivo Nazionale del Lavoro Domestico Tutela delle condizioni di lavoro. <https://www.brocardi.it/contratto-collettivo-colf-badanti/art28.html>

<sup>5</sup> The full report is available at: <https://osha.europa.eu/en/publications/home-care-workers-comprehensive-overview-occupational-safety-and-health-risks>

## Description of the EBINCOLF Initiative

### Background



**Ente Bilaterale Nazionale del Comparto  
Datori di Lavoro Collaboratori Familiari**

Source: EBINCOLF Website

The *Ente Bilaterale Nazionale Collaboratori Familiari* (EBINCOLF), which translates as the *National Bilateral Agency for Family Workers*, is a national joint body in Italy established in December 2002. This body was formed through the national collective bargaining agreement for domestic workers to support both employers and workers in the sector. The organisation manages certification, training and safety initiatives in the home care and domestic sector and is dedicated to improving working conditions, professionalisation and safety standards legislation in home-based care.<sup>6,7</sup>

The initiative was developed to address key challenges in Italy's domestic care sector, where approximately 90% of workers are women and 72% are migrants,<sup>8</sup> of whom a significant portion work informally. EBINCOLF's activities are guided by the principle that formalisation through professionalisation benefits both workers and employers by enhancing the quality of care, improving working conditions and, generally, creating more stable employment conditions.<sup>9</sup> This step towards professionalisation is supported by Italy's approach to enforcement. The National Social Security Institute (INPS) can charge fines of up to €12,000 on households that fail to register their employees, creating a significant incentive for compliance.<sup>10</sup>

Italy's high level of formalisation is rooted in its socio-political development of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Domestic workers in Italy gained important social protections as early as the 1950s, including (limited) maternity leave (1950), health insurance (1952) and Christmas bonuses (1953). [The Special Law No. 339 of 1958 Per la tutela del rapporto di lavoro domestico](#) (For the protection of domestic employment relationships), formally incorporated domestic care workers into the social protection system for employees.<sup>11</sup> The law is applicable to domestic workers who work at least four hours per day for the same employer. However, only one article in the Law (Art. 6, l. 339/1958) seeks to protect domestic care workers from the most basic OSH risks. Furthermore, since May 1974, the early recognition of domestic workers' rights has been further strengthened through the first National Collective Bargaining Agreement for domestic workers. This established a foundation for regulating the sector and has continued to evolve since then.<sup>12</sup>

In 2023, a judgment was made by the Italian Supreme Court (Corte di Cassazione) that ruled that the protection of workers' health and safety under Article 2087 of the Italian Civil Code did apply to domestic workers and thus obliged their employers to protect workers from OSH risks. The 2023 ruling provided EBINCOLF with a legal foothold to ensure better OSH for these workers, as previously, domestic workers had been neglected under this piece of legislation. The reasons behind the history of legal neglect in the domestic sector are, among others, high levels of undeclared employment, limited oversight in the private workplace and an outdated legal framework. Whereas workers in other sectors are protected from modern OSH risks through new legislation specific to those sectors, the Italian

<sup>6</sup> Ebincolf. *Who we are*. <https://ebincolf.it/chi-siamo/>

<sup>7</sup> Expert Interview (20 May 2025).

<sup>8</sup> Seiffarth, M. (2023). Collective bargaining in domestic work and its contribution to regulation and formalization in Italy. *International Labour Review*, 162(3), p. 507. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ilr.12382>

<sup>9</sup> Seiffarth (2023, p. 513).

<sup>10</sup> Seiffarth (2022, p. 389).

<sup>11</sup> Seiffarth (2022, p. 389).

<sup>12</sup> Seiffarth (2022, p. 389).

domestic sector still relies on the 1958 Special Law No. 339, which, especially when modern OSH challenges arise, can be outdated and in need of improvement to sufficiently protect workers in a home environment.<sup>13</sup>

Currently, the domestic care sector has a very productive collective bargaining culture. However, the collective bargaining agreements made between trade unions and employers' organisations in the sector only apply to workers whose trade union or employer is a party to one of these agreements. Domestic care workers that are not covered by the collective bargaining agreements, because they are not trade union members nor are their employers part of an employers' organisation, can only rely on the basic rights under the Special Law No. 339 of 1958 and the Civil Code norm that obliges employers to protect workers' OSH risks. This group of workers cannot depend on the representation and support of a trade union and their collective agreements when they are faced with OSH risks at the workplace and in conflict with their employer.<sup>14</sup>

## Organisational structure

EBINCOLF is a joint body and functions as an umbrella organisation, managing partnerships and bringing together key stakeholders.<sup>15</sup> EBINCOLF is co-managed by representatives of the six member associations and thus needs a functioning administration that prevents institutional deadlock. Furthermore, the administrative body of EBINCOLF also approves the budgets for training, certification, awareness campaigns and structures that finance health benefits and emergency situations, like the COVID-19 crisis.<sup>16</sup> The organisation brings together a diverse group of key stakeholders:

### Employer representation

- FIDALDO (Federazione Italiana Datori Di Lavoro Domestico) is the Italian Federation of Domestic Employers and is an umbrella organisation for the four oldest and most significant national associations 'that represent families who employ housekeepers, carers and babysitters'; they include: Assindatcolf, Adld, Adlc, and Nuova Collaborazione.<sup>17</sup>
- DOMINA (Associazione Nazionale Famiglie Datori di Lavoro Domestico) is a national association of domestic employers in Italy. They help support and guide families in managing a safe employment relationship with their domestic workers. DOMINA proposes training projects to improve the qualifications of domestic workers as part of the EBINCOLF initiative.<sup>18</sup>

### Worker representation

- Federcolf is the primary trade union for domestic workers in Italy, both in public and private workplaces. The trade union defends the economic, moral, welfare and legal interests of all domestic workers in Italy. Furthermore, Federcolf has an important role in integrating immigrants into Italian society.<sup>19</sup>
- FILCAMS CGIL (Federazione Italiana dei Lavoratori del Commercio Turismo Servizi) is the Italian trade union for workers in commerce, hotels and canteens, as well as service employees in the tertiary, tourism and services sectors. FILCAMS CGIL is active throughout all regions of Italy to protect worker activities at a trade union level.<sup>20</sup>
- Fisascat Cisl or F.I.S.A.S.C.A.T. (Federazione Italiana Sindacati Addetti Servizi Commerciali, Affini e del Turismo) is the Cisl category federation that represents workers in the tertiary, tourism and services sectors.<sup>21</sup>
- UILTuCS (Unione italiana lavoratori turismo commercio e servizi) is a combination of multiple historical trade unions in Italy spanning over various sectors. It represents, among others, tourism, commerce and services workers.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Expert Interview (8 May 2025).

<sup>14</sup> Expert Interview (8 May 2025).

<sup>15</sup> Ebincolf. *Who we are*.

<sup>16</sup> Expert Interview (20 May 2025).

<sup>17</sup> FIDALDO. *Fidaldo, chi siamo*. <https://www.fidaldo.it/federazione-datori-lavoro-domestico/>

<sup>18</sup> DOMINA. *Chi siamo*. <https://associazionedomina.it/chi-siamo/>

<sup>19</sup> Federcolf. *Federcolf: il sindacato delle colf*. <https://www.federcolf.it/chi-siamo-federcolf/>

<sup>20</sup> FILCAMS CGIL. *Chi siamo*. [https://www.filcams.cgil.it/page/chi\\_e\\_la\\_filcams\\_e\\_cosa\\_fa#](https://www.filcams.cgil.it/page/chi_e_la_filcams_e_cosa_fa#)

<sup>21</sup> Fisascat. *Chi siamo*. <https://www.fisascat.it/presentazione>

<sup>22</sup> UILTuCS. *La nostra storia*. <https://uiltucs.it/la-nostra-storia/>

## Results

The core of EBINCOLF's activities involves providing certification, conducting research, organising training sessions and developing safety resources.

EBINCOLF organises hundreds of **training courses** annually across the country. They are designed for both beginners and more experienced domestic workers, focusing on developing professional skills and creating more awareness for safety.<sup>23</sup> Furthermore, these courses are supported by online tools such as EBINCOLF's **health and safety notebooks**. There are five comprehensive notebooks that offer practical guidance on health hazards, safety measures and accident prevention in households. The notebooks are all two-page-long brochures with accompanying cartoons. These are an important creation by EBINCOLF to keep domestic workers safe. Each notebook addresses a different topic that can improve the OSH of domestic workers:<sup>24</sup>

1. [Cleaning and hygiene in the house](#)
2. [Electricity in the house](#)
3. [Stairs and tools](#)
4. [Using gas at home](#)
5. [Handling and lifting loads](#)

Each notebook has an average of four themes, for example: *Ingestion of (toxic) substances*; *Conscious use of household appliances*; *Slowly and carefully from the bed to the wheelchair*; and *What should you do when you smell gas?*



Source: EBINCOLF website and notebook on *Handling and lifting loads*<sup>25</sup>

A notable result from the COVID-19 crisis was EBINCOLF's collaboration with *Doctors without Borders*. Together these organisations developed nine guideline booklets for home care and domestic workers to increase awareness of the risk of infection and its prevention. These resources, which are also available in English, cover the following topics:

1. [Transmission / Contagion / Incubation](#)
2. [Symptoms / Diagnosis / Vulnerable Groups / Case definition](#)
3. [Health of staff and those assisted / Prevention and Monitoring](#)
4. [Safeguarding patients and healthcare workers](#)
5. [Home care](#)
- 6-7. [What to do in case of suspected COVID-19 infection](#)
8. [Who is vulnerable. How to reduce the risk of contagion](#)
9. [Psycho-social reactions to the epidemic. How to protect yourself](#)<sup>26,27</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Ebincolf. *Ebincolf Official Website*. <https://ebincolf.it/>

<sup>24</sup> Ebincolf. *Notebooks*. <https://ebincolf.it/quaderni/>

<sup>25</sup> See: <https://ebincolf.it/>

<sup>26</sup> Ebincolf. *Mutual Solidarity Fund (MSF)*. <https://ebincolf.it/msf/>

<sup>27</sup> Expert Interview (20 May 2025).



The booklets inform the reader about the risks related to COVID-19 and the preventive measures to be adopted. They also address different challenges that domestic workers were likely to come across during their work at the time of the pandemic. Booklets 1, 2 and 6-7 provide domestic workers with information on the technicalities of COVID-19 and actions to undertake when a COVID-19 infection is suspected. An important function of the guideline booklets was to protect the workers themselves, and booklets 3, 4, 8 and 9 specifically address the physical and mental health of workers and patients. Lastly, booklet 5 focuses on home care and informs home care workers on what to wear at work (personal protective equipment for daily and risk situations) and how to dispose of it correctly.<sup>28</sup> On top of the guideline booklets, EBINCOLF also published five informative videos that describe how to manage the work environment in a safe manner to avoid COVID-19 infection.<sup>29</sup>

EBINCOLF functions as a **certification body** accredited by ACCREDIA (the national accreditation body in Italy). They provide professional certification for domestic workers according to the national standard UNI 11766:2019, which regulates skills requirements and competencies in different categories of domestic work, including knowledge about health and safety risks associated with the different tasks under the wide umbrella of domestic work (such as falling, biological risk, chemical hazards, correct waste disposal, food safety and body hygiene).<sup>30,31</sup> Since 2023, the **CERTICOLF**<sup>32</sup> trademark has been used to certify family assistants that include the following categories: general multifunctional housekeepers (also known as domestic workers), babysitters and carers. Certified workers receive an additional 24 hours of paid leave, which leads to the total sum of 64 hours per year (uncertified workers who are part of a trade union are eligible for 40 hours of paid leave per year). Domestic workers are eligible for this certification if they have a basic knowledge of the Italian language, have completed a relevant training course in the last three years and have at least 12 months of work experience within the last three years.

EBINCOLF also functions as a **research observatory** in the field of domestic work, although this is less of a priority for the organisation. The organisation conducts analyses, studies and surveys to understand the working conditions, employment situations, wage levels and real-life applications of the collective agreement across territories, as well as the social security and welfare situation of domestic workers.<sup>33</sup>

## Success factors and challenges

EBINCOLF's approach of combining training, certification and offering practical safety resources to address challenges faced by domestic workers' functions has been exemplary for improving domestic care workers' occupational wellbeing. Its unique circumstances — national bargaining and social partner collaboration — presents a good example to understand how organisations can complement legislation and help support the recognition and formalisation of a whole sector of workers such as home care workers.<sup>34</sup>

### Success factors

The establishment of the EBINCOLF body by the **national collective bargaining agreement** (CCNLD) provided institutional legitimacy and cooperation of key stakeholders and offered a platform for the employer and worker associations to find common goals and strategies to improve the sector. This paved the way for change by and for the employees and employers of the domestic care sector. One of the initiatives that has been successful is the development of a **certification programme** and the incentivisation of domestic workers to get certified. The additional paid leave entitlement (24 extra hours per year) creates an incentive for workers to pursue certification. In turn, the certification benefits

<sup>28</sup> Ebincolf. *Mutual Solidarity Fund (MSF)*.

<sup>29</sup> Ebincolf. *Ebincolf Speciale COVID-19*. <https://ebincolf.it/gratis-il-video-corso-sul-covid-19/>

<sup>30</sup> Ebincolf. *Who we are*.

<sup>31</sup> UNI. (2019). UNI 11766:2019. Attività professionali non regolamentate – Assistente familiare: colf, baby sitter, badante – Requisiti di conoscenza, abilità e competenza [Non-regulated professions – Domestic workers, baby sitter, caregiver – Knowledge, skill and competence requirements]. Ente Italiano di Normazione (UNI).

<sup>32</sup> Ebincolf. *Certification*. <https://ebincolf.it/certificazione/>

<sup>33</sup> Ebincolf. *Who we are*.

<sup>34</sup> Seiffarth, M. (2023, pp. 509-512).

families with need of care as it increases the quality of care received. As many workers are usually isolated from one another, attending a course can create a feeling of community and offer a place to exchange knowledge and experiences. It also offers them the chance to improve their Italian language skills.<sup>35</sup>

Furthermore, EBINCOLF also collaborated with *Doctors without Borders* to develop **COVID-19 resources**. This collaboration brought forth nine guideline booklets on OSH with information cards and video training on how to work with people during the COVID-19 crisis. The informative booklets reached many workers in the sector and led to institutional strengthening of the sector during the pandemic period.<sup>36,37</sup> The focus on skills development and certification aligns with the broader goal of improving care quality and creating more stable employment relationships. By providing certification services free of charge across the country, EBINCOLF removes financial barriers to professionalisation for domestic workers, many of whom are in rather precarious economic situations.

## Challenges

**Collective bargaining agreements** have their **limitations**, especially in the domestic care sector, because many workers are not members of trade unions, nor are their employers often part of an employers' organisation. This disqualifies them from directly receiving the benefits of collective bargaining agreements between trade unions and employers' organisations, leaving workers with very basic protections under the law. However, due to the limited individual bargaining power of domestic workers and the fact that collective bargaining agreements are often used as the reference standard by the Italian courts, it is likely that non-union members can rely on the agreements when there are disputes regarding unfair wages, severance or dismissal protections, and entitlements to rest, holidays or contributions. Thus, non-union members can still depend on the collective bargaining agreements in most cases in Italian courts.<sup>38</sup> The rise of intermediaries and especially temporary employment agencies for domestic care workers in Italy is expected to increase the number of trade union members and workers' rights in the sector, thus improving the coverage of the workers in the sector through collective bargaining agreements.<sup>39</sup>

When domestic workers are employed directly by families and have their **work environment in the patients' home**, they are more likely to come across OSH risks. These OSH risks stem from the non-standard nature of the domestic setting as a workplace, making both caregivers and patients more prone to accidents during at-home care compared to environments like hospitals and elderly care homes.<sup>40</sup> Furthermore, family dynamics can complicate the relationship between employee and employer, as the employer is often a family member of the patient. Domestic workers, especially those with an immigrant background, are often dependent on the work that they do for these families, successful communication regarding their social benefits is often limited, and many workers are not aware of the benefits of membership to a trade union.<sup>41</sup> **The lack of protection for home care workers during the COVID-19 crisis** showcased just how little rights they held, especially in comparison to 'regular' employees. Multiple decrees that were installed to protect 'regular' care workers in Italy explicitly excluded home care workers, therefore, putting them and their patients at higher risk during the COVID-19 crisis.<sup>42</sup>

Lastly, there are many **barriers to training domestic workers**, because long training hours are incompatible with workers' schedules and employers (often families) can rarely afford to allow workers enough time off to attend longer trainings. The main challenge for EBINCOLF is therefore the certification of home care and domestic workers — only around 2000 workers are certified annually. Consequently, their strategic focus is now shifting towards certification instead of training. The French model is taken as an example of advanced institutionalisation. The most important difference between

<sup>35</sup> Seiffarth (2023).

<sup>36</sup> Expert Interview (20 May 2025).

<sup>37</sup> Ebincolf. *Ebincolf Speciale COVID-19*.

<sup>38</sup> Centro Studi Corrado Rossitto. (n.d.). Verification of sufficient remuneration pursuant to Article 36 of the Constitution [La verifica della retribuzione sufficiente ex art. 36 Costituzione]. <https://www.centrostudirossitto.it/la-verifica-della-retribuzione-sufficiente-ex-art-36-costituzione/>

<sup>39</sup> Expert Interview (8 May 2025).

<sup>40</sup> Expert Interview (20 May 2025).

<sup>41</sup> de Martino, C. (2021). Who looks after carers? The speciality of domestic work domestic work to the test of Covid-19 [Chi bada alle badanti? La specialità del lavoro domestico alla prova del Covid-19], *DIRITTO DEL LAVORO e di RELAZIONI INDUSTRIALI*, 169(1), pp. 53-78.

<sup>42</sup> de Martino, C. (2021). Who looks after carers? The speciality of domestic work domestic work to the test of Covid-19.

the Italian and French models is that the French model is state-delegated, while the Italian model is created and distributed on an organisational level such as CERTICOLF. The state-level certification seems to have a better status in France and has been able to change the mindset regarding training and certification for many employers of domestic workers. It is now the norm for home care workers in France to hold state certification.<sup>43</sup>

## Transferability

The EBINCOLF initiative highlights how formalisation, professionalisation and strong social partner collaboration can significantly increase awareness of working conditions and OSH in the domestic care sector. Its accessible certification and training programmes demonstrate the value of combining skills development with practical safety measures tailored to home care environments.

The importance of linking professional recognition to tangible benefits, ensuring that legal protections are extended to domestic workers and developing targeted OSH tools stand out as key lessons. For successful implementation elsewhere, initiatives should also consider the importance of outreach to non-unionised and migrant workers, and to ensure home care workers are not excluded from broader labour protections targeted at 'regular' care workers.

EBINCOLF has been partially implemented throughout all of Italy, which mostly includes the adoption of guidelines that are available online, namely, EBINCOLF's five health and safety notebooks and the nine COVID-19 guideline booklets. However, further implementation varies by region. Additionally, there has been some international interest, such as from the Basque Country in Spain, with which EBINCOLF is in close contact regarding the possibilities of implementing the model there. Still, the EBINCOLF joint body is currently more focused on self-development with an eye on the French model as a viable reference model.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Expert Interview (20 May 2025).

<sup>44</sup> Expert Interview (20 May 2025).