Shramik Sanjal

# Statement on International Equal Pay Day

**Equal pay & dignity for every 'worker'.**
**Labour has no nationality**

## The Origin of International Equal Pay Day

18th September marks International Equal Pay Day, a global observance representing longstanding efforts to achieve equal pay for work of equal value. The day was officially established by the United Nations General Assembly in December 2019, through Resolution A/RES/74/142, and first observed in 2020.[1] The day builds on the 1975 Fourth World Conference on Women's commitment to **"equal pay for equal work**"; precisely on the Equal Pay International Coalition (EPIC) launched in 2017 under the joint leadership of the International Labour Organization (ILO), UN Women, and the OECD's Gender Initiative, together with governments, worker organizations, and employer organizations.[2] Equal pay is also included in the global development agenda: **UN Sustainable Development Goal target 8.5,** which urges the international community to "achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men and equal pay for work of equal value" by 2030.[3]

*"By 2030, achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men, including for young people and persons with disabilities, and equal pay for work of equal value."*[1]

## Rationale for Shramik Sanjal

For Shramik Sanjal, International Equal Pay Day is more than a gender issue; it is a profound migration and human rights issue. This statement is issued in acknowledgement of a systemic inequality that defines the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and Malaysian labour markets: the **passport-based wage discrimination**. [4]

Equal pay is fundamental to ensuring dignity, fairness, and justice at work. Yet, for many migrant workers, compensation may be influenced not only by skill, occupation, experience, and productivity, but also by migration status and nationality. Such disparities raise important concerns regarding the principle of equal treatment in remuneration reflected in international labour standards. Article 6 of the ILO's *Migration for Employment Convention (Revised), 1949 (No. 97)* provides for treatment no less favourable than that accorded to nationals in respect of remuneration, under the conditions specified in the Convention.[5]

> "I have observed in the UAE that workers of different nationalities can sometimes be paid differently for the same or similar work. In some cases, nationality appears to influence salary levels, even when the workers have similar roles and responsibilities." - Migrant worker from the UAE

## The Evidence: Inequality in Practice

> "In the factory, local workers and migrant workers perform the exact same tasks, work the same hours, and meet identical production targets. However, local workers receive higher basic wages, better allowances, and more benefits compared to migrant workers doing the same job." - Migrant worker from Malaysia

The data confirms that the migrant pay gap is an institutionalized reality. According to a landmark 2020 report by the ILO, migrant workers globally earn, on average, nearly 13 percent less than national workers, a gap that widens significantly in low-skilled sectors where South Asian workers are heavily concentrated. [6]

Furthermore, this discrimination intersects with gender. Nepali female domestic workers frequently face double discrimination; underpaid because of their gender and underpaid because of their nationality. [7] For instance, minimum salary requirements and recruitment practices can create nationality-based wage hierarchies in which domestic workers from countries such as Bangladesh are offered lower salaries than workers from the Philippines for comparable domestic work.[8]

> "Our company has salary brackets from minimum to maximum for each position. However, employees in the same position are often offered different salaries based on nationality or passport, with South Asian and African nationals mostly being offered salaries at the lower end of the bracket". - Migrant Worker from Qatar

While some destination countries have introduced non-discriminatory statutory minimum wages such as Qatar's 2021 establishment of a QAR 1,000, or Malaysia's RM 1,700, these minimum wage ceilings often function as permanent ceilings for Nepali workers.[9] The persistent lack of wage auditing, combined with the restrictive *Kafala* system, restricts migrant workers from collective bargaining to demand equal pay for work of equal value.

## Our Call to Action

Shramik Sanjal asserts that the discriminated valuation of migrant labour is deliberate; it is produced and sustained by policies and systems. We demand an end to treating Nepali workers as a source of undervalued labour. In the face of rising inequality and persistent pay disparities, Shramik Sanjal urges all relevant stakeholders to take immediate and meaningful action. We call upon governments, employers, trade unions, civil society, and other relevant stakeholders to uphold the principle of equal pay for work of equal value, ensure decent wages and fair working conditions, and protect the rights of all workers, regardless of gender, nationality, ethnicity, or place of origin.

1. **Destination Countries:** Abolish nationality-based salary scaling and enforce strict "equal pay for work of equal value" legislation across all sectors, backed by transparent, accessible wage auditing, a wage protection system, a grievance-redressal mechanism, and the dismantling of the Kafala System that prevents **workers' collective bargaining power.**
2. **The Government of Nepal:** Leverage Bilateral Labour Agreements (BLAs) and various regional mechanisms to collectively bargain for standardized, living wages for all South Asian workers, refusing to allow Nepali workers to be undercut in a regional race to the bottom.
3. **Global Corporations:** Conduct a fair, transparent audit of supply chains to ensure subcontractors in the GCC and Malaysia pay equitable, non-discriminatory wages based on skill, not origin.

**Labour has no nationality**. The sweat of a Nepali worker builds the same infrastructure and generates the same profit as any other. On this International Equal Pay Day, Shramik Sanjal stands in solidarity with all migrant workers demanding the simplest, most fundamental form of justice: "*Equal pay for equal work.*"

## End Note

[1] United Nations General Assembly, "Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 18 December 2019: International Equal Pay Day," A/RES/74/142 (New York: United Nations, 2019), https://undocs.org/en/A/RES/74/142.

[2] Marie Lecerf, "International Equal Pay Day," *European Parliamentary Research Service*, September 18, 2025, https://epthinktank.eu/2025/09/18/international-equal-pay-day-2
[3] United Nations, "International Equal Pay Day," accessed September 15, 2026, https://www.un.org/en/observances/equal-pay-day

[4] International Labour Organization (ILO). *The Migrant Pay Gap: Understanding Wage Differences between Migrants and Nationals*. Geneva: International Labour Office, 2020. https://www.ilo.org/resource/news/migrant-pay-gap-widens-many-high-income-countries-1

[5] International Labour Organization (ILO), "C097 - Migration for Employment Convention (Revised), 1949 (No. 97)," adopted July 1, 1949, https://normlex.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100_ILO_CODE:C097.

[6] International Labour Organization (ILO), "C097 - Migration for Employment Convention (Revised), 1949 (No. 97)," adopted July 1, 1949, https://normlex.ilo.org/dyn/nrmlx_en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100_ILO_CODE:C097

[7] International Labour Organization, *A Comprehensive Analysis of Policies and Frameworks Governing Foreign Employment for Nepali Women Migrant Workers and Migrant Domestic Workers: Exploring the Migration Policymaking Process with a Specific Focus on Bans and Restrictions on Foreign Employment* (Kathmandu: ILO Country Office for Nepal, 2020). https://researchrepository.ilo.org/esploro/outputs/report/A-comprehensive-analysis-of-policies

[8] Human Rights Watch, "Bangladesh: Improve Protections for Migrant Domestic Workers," December 8, 2016, https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/12/08/bangladesh-improve-protections-migrant-domestic-workers

[9] International Labour Organization (ILO), "Qatar's new minimum wage enters into force," ILO Newsroom, March 19, 2021, https://www.ilo.org/resource/news/qatar%E2%80%99s-new-minimum-wage-enters-force