



INTERNATIONAL
DOMESTIC WORKERS'
NETWORK

Domestic Workers Worldwide

*Summary of available statistical data
and estimates*



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DOMESTIC WORK: A SIGNIFICANT SECTOR WORLDWIDE

Domestic work is one of the oldest and for many women the most important occupation. It is a global phenomenon and in many countries indispensable for the economy outside the household to function. Domestic workers are employed for cleaning, child-minding, gardening, servicing or care-taking of elderly people in all kinds of private households. The ILO estimates that over 100 million people work in domestic services (ILO, 2008, p. 13). In spite of the salience of this sector globally, data on the number of domestic workers is rare. Due to the high degree of informality of this sector of the labor market, reliable numbers are difficult to collect and compare. Nevertheless, estimates do exist¹.

TOTAL NUMBERS OF PERSONS WORKING IN DOMESTIC WORK

Especially significant is the domestic work sector in the Gulf countries, with 1.2 to 2 million working in Saudi Arabia alone (Human Rights Watch, 2007, pp. 15-16). In the Middle East, female migrants alone make up 6 million domestic workers (ICFTU, 2002, p. 2). In India, official estimates talk of 4.75 million workers employed in private households (ILO, 2010a, p. 1). Also in East Asia and South East Asia, domestic work is an important sector of employment. In China, an estimated 20 million people work as domestic workers (ILO, 2009, p. 2). For domestic workers in Indonesia, estimates range between 2.2 million (LABORSTA)² and 2.6 million domestic workers (ILO-IPEC, 2004). According to LABORSTA, in 2008, 253,000 people worked as domestic workers in Malaysia.

In Latin America, domestic work is very common. The higher the development of the country, the more important is the domestic service sector (Tokman, 2010, p. 3).³ In Chile, 310,351 workers were employed in private households in 2002; in Brazil, 6,732,000 persons; and in Uruguay, 128,200 were working in private households in 2007 (LABORSTA). While there is an increase of domestic services in, for example, European countries, the situation remains stable in Latin America.

On the African continent, official data exists for several countries as well. In 2005, in Ethiopia, 248,600 people were employed in the domestic work sector (LABORSTA). In Egypt, the total number of domestic workers in 2007 was 51,600 (LABORSTA). In domestic work, 103,900 people were employed in Mali (LABORSTA, 2004). In South Africa, the domestic work sector employs more than 1.2 million (LABORSTA, 2007) and is the largest single sector of women's employment (Ally, 2009, p. 2).

In Europe, broad estimations for female irregular migrant domestic workers alone arrive at 1 million (Pannell & Altman, 2007, p. 35). LABORSTA data points to 752,600 persons employed in private households in Spain (2008), 607,900 in France (2008), 138,000 in the UK (2008), 68,500 in Greece (2007), 42,100 in Belgium (2008), 16,000 in Poland (2007) and 6,600 in Serbia (2008). However, a closer look at the data of Italy, for example, points to the difference between these official statistics and estimates that include undocumented workers. The LABORSTA data for 2008 calculates 419,000 persons employed in private households, but estimations go up to 1.2 million domestic workers in Italy (IRENE & IUF, 2008, p. 34). The same is true for Germany: while there are 40,000 officially registered domestic workers according to the 2000 Socioeconomic Panel,

¹ Data on domestic workers is not always reliable and numbers on domestic workers are often based on estimates because of the large gray area in which it takes place. We only presented data we feel is coherent. Nevertheless, numbers on domestic workers are difficult to evaluate, as definitions vary and the sourcing process is not always the same in every study. Also in calculating national estimates, not all areas of a country are necessarily surveyed, influencing the estimate for the total number of domestic workers in that country.

² When counting domestic workers, LABORSTA, the ILO Department of Statistics, refers to employment in private households. If not indicated otherwise, data on employees from statistics on total employment has been used.

³ Most data for Latin America originates from Victor E. Tokman's study "Domestic Services in Latin America: Statistical Profile for Regulations" (Santiago de Chile, April 2010) which has been prepared at the request of the IUF and WIEGO. The in-depth study provides a regional overview with regards to access to protection, labor contracts and social security. Tokman is a former ILO Regional Director for Latin American and the Caribbean and at present professor at the University of Chile and the Latin America Faculty of Social Sciences (FLACSO).

more than 1.1 million people are estimated to be employed without paying into the social security system in private households in 1997 (Schupp, 2002, p. 56).

The United States estimates for domestic workers range from 1.5 million (Ratner, 2008 citing the Census Bureau) to 2.5 million domestic workers (Shenker, 2010). Canada records 72,800 persons employed in private households (LABORSTA, 2008). For Mexico, LABORSTA calculated 1.85 million employed in private households (2008). In the Caribbean, 117,400 persons were working in private households in Nicaragua (LABORSTA, 2006) and 194,600 in the Dominican Republic (LABORSTA, 2007).

In Australia, in official census data from 2006 16,173 people are registered as domestic cleaners. Overall numbers on domestic workers are probably much higher, because domestic workers employed as carers or gardeners would have to be included as well as informal work. In the Pacific Islands, domestic work plays a role as well. In Papua New Guinea, 15,523 people were working as domestic workers in 2000 (LABORSTA).

Besides the total number of domestic work employees, another form of measurement is the total number of households employing a domestic worker. In Nairobi alone, it is estimated that around two million households employ a domestic worker (Family Health International, 2009). In Singapore, one in seven households employs a foreign domestic worker (Iredale & Piper, 2003, p. 43). In Palau,

one in five households employs a domestic worker (Nero, Murray, & Burton, 2000, p. 326). There is a numerical difference between households and domestic workers, particularly in those countries in which domestic workers work on an hourly basis in a number of households at the same time. Therefore, the estimations for Germany go up to 4 million households (Cyrus, 2009, p. 59), but not the numbers of domestic workers.

AS PART OF THE TOTAL WORKFORCE

The domestic work sector is especially important in developing countries, where often 4-10% of total employment is domestic work; however, in some developed countries more than 2% of total employment takes place in this sector as well, e.g. 4.4% in Cyprus, 2.3% in France, or 3.7% in Spain, among others (LABORSTA, 2008). In some countries of the Global South, estimates for percentage of work force in this sector can be significantly higher. In South Africa, about 9.4% of the total workforce work as domestic workers (LABORSTA 2007). NGO estimates point to up to 20% of the total workforce in India being employed in domestic work (Devos, 2010). In Kuwait, 21.9% of total employment takes place in private households (LABORSTA, 2005). In Latin America, domestic workers constitute on average 5.5% of the urban workforce, but 12.2% of the female urban workforce; one out of every 6.6 female workers is occupied in domestic services (CEPAL, 2009; Tokman, 2010, p. 3).

DEFINING DOMESTIC WORK

In various countries, different definitions of domestic work exist (see ILO, 2010b for an overview). In its International Standard Classification of Occupations, Groups 5121, 5131, 5133, 9131, ISCO-88, the ILO describes, for instance, “domestic worker,” “household worker,” and “domestic help” as a person employed part-time or full-time in a household or private residence. Domestic workers may be for example cooks, servants, nurses, child minders, carers for elderly or disabled persons, chauffeurs, porters, or gardeners (see Caritas Internationalis, 2009, p. 4 for a detailed description).

PERSONS EMPLOYED BY PRIVATE HOUSEHOLDS IN SELECTED COUNTRIES

(LABORSTA, OWN COMPILATION)

Country	Total	Men	Women	Percentage of Total Employment	Female DWs as % of female employment
Saudi Arabia (2008)	876,596	319,794	556,802	11.0%	49.7%
Spain (2008)	752,600	53,000	699,600	3.7%	8.2%
Malaysia (2008)	253,000	29,400	223,600	2.4%	5.9%
Namibia (2004)	24,100	4,100	20,000	6.3%	11.9%
Canada (2008)	72,800	2,500	70,300	0.4%	0.9%
Brazil (2007)	6,732,000	418,000	6,313,000	7.4%	16.4%

THE INFORMAL CHARACTER OF DOMESTIC WORK

A large part of domestic work takes place in the informal economy. Migrants without legal status and without recognized formal skills, who otherwise have limited chances to enter the labor market, can find work in the domestic service sector. In the U.S., an estimated 23% of those in private household employment were unauthorized immigrants in 2008 (Passal & Cohn, 2009, p. 16). Up to 30,000 domestic workers are estimated to work in Jordan without proper documentation (Amnesty International, 2008, p. 2). Family workers are an important source of informal domestic work. Since domestic workers are sometimes seen as part of the family, employers do not see the necessity of registering them formally.

WOMEN IN DOMESTIC WORK

In most countries, women comprise the vast majority of employees in the domestic service sector (usually more than 80% of people working as domestic workers). In China and in Spain, more than 90% of domestic workers are female (ILO Office for China and Mongolia, 2009, p. 1, LABORSTAT, 2008). That is also the case in many Latin American countries: 96.4% in Bolivia (LABORSTA, 2007) and 90.8% in Chile are female (LABORSTA, 2001). In Namibia, of 24,100 domestic workers 20,000 are women, i.e. 83.0%

(LABORSTA, 2004), whereas in Mauritius 88.5% of persons employed by private households are female (LABORSTA, 2001). Domestic work in the Philippines is performed also mostly by women: 84.8% of domestic employees are women (LABORSTA, 2008). Even though in some countries household employees are predominantly male, as in Tajikistan, where in 2004 a total of 2,400 men were employed in private households and only 1,000 women (LABORSTA), this is the exception and domestic workers are mostly female.

INTERNAL AND INTERNATIONAL MIGRANTS IN DOMESTIC WORK

Not only is domestic work a feminized sector of the economy, but it is also often characterized by a large number of migrants working in the sector. Because of the informality of the domestic services sector, migrants are able to work, even without formal skills and legal status in the country. The percentage of immigrants who work in this field ranges between 16% and 21% of total immigrants in Costa Rica, Chile, and Argentina (Tokman, 2010, p. 17). In Argentina, 78% of women immigrants are employed in domestic services, in Costa Rica and Chile, respectively 47% and 37%, of whom most are coming from neighboring countries (ibid, p. 18). Whereas in some countries migrant domestic workers migrate internationally, in other countries internal migration from rural to

urban areas takes place. This is for instance the case in Kathmandu in Nepal, where internal migrants find work in private households (C-WISH, 2009, p. 25). Human Rights Watch estimates that 160,000 migrant domestic workers are employed in Singapore and 300,000 in Malaysia (2006, p. 3). In Jordan, more than 40,000 migrant domestic workers are registered with the Ministry of Labor; however, another 30,000 foreign migrant domestic workers are estimated to work in Jordan without valid documents (Amnesty International, 2008, p. 2). In the United States, 30% of registered domestic workers are migrants in 1998 (Human Rights Watch, 2000), but since the number of migrants is especially high with informal domestic workers, the actual percentage of migrant domestic workers will be above 30%.

Studies for Latin America show that there is no competition between local and immigrant domestic workers as the activities are segmented. Most Peruvian domestic workers in Chile work full-time as live-ins and have considerable years of schooling, while the majority of Chilean women have a rural, low-income background and work as live-outs (Tokman, 2010, p. 19). Due to rapid urbanization, fewer local women tend to work in the domestic service sector and are replaced by immigrant women.

The domestic sector is hence dominated by female migrants, a group often marginalised. Worldwide 17 - 25 million female migrants are estimated to work in the domestic service sector (Pannell & Altman, 2007, p. 35).

EMPLOYMENT STATUS AND WAGES PAID FOR DOMESTIC SERVICES

Wages paid are usually low both in absolute terms as well as compared to other occupations, even to other low productivity activities. Incomes earned in domestic services in Latin America reach 40% of the level of incomes earned as an average by the working population (Tokman 2010, p. 4). Further, there is a gender pay gap: the average income of women working in urban domestic services in Latin America is 73% of that paid to men in the same occupation (ibid., p. 5).

The domestic service sector is characterised by heterogeneous work conditions. Whereas some domestic workers work full-time, others are only employed part-time. Estimates by the National Domestic Workers' Movement for India show that around 20% work full-time (Devos, 2010). In Italy, most women domestic workers work full-time (D'Alconzo, Rocca, & Marioni, 2009, p. 11).

Additionally, domestic work can be differentiated between live-in and live-out employment situations. This influences wages. The average wage for domestic work is €750 for a 55 hour work week per month in Italy, but live-in domestic workers earn around €1200 (Scrinzi, 2008, p. 31). In Israel, immigrants often work as live-in domestic workers, earning €450-550 a month plus additional benefits (Mundlak & Shamir, 2008, p. 164). For live-in workers, employers can deduct money for room and board from the wage. For instance, in Spain, up to 45% of pay is deducted (Albarracín, 2002); in Cyprus, 10% can be deducted from pay for accommodation and 15% if food is also provided (Georgiou, Papadopoulou, & Polykarpou, 2007, p. 18). Wages sometimes tend to be extremely different in the same location. A case in point is New York City where the hourly wages spreads from US\$1.43 to US\$40, while the median is US\$10 (Domestic Workers United, 2006, p. 16).

Some countries have minimum wages for domestic workers. For instance, the minimum wage for domestic workers in Tanzania was set in 2008 at around \$60 per month (Grumiau, 2009). In Portugal, the minimum wage is set at €475 per month (Alves, 2010). South Africa also introduced a minimum wage for domestic workers, which was in 2009 between ZAR 1,097.40 (€111) and ZAR 1,340.95 (€135) (Department of Labour, 2010). Nevertheless, despite the existence of a minimum wage in several countries, domestic workers often earn less, because domestic work is often informal. Furthermore, often domestic workers work for multiple employers and do not work a full working week, earning less than minimum wage.

CONCLUSION

Data regarding domestic workers is difficult to obtain and to compare because of different definitions of domestic work in various countries, as well as because of its informal character. Nonetheless, domestic work is a significant sector in many countries and especially in a large number of developing countries.

Aside from the informal character of domestic work, domestic work is mostly performed by women. This feminised and informal sector offers jobs to internal as well as international migrants. Due to ageing societies in developed countries and cutbacks in welfare state provisions, i.e. commodification of social and public services, demand for domestic work is increasing.

To better acknowledge the true importance of the domestic work sector, domestic workers need to be included into national labor laws. Statistical data is so far not collected systematically by the relevant statistical bureaus all over the world. This needs to be changed in order to follow developments in the future and to be able to ensure the protection of the rights of domestic workers.

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