



International
Labour
Organization

The background of the cover features a city skyline at dusk or night, with various skyscrapers and buildings illuminated. Overlaid on this are several blue silhouettes of people in various work-related poses: a person mopping, a person carrying a basket, a person holding a child's hand, a person in a wheelchair being pushed, and a person in a cap. A large, faint white silhouette of a person is also visible on the left side.

► Making decent work a reality for domestic workers

Progress and prospects ten years after the adoption of the Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189)

Executive summary

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Since the adoption of the Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189), domestic workers have gained legal protection in many countries. For too many domestic workers, however, decent work has not yet become a reality. At least 75.6 million people around the world perform this essential work in or for private households. A staggering eight out of every ten domestic workers are informally employed and thus lack effective labour and social protections.

Ten years after the adoption of Convention No. 189, it is time to assess the extent to which decent work has become a reality for domestic workers. Domestic workers provide services for households around the world, and yet they work in some of the most vulnerable situations. Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, domestic workers were often on the front line, continuing to supply direct and indirect care services for households despite the risk of contagion. Convention No. 189 sought to extend protections to domestic workers and ensure their access to decent work – it is now more necessary than ever to protect them from the loss of jobs and incomes many of them faced during the pandemic.

This report provides new global and regional estimates of the number of domestic workers. It then provides a measure of the extent to which domestic workers enjoy **legal coverage** (meaning their inclusion under key labour and social security laws) and assesses progress made since the adoption of the Convention. The report then provides statistics on the extent to which domestic workers enjoy **effective coverage** (meaning that they can effectively access their rights and protections in reality) in the areas of working time, wages and social security protection. Exposure to occupational safety and health (OSH) risks and to violence and harassment is also addressed. Importantly, the report also provides a measure of the share of domestic workers who **lack coverage** owing to a lack of implementation of applicable laws and policies, or for whom legal gaps must be closed before the question of implementation can be addressed. Statistics on the impacts of COVID-19, in terms of loss of jobs and income, are also presented.

Finally, the report provides guidance on making decent work a reality for domestic workers, including examples of ways in which countries have closed legal and implementation gaps.

What is domestic work?

Convention No. 189 defines domestic work as work performed in or for a household or households, within an employment relationship and on an occupational basis. While domestic workers typically undertake cleaning and cooking and care for children and elderly and disabled people, as well as gardening, driving and guarding private households, the reality is that their tasks vary across countries and over time. Given this heterogeneity of tasks, the defining characteristic of domestic work was determined to be the workplace – that is, the household.

The estimates presented in this report constitute a new attempt to capture more accurately and comprehensively the situation of all domestic workers, as defined by Convention No. 189. They cover “domestic workers” as established in the definition agreed by the 20th International Conference of Labour Statisticians, which was adopted in 2018 to align more closely with the definition set out in Convention No. 189. The estimates thus capture live-in and live-out domestic workers employed directly by a household or households; domestic workers employed through or by a service provider; and domestic workers providing direct and indirect care services. They do not include domestic workers under the age of 15 years.

Around the world, there are 75.6 million domestic workers aged 15 years and over.¹ The world's largest employers of domestic workers, in numerical terms, are Asia and the Pacific (where 50 per cent of all domestic workers are employed) and the Americas (where 23 per cent of all domestic workers are employed). In contrast, the Europe and Central Asia region employs the smallest share of all domestic workers.


Domestic work is an important source of employment, representing 2.3 per cent of total employment worldwide. When looking at employees only, this figure almost doubles to 4.5 per cent. The weight of domestic work as a source of employment varies across the globe. Domestic work represents the largest share of employees in the Arab States (14.8 per cent), followed by Latin America and the Caribbean (8.4 per cent), Africa (7.3 per cent) and Asia and the Pacific (4.6 per cent). In contrast, domestic work represents only 1 per cent of employees in Europe and Central Asia.

Women continue to make up the majority of the sector (76.2 per cent), which accounts for 4.5 per cent of female employment worldwide, or 8.8 per cent of female employees. Domestic workers represent one third of female employment in the Arab States and 11.3 per cent in Latin America and the Caribbean. Expressed as a percentage of employees, these figures amount to 34.6 per cent and 17.8 per cent, respectively. In contrast, domestic workers represent just 1.6 per cent of women in employment in Europe and Central Asia.

Men make up nearly one quarter of the sector; however, domestic work represents only 0.9 per cent of overall male employment. Among male domestic workers, the largest group can be found in the Arab States (23.2 per cent), followed by Southern Asia (21.8 per cent), Eastern Asia (19.1 per cent) and sub-Saharan Africa (14.2 per cent). Men actually outnumber women in domestic work in the Arab States (63.4 per cent) and represent an almost equal share in Southern Asia (42.6 per cent).

Domestic workers are over-represented in upper-middle-income countries: more than half (53.1 per cent) of all domestic workers are in these countries, compared with 46.8 per cent of all employees. The over-representation of domestic workers in upper-middle-income countries is mostly due to the large countries in that group with both a high share of domestic workers and some of the highest Gini coefficients, such as Argentina.²

The demand for domestic work is expected to grow in light of demographic changes, population ageing and increasing long-term care needs. Service providers play a growing role. The number of digital labour platforms in the sector has risen eightfold, from 28 platforms in 2010 to 224 platforms in 2020. The workforce for domestic work is likely to be sustained owing to continued income inequality within and between countries, as well as unequal access to education and care services. As a job-intensive sector that meets essential and growing household needs for direct and indirect care services, domestic work could be a source of employment in the post-COVID-19 economic recovery.

 There are 75.6 million domestic workers aged 15 years and over.

1 The ILO's new global estimates of the number of domestic workers cover 155 countries and are primarily based on a systematic approach, which is designed to identify domestic workers in national labour force and household survey microdata sets, complemented by data from secondary official sources (in ten countries).

2 It is important to note, however, that these results are probably influenced by the strong underestimation of the number of domestic workers in low-income countries.

How many domestic workers are legally covered today, and have their numbers increased since 2010?

Scope

More laws and policies now cover domestic workers, after ten years of effort by governments and by employers' and workers' organizations. Since 2010, thanks to the extension of laws and policies to cover domestic workers, there has been a decrease of 16.3 percentage points in the number of domestic workers who are wholly excluded from the scope of labour laws and regulations. Domestic workers are wholly excluded from coverage in only 8.3 per cent of the countries reviewed, most of them in the Arab States and in Asia and the Pacific. There has been a growing tendency to cover domestic workers through both general labour law and specific labour laws or subordinate regulations.

Working time

Since 2010, there has been an increase in the number of domestic workers legally entitled to: (a) limits on their normal weekly hours equal to or more favourable than other workers (7.2 percentage points); (b) weekly rest entitlements of at least the same length as those enjoyed by other workers (21.0 percentage points); and (c) periods of annual leave the same as or longer than those for other workers (12.6 percentage points). When adopting laws on working time, the majority of countries reviewed cover domestic workers with rights equivalent to those enjoyed by workers generally. As a result, as of 2020, 48.9 per cent of all domestic workers are entitled to weekly rest entitlements that are at least equal to those enjoyed by other workers, 34.8 per cent are entitled to the same limitation on their normal weekly hours as other workers, and 42.9 per cent have equal rights with respect to periods of paid annual leave.

There nonetheless remain important legal gaps. About 28 per cent of countries impose no limits on normal weekly hours of work; 14 per cent of countries provide no legal right to weekly rest; and 11 per cent of countries provide no legal right to paid annual leave.

Minimum wages and payment in kind

Since 2010, little progress has been made in ensuring a minimum wage for domestic workers equal to that enjoyed by workers generally or limiting payment in kind for domestic workers. There has been only a small increase in the number of domestic workers who are entitled to a minimum wage equal to that of other workers (2.9 percentage points) and who have a right to receive their minimum wage fully in cash (7.2 percentage points). When adopting laws on wages, the majority of countries reviewed (64.8 per cent) provide a statutory minimum wage for domestic workers that is at least equivalent to that of other workers. Of the countries in which domestic workers are entitled to a minimum wage, about half stipulate that the minimum wage must be paid in cash only. As a result, 35 per cent of domestic workers are entitled to a minimum wage rate that is at least equal to that fixed for other workers, and 29 per cent must receive that minimum wage in cash.

Improvements in this area have been more limited than in other areas. In one third of the countries reviewed, domestic workers either do not enjoy equal rights with respect to a minimum wage (9.3 per cent) or do not enjoy minimum wage coverage at all (22.2 per cent), and there are about 41 million domestic workers for whom no statutory minimum wage is applicable.



Men make up nearly one quarter of the sector.

Social security (including maternity leave and cash benefits)

Globally, almost half of all domestic workers are legally covered by at least one branch of social security. Levels of social security coverage vary according to the branch concerned. The most common branch of social security to be provided by law for domestic workers is pension coverage (provided by 50 per cent of countries reviewed in 2020). The least common branch is unemployment benefits, which is provided by 25 per cent of countries. There is a strong tendency among countries to provide maternity leave entitlements (74.1 per cent) and maternity cash benefits (68.5 per cent) that are equal to or more favourable than those provided for other workers. Improvements made since 2010 with regard to maternity are less significant. However, thanks to legal reforms in a number of countries, there has been an increase in the number of women domestic workers who have maternity leave entitlements (4.7 percentage points) and maternity cash benefits (3.6 percentage points) that are at least equal to those of other workers.

Substantial gaps remain in other social security branches, however. Only 6 per cent of domestic workers are covered by all social security branches, 46.5 per cent have no legal entitlement to maternity leave and 47.6 per cent have no right to maternity cash benefits.

What are the rates of legal coverage at the regional level?

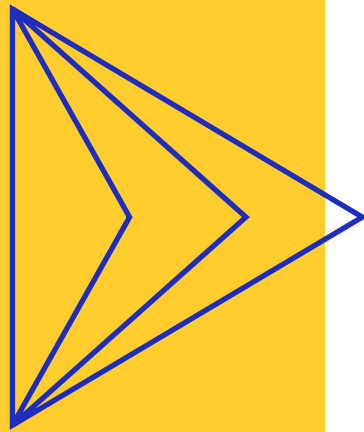
Regional disparities persist regarding the extension of legal coverage. In the Arab States and Asia and the Pacific, most domestic workers remain excluded from the scope of labour law. In provisions on working time, wages and maternity protection, domestic workers are either excluded or are covered under less favourable conditions than workers generally. By contrast, domestic workers in the Americas and in Europe and Central Asia are nearly all covered, in most cases under conditions that are no less favourable than those provided for workers generally.

What are the real working conditions of domestic workers?

While progress has been made in legal coverage, these legal rights have not yet become a reality for most domestic workers. There remain significant decent work deficits in the areas of working time, wages and social security. Only one in five domestic workers enjoys effective employment-related social security coverage. Domestic workers are less likely to work within the range of normal weekly hours and are more likely to work very short or very long hours compared with their employee counterparts. Working outside what are considered “normal” working hours has implications for the wages and social security benefits of domestic workers, who are some of the lowest earners among all wage employees. Globally, they earn 56.4 per cent of the average monthly wages of other employees. Live-in domestic workers and migrant domestic workers can be particularly vulnerable to poor working conditions. Domestic workers are commonly exposed to chemical, ergonomic, physical, psychosocial and biological hazards and are especially vulnerable to violence and harassment.

How many domestic workers are informal workers, and are they in a more vulnerable situation?

The high rate of informal employment in the sector (81.2 per cent) points to the increased vulnerability of domestic workers. About 61.4 million domestic workers are in informal employment, meaning they have no effective access to social or labour protections. The share of informal employment among domestic workers is twice that of other employees (39.7 per cent) and still significantly higher than the overall share of informal employment among non-domestic workers, independent of their employment status



The share of informal employment among domestic workers is twice that of other employees.

(60.1 per cent). Domestic workers in informal employment face some of the worst working conditions. They earn on average 37.6 per cent of the monthly wages of formal employees.

What are the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on domestic work?

Domestic workers are among those worst hit by the consequences of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. More domestic workers than other employees have lost their jobs or are seeing a dramatic reduction in working hours and correspondingly lower wages. Compared with the last quarter of 2019, the number of domestic workers in the second quarter of 2020 decreased by 5–20 per cent in most European countries covered, by about 50 per cent in Latin America and the Caribbean and by 70 per cent in Peru. To date, job losses have been higher among domestic workers in informal employment than those observed for all domestic workers and systematically higher than for other employees. Live-in migrant domestic workers are facing especially extreme scenarios. Despite providing essential services for clients who are often vulnerable, domestic workers frequently do not have adequate access to personal protective equipment (PPE). Informal domestic workers are the least likely to have access to income support or other emergency measures adopted to address the COVID-19 pandemic.

How much of the deficit in decent work is due to gaps in law versus gaps in implementation?

In this report, informality is used as the main indicator of effective access to rights and protection. There are three sources of informality: exclusion from labour and social security laws; lack of implementation or compliance with labour and social security laws; and insufficient or inadequate levels of legal protection. Using the first two sources of informality, the report measures the extent to which informality is due

only to implementation gaps or is due to legal gaps that would need to be filled prior to closing implementation gaps.

Among the 61.4 million domestic workers who are informally employed, 66 per cent will require a first step towards formalization through their inclusion in the scope of pension schemes and other social security branches, and in the scope of any labour laws that are required to ensure adequate rights and protection. The remaining 34 per cent are covered by laws but remain in informal employment because the laws are not applied in practice.

The way forward: Closing legal and implementation gaps

The following points provide guidance on closing legal and implementation gaps, based on practices used by countries. While the points are organized by policy area, it is important that measures are taken with a view to protecting domestic workers coherently and comprehensively across all areas included in Convention No. 189.

Legal recognition of domestic workers

There has been a growing tendency to cover domestic workers both through general labour law and through specific labour laws or subordinate regulations. Regardless of the approach taken, social dialogue – particularly when it includes the participation of both employers' and workers' organizations, as well as organizations of domestic workers and of their employers, where they exist – has served to achieve such recognition and ensure that levels of protection are adequate.

Working time

Laws on working time should be established in coherence with applicable minimum wages, accounting for the various working arrangements in domestic work. Live-in domestic workers, in particular, do not always have rights equal to those of their live-out counterparts; they generally

work longer hours; and they are more likely to receive a portion of their pay in kind. Efforts to close legal gaps may therefore target excessive working hours among live-in domestic workers by establishing periods of daily rest, regulating overtime pay and compensatory rest and limiting payments in kind. The right to rest must also be upheld by ensuring that domestic workers are free to dispose of their rest time as they please, with the right to leave the household during rest periods. Adequate regulation must be complemented by public awareness campaigns and tools to facilitate the monitoring and enforcement of working time regulations. In this respect, time sheets, work schedules and payslips help domestic workers and employers reach agreement on work schedules, time worked and wages paid. They also provide a written record that enables the enforcement of compliance.

Minimum wages and payment in kind

In closing legal gaps, governments are encouraged to engage with social partners to fix an appropriate minimum wage level that accounts for the specificities of the sector. To this end, data are needed, not only on domestic workers but also on employing households, their distribution across income groups, the percentage of income spent on domestic work and their capacity to pay. To ensure affordability and avoid potential negative impacts on employment, some countries have opted to take a gradual approach to extending minimum wage coverage. In a small but growing number of countries, such wages have even been fixed through collective bargaining and show significant promise in achieving wages that are adapted to the sector. However, while a well-designed minimum wage policy may encourage compliance, it is rarely sufficient to ensure it. Efforts must be made to raise public awareness of applicable wages. As simulations have demonstrated, achieving full compliance with the minimum wage among domestic workers will contribute to a reduction in overall wage inequality, will have the visible effect of reducing household inequality and will reduce relative poverty, both among domestic workers' households and overall.

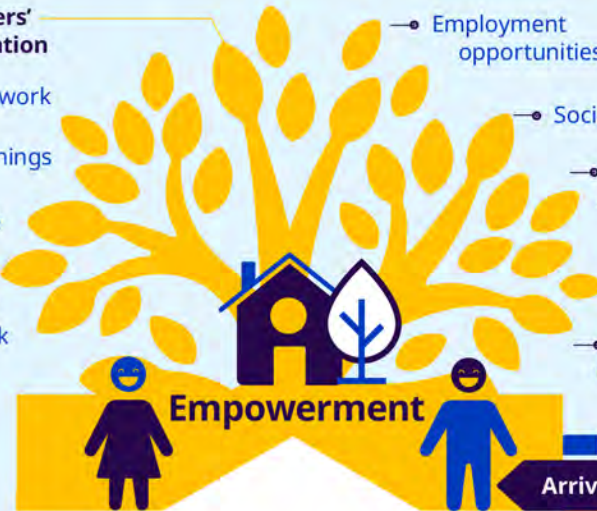
Making decent work a reality for domestic workers

Social dialogue, employers' and workers' representation

- Safe work
- Adequate earnings
- Decent working time
- Stability and security of work

Employment opportunities

- Social security
- Work, family and personal life balance
- Abolishing child labour and forced labour
- Equal opportunity treatment



14.2 million

Decent work

← Domestic workers have access to effective protection

Aim for adequate levels of protection



Close implementation gaps

← Domestic workers covered by laws that are insufficiently implemented in practice

20.7 million

Close legal gaps

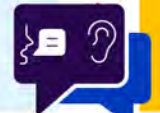
← Domestic workers not covered by labour and social security laws

Recognition of the employment relationship



40.7 million

Social dialogue between employers, workers and governments



Start



Social security (including maternity leave and cash benefits)

The scope of social security laws needs to be extended to include domestic workers. Entitlements must also be sufficient – at least equal to those enjoyed by workers generally – and must include guaranteed access through appropriate eligibility criteria. Governments must remove administrative barriers, facilitate registration with multiple employers, simplify registration and contribution procedures (including by using digital technology) and facilitate access to benefits. Contributory rates must be adapted to the capacity of household employers and domestic workers alike, while ensuring that the benefits enjoyed by domestic workers are no less favourable than those enjoyed by workers generally. Government subsidies are an important mechanism in that regard. The promotion of awareness, through inspectorates, employers’ and workers’ organizations and public campaigns, helps to promote compliance. Behavioural insights can also help in systems design, taking into account the behaviour of households as employers of domestic workers and the behaviour of domestic workers themselves. Finally, inspection mechanisms must be adapted to promote compliance in the sector, including by establishing the conditions under which labour inspectors may be granted access to household premises as the workplace of domestic workers.

Occupational safety and health

Governments should ensure that domestic workers are covered by OSH laws, either through inclusion of domestic workers within the scope of OSH laws or by adopting special regulations for the sector. Such laws can mandate households or other employers to make domestic workers aware of OSH risks and provide them with PPE, and can be supplemented with guides on risks and prevention measures for use by public authorities, employers and domestic workers. Enforcement of these laws can be enabled by establishing the conditions under which labour inspectors may be granted access to household premises and by

building the capacity of labour inspectorates to carry out awareness-raising and inspections. To support such measures, OSH surveys can help map the nature and incidence of risks and assist in effective policymaking.

Violence and harassment

As a systematic phenomenon that is deeply embedded in the patterns of society, acts of violence and harassment against domestic workers must become both legally and socially unacceptable. Domestic workers must be covered by labour, social security and OSH laws, as well as equality and non-discrimination laws. Those laws must cover all forms of violence and harassment to which domestic workers are exposed in their world of work. The implementation of applicable laws involves ensuring access to justice by: (a) strengthening the capacity of institutions to prosecute cases; (b) providing avenues for domestic workers to bring complaints and measures to protect them from reprisals; (c) allowing human rights and other organizations to denounce cases of violence and harassment; and (d) protecting whistle-blowers. Building capacity for enforcement by mandating labour inspectors, judges and other stakeholders to address violence and harassment is another key element in ensuring justice for domestic workers. Denormalizing violence and harassment requires the raising of public awareness via campaigns, guides, informational materials and hotlines.

Formalization as a means of making decent work a reality for domestic workers

Formalization is a means of, and a necessary condition for, achieving decent working and living conditions. In adopting formalization policies, the ILO Transition from the Informal to the Formal Economy Recommendation, 2015 (No. 204), calls on Member States to adopt coherent and integrated strategies to facilitate the transition to the formal economy, while targeting the multiple drivers of informality at the same time.

Governments have worked to reduce the financial and transaction costs of formal employment through fiscal incentives, such as tax breaks or subsidies, and to simplify procedures for registering and making contributions to social security, including through digital technologies. They have also sought to increase the costs of non-compliance, including through punitive measures enforced by relevant public authorities. Awareness-raising campaigns have been carried out in countries around the world, often by the public authorities but also by employers' and workers' organizations, including organizations of domestic workers and of their employers, where they exist. Skills training and professionalization can also promote formal employment, particularly when training institutes simultaneously act as a point of hire for household employers, at which point they can enforce the signing of a contract in line with labour laws. Institutions should improve their accountability, effectiveness and transparency and provide adequate levels of benefits. This is an important condition for strengthening the perception of the fairness of institutions and increasing the willingness to formalize, as well as for providing the foundation for a sustainable formalization process.

Employers' and workers' organizations and organizations of domestic workers and of their employers, where they exist, have played a fundamental role in formalizing domestic work by: (a) providing services for their members; (b) participating in social dialogue to extend rights and protections; (c) advocating for fiscal incentives and subsidies; (d) establishing bipartite

institutions to professionalize and ensure social security benefits for the domestic work sector; and (e) assisting the promotion of compliance.

Voice and representation

The existence of organizations of domestic workers and of organizations of their employers must be facilitated by the removal of barriers to freedom of association. Deep leadership training has helped domestic workers to establish their own representative organizations and to build and retain membership. Workers' organizations have also played an important role in supporting the organization of domestic workers, inter alia by providing training, advice and political support for domestic worker leaders in representing their sector in social dialogue.

The existence of organizations of employers of domestic workers is a prerequisite for collective bargaining and has also contributed to successful social dialogue beyond collective bargaining. These organizations have facilitated joint advocacy for increased public investment in domestic work, as a means of linking the interests of employers and workers.

A future in which decent work becomes a reality for domestic workers must be informed by the progress already achieved by organizations of domestic workers, organizations of their employers and committed policymakers. Social dialogue is a crucial instrument for addressing the remaining decent work deficits for domestic workers.

Advancing social justice, promoting decent work

The International Labour Organization is the United Nations agency for the world of work. We bring together governments, employers and workers to drive a human-centred approach to the future of work through employment creation, rights at work, social protection and social dialogue.

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