

DOMESTIC WORKERS IN LATIN AMERICA: A STATISTICAL PROFILE ¹



Domestic work is an important occupation, involving a significant proportion of the workforce in Latin America. Domestic work is mostly, but not exclusively, performed by women and increasingly by migrants. Female domestic workers are concentrated in cleaning, cooking, and child care while male domestic workers tend to have better-paid jobs as drivers, gardeners, and guards. Most domestic work, especially by women, is informal: that is, performed outside the realm of labour contracts and social protection.

This note summarizes official data on urban domestic employment in 19 Latin American countries.²

1. Scale and Significance

- domestic workers: 7.6 million
- domestic workers: 5.5% of total urban workforce
 - 12% of female urban workforce
 - 0.5% of male urban workforce

2. Earnings and Poverty

- earnings of domestic workers: 41% of average urban incomes
 - earnings of female domestic workers: 73% of earnings of male domestic workers
 - earnings of female domestic workers: 76% of earnings of all female workers in the informal sector, 84% of female own account workers, 83% of female wage workers in informal enterprises³
 - earnings of male domestic workers: 56% of earnings of all workers in the informal sector, 118% of male own account workers, 94% of male wage workers in informal enterprises
- percentage of domestic workers whose earnings are below the per-capita poverty line of the various countries: 36% (compared to 26% for total urban workforce and 35% for wage workers in informal enterprises)

3. Social Protection and Labour Contracts

- percentage of domestic workers who have a labour contract: 20% (compared to 58% for total urban workforce)
- percentage of domestic workers who contribute to pension schemes: 19% (compared to 47% for total urban workforce and 25% for wage workers in micro-enterprises)
 - percentage of female domestic workers who contribute to pension schemes: 18%
 - percentage of male domestic workers who contribute to pension schemes: 31%

¹ This is a summary of a paper entitled “Domestic Services in Latin America: Statistical Profile for Regulations” that Victor Tokman prepared at the request of the International Union of Food and Allied Workers (IUF) and the global network Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO). The full paper is available on the WIEGO website: www.wiego.org. Victor Tokman is a former Regional Director for Latin America and the Caribbean and former Director of the Employment and Development Department of the International Labour Organization (ILO). Presently, he is an international consultant and a professor at the University of Chile and the Latin America Faculty of Social Sciences (FLASCO).

² The data were compiled by Victor Tokman from the statistical data base of the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC).

³ In the ECLAC data base, workers in the informal sector include owners and wage workers in informal enterprises, domestic workers, non-professional own account operators, and unpaid contributing family members. Informal enterprises are defined as enterprises with less than 5 workers. Own account workers are defined as self-employed workers who do not hire others and are not professionals. Amongst the informal sector workforce, the earnings of owner-operators of informal enterprises are often quite high and the earnings of own account workers are often quite low.

DOMESTIC WORKERS IN LATIN AMERICA



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- percentage of domestic workers *without contracts* who contribute to pension schemes: 10% (compared to 19% for total urban workforce without contracts)
- percentage of domestic workers *with contracts* who contribute to pension schemes: 41% (compared to 83% for all urban workers with contracts)
- percentage of domestic workers *with permanent contracts* who contribute to pension schemes: 43% (compared to 86% of all urban workers)
 - percentage of female domestic workers with permanent contracts who contribute to pension schemes: 38%
 - percentage of male domestic workers with permanent contracts who contribute to pension schemes: 54%
- percentage of domestic workers who contribute to pension and/or health schemes: 44% (compared to 64% for the total urban workforce)
 - percentage of female domestic workers who contribute to pensions and/or health schemes: 44%
 - percentage of male domestic workers who contribute to pensions and/or health schemes: 47%⁴

4. Migrant Domestic Workers

- percentage of immigrants within Latin America who are domestic workers: ranges from 16-21% in Costa Rica, Chile, and Argentina
 - percentage of female immigrants who are domestic workers: ranges from 10% (Dominican Republic) to 19% (Paraguay) to 37% (Chile) to 47% (Costa Rica) to 78% (Argentina)
 - percentage of migrant domestic workers who are female: ranges from 70-74% (Costa Rica, Honduras, and Dominican Republic) to 90-96% (Argentina, Chile, Brazil, and Paraguay)
- percentage of workers in personal and related services (including domestic) in the USA that are immigrants from Latin America: 58%

Policy Implications

The earnings of domestic workers are among the lowest of all occupations with a significant proportion of domestic workers earning below the per capita poverty line. Also, the share of domestic workers who have labour contracts and/or social protection is very low compared to other occupations. Female domestic workers are in a worse position than male domestic workers, in part because they perform different tasks or functions. Migrants who perform domestic workers deserve special attention due to their numbers and significance and because regulating migrant domestic work requires coordinated laws and practice in both sending and receiving countries.

⁴ In regards to social protection, coverage is higher and gender differences are lower when health is included, as well as pensions, as health coverage is near universal in some countries.

HOW WE HELP

The **WIEGO** network seeks to improve the status of the working poor in the informal economy, especially women, through support for increased organization and representation; improved statistics and research; more inclusive policy processes; and more equitable trade, labour, urban planning, and social protection policies.

The **International Domestic Workers' Network (IDWN)** assists in the organization of domestic workers' unions where they do not yet exist; serves as a clearing house for the exchange of information; organizes mutual support and solidarity; to advance common political aims (international standards, national legislation); represents domestic workers at the international level; and secures the support of the wider labour movement for each of these objectives.

The **International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tobacco and Allied Workers' Associations (IUF)** is an international federation of trade unions representing workers employed in agriculture and plantations; the preparation and manufacture of food and beverages; hotels, restaurants and catering services; all stages of tobacco processing; and domestic work. Together with WIEGO, the IUF has played an important supporting role in the development of the IDWN and has provided the network with an organizational basis.