



Statistics on Domestic Workers in Latin America¹

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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, it is performed outside the realm of labour contracts and social protection.

Statistics on Urban Domestic Workers in Latin America³

1. Scale and Significance

- 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 Poverty⁴

The earnings of domestic workers are among the lowest of all occupations and the earnings of women are lower than men's – in part because women and men tend to do different tasks within domestic service. Further, a significant proportion of domestic workers live below the poverty line.

- Domestic workers in urban areas earn 41% of the earnings of the urban workforce.
 - Women's earnings in domestic work are 73% of men's.
 - Women's earnings in domestic work **are less** than in other jobs in the informal economy: only 84% of women's earning in own account employment and 83% of women's earnings in wage work in micro-enterprises.
 - Men's earnings in domestic work **are often more** than in other jobs in the informal economy:⁵ 94% of men's earnings in wage work in micro-enterprises but 118% of men's earnings in own account employment.



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¹ This is a summary of the key findings in WIEGO Working Paper N° 17, Domestic Workers in Latin America: Statistics for New Policies prepared by Victor Tokman 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). It was originally prepared in 2010 and was revised in November 2012.

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³ The data were compiled by Victor Tokman from the statistical database of the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC).

⁴ Micro-enterprises are defined as enterprises with less than five workers. Own account workers are defined as self-employed workers who do not hire others and are not professionals.

⁵ The large gap between the earnings of domestic workers and jobs in the informal sector is due to the high earnings of owner-operators of informal enterprises.

- 36% of urban domestic workers are below the poverty line compared to 26% of the total urban workforce and 35% of urban wage workers in micro-enterprises.

3. Labour Contracts and Social Protection

Very few domestic workers in urban areas have labour contracts or social protection and women in domestic work are in a worse position than men.

- 20% of urban domestic workers have a labour contract compared to 58% of the total urban workforce.
- 19% of domestic workers contribute to pension schemes compared to 47% of the total urban workforce and 25% of wage workers in micro-enterprises.
 - Fewer women in domestic work (18%) contribute to pension schemes than men (31%).
- 43% of domestic workers with *permanent contracts* contribute to pension schemes compared to 86% of all urban workers with permanent contracts.
 - Among domestic workers with a permanent contract, fewer women (38%) contribute to a pension scheme than men (54%).
- 44% of domestic workers contribute to pensions and/or health schemes compared to 64% of the total urban workforce.
 - 44% of women in domestic work contribute to pensions and/or health schemes compared to 47% of men.

4. Migrant Domestic Workers

Immigrants, especially women migrants, comprise a large share of domestic workers. Improvement in their working conditions requires new laws and practices in both sending and receiving countries.

- Domestic work is an important source of employment for migrants in Latin America, comprising 16-21% of migrant employment in Costa Rica, Chile, and Argentina.
 - For women immigrants, employment in domestic work reached from 37-47% in Costa Rica, Chile and Paraguay.
 - Most immigrants employed in domestic service are women: from 70-74% (Costa Rica, Honduras and the Dominican Republic) to 89-96% (Argentina, Chile, Brazil and Paraguay).
- 58% of workers in personal and related services (including domestic) in the USA in 2000 were immigrants from Latin America.



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About WIEGO: Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing is a global research-policy-action network that seeks to improve the status of the working poor, especially women, in the informal economy. WIEGO draws its membership from membership-based organizations of informal workers, researchers and statisticians working on the informal economy. For more information see www.wiego.org.

The International Domestic Workers' Network (IDWN) assists in the organization of domestic workers' unions where they do not yet exist; serves as a clearinghouse 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. For more information, see www.idwn.info.

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. For more information, see www.iuf.org.