

# Strong and United Facing up to the Pandemic



## THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON DOMESTIC WORKERS IN LATIN AMERICA



International Domestic Workers  
Federation (IDWF)'s Regional  
Survey Results



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# Surveys on the impact of COVID-19: Participating countries and domestic workers organizations

UPACP

FENATRAD

FESINTRACAP

SINTRASEDOM

UTRASD

ASTRADOMES

ATH

UNFETRAH

SIMUTHRES

SITRADOMSA

RMEHAC

SINACTRAHO

SINTRADOMGRA

FETRADOMOV

SINGRETRADS

SINTRADI

SINTRADOMES-CASC

SINTRADESPY

CCTH

FENTRAHOGARP

I PROFOTH

SINTTRAHOL

FENATRAHOB

SINPECAF



- **2.712 Completed surveys**
- **14 Countries**
- **24 Organizations**

# Background Information: Gathering Data in Pandemic Times

## • Our Objectives

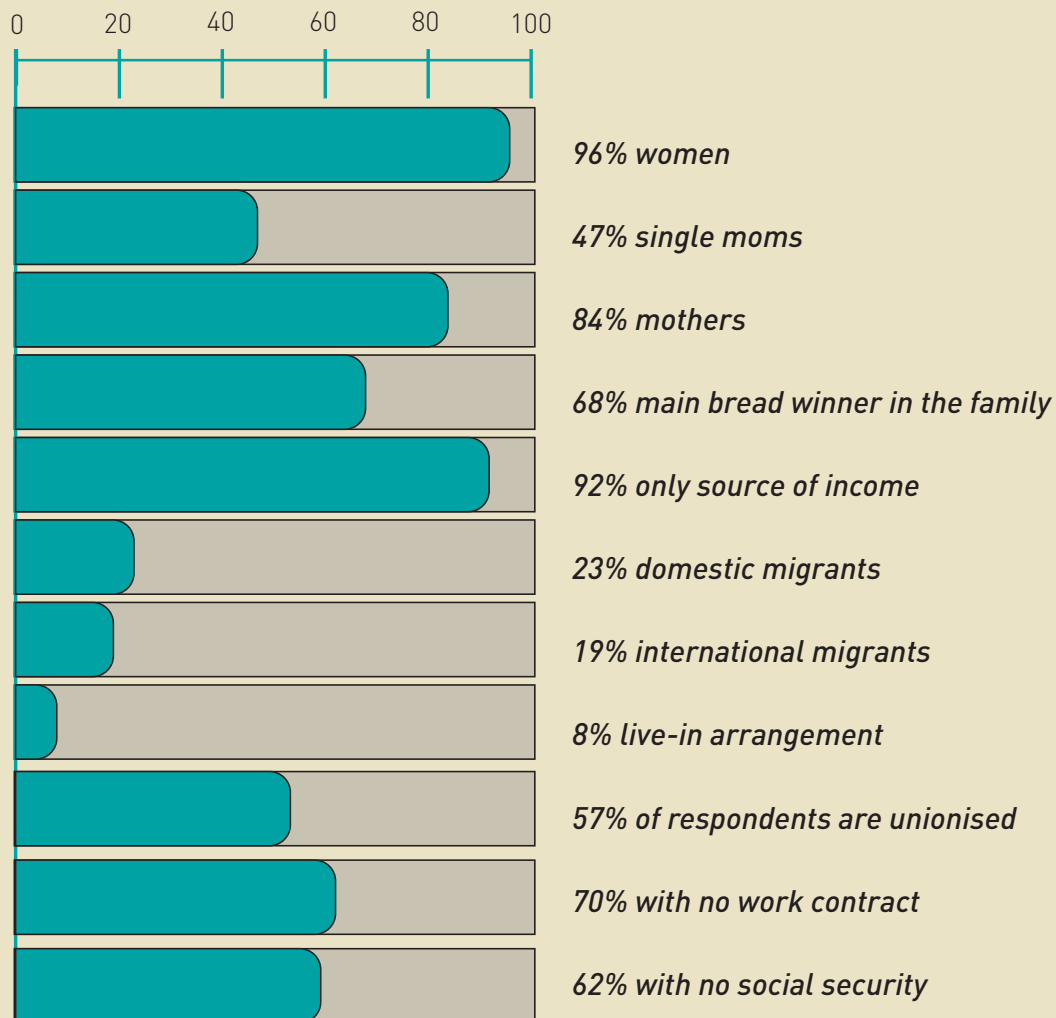
The Survey was designed in April 2020 since it was already clear for the regional IDWF team that we had to generate our own information of “hard data” to use it as empirical evidence regarding the effects of the pandemic on our sector. Also, we wanted to offer useful tools to union organizations to contribute to their organizing and advocacy actions before governments during and after the pandemic.

## • General Characteristics of the Survey:

An online questionnaire was designed in Spanish (for 13 Spanish-speaking countries) and Portuguese (for Brazil) to make it easy to complete electronically. The questionnaire was distributed on social media, Facebook, and WhatsApp groups of IDWF and CONLACTRHO affiliates during April and May, which were the most difficult months of the pandemic in the region. With great enthusiasm and significant efforts, a total of 2,712 surveys were completed. There were many challenges in the process, but we can highlight mainly two. The first one is that during the survey months, 95% of the surveyed countries were in confinement (except for Nicaragua) and it was not possible to travel on the streets; this meant that we were not able to contact those members who did not have a phone. Secondly, many members did not have resources to pay for their phone bills and, therefore, had no access to WhatsApp.

## • Who are the Domestic Workers who Answered the Survey?

Most respondents are women (96%) aged on average 41 (between 16 and 82 years of age), 47% of them are single moms and 84% are mothers. In 68% of the cases the respondent is the main bread winner in the family and for 92% domestic work is the only source of income. Half of them pay rent, 23% are domestic migrants, and 19% are international migrants. Around 8% live in their employer's home. Their salary is relatively low and below minimum wage. 70% of respondents do not have a written work contract and 62% are not covered by social security; a figure lower than the official International Labour Organization's official data.



It is worth pointing out that 57% of respondents are unionised. Taking into account that the percentages of domestic workers who are unionised varies between 1% to 2%, we can safely estimate that the real situation of domestic workers in the region is worse than the data resulting from this survey.

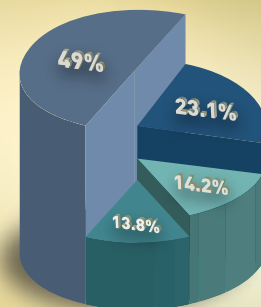
## Domestic workers among the sectors that were most affected by the pandemic

They went into the pandemic in highly unfavourable conditions: high levels of informality and low social recognition of their contribution to the wellbeing of people and society at large. Care work to protect life is held in high regard, but the workers who provide that care are hardly recognized.

- Domestic Workers (DW) are facing loss of employment and a reduction in their working hours as a result of the economic crisis, the fear of contagion and restricted mobility associated with confinement measures. This has caused a serious decrease in their income, putting their wellbeing at risk. According to the IDWF Survey, 49% of the region domestic workers had no work whether as a result of being suspended or dismissed (April and May data).

- Over 95% of the region domestic workers live in countries that have adopted confinement measures to fight the pandemic (only Nicaragua has not adopted confinement measures). According to the ILO Monitor: COVID-19 and the world of work, 5th edition, the Americas experienced the highest level of restrictions. **As a consequence, the highest number of working-hour losses for the second quarter of 2020 occurred in Latin America and the Caribbean mainly as a result of the destruction of jobs and the decline in working hours.**

Seriously affected by the crisis:  
violated labour rights and  
with no social protection.



- Another ILO report on the impact of COVID-19 on the domestic worker sector estimates that 69% of domestic workers in Latin America and the Caribbean had been significantly impacted by June 2020 as a result of the lockdown measures taken in the context of the pandemic, leading to loss of employment or a reduction of working hours and consequently their salary. This is the worst figure worldwide: 20 percentage points above the world's average (40%).
- The situation of domestic workers before the pandemic (high levels of informal employment) explains why the sector has been so impacted by the crisis brought about by the pandemic.
- The ILO report also indicates that domestic workers under an informal employment arrangement that did not include social security coverage before the lockdown measures face nowadays a higher risk of loss of employment and income. 83% of total domestic workers, both men and women, who were severely affected were in an informal labour situation at the onset of the pandemic.
- In Chile, for example, according to data from the National Statistics Institute, there was a 41.2% decline in employment for the March-May quarter 2020 compared to the same period in 2019.

## Are Domestic Workers Essential Workers?

- The worldwide crisis brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic has made apparent a contradiction: care work to protect life is held in high regard, but the workers who provide that care are hardly recognised.<sup>1</sup>



- The recognition of the essential nature of this occupation contrasts with the high level of informality and lack of protection that characterises the sector. This contradiction is shown by the fact that on the one hand these workers are considered essential for the wellbeing of families, their care and health, and on the other hand this is still the occupation that has the highest levels of lack of protection, and worse salaries and work conditions than any other wage earning sector.

**1 For more information please refer to the following reports:**

[https://repositorio.cepal.org/bitstream/handle/11362/46537/1/S2000799\\_es.pdf](https://repositorio.cepal.org/bitstream/handle/11362/46537/1/S2000799_es.pdf)

[https://repositorio.cepal.org/bitstream/handle/11362/46633/5/S2000740\\_es.pdf](https://repositorio.cepal.org/bitstream/handle/11362/46633/5/S2000740_es.pdf)

[https://repositorio.cepal.org/bitstream/handle/11362/45724/1/Informe\\_CEPAL-ONUmujeres-OIT\\_es.pdf](https://repositorio.cepal.org/bitstream/handle/11362/45724/1/Informe_CEPAL-ONUmujeres-OIT_es.pdf)

- The determination of the essential or non-essential nature of the work performed by domestic workers has given rise to a heated debate and opposing positions. In some countries, this sector has been considered as one that provides indispensable services for society, but a difference has been drawn according to the type of activity performed (care to boys, girls and elderly persons is considered essential) or when their employers are at the frontline (healthcare workers, basic services). In other countries domestic workers have been explicitly declared non-essential and their circulation to the workplace has been banned. Most countries, however, have not defined clear criteria: domestic workers have not been included on the essential worker lists but also no measures have been taken for them to be able to stay at home with assistance to maintain or replace their income.

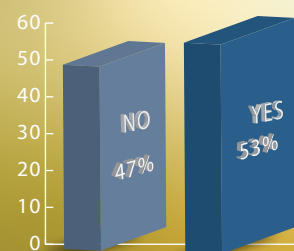


*“Due to the lack of public transport I accepted to stay [to work] in a live-in arrangement. I have worked 46 consecutive days with no rest”. (Peru)*

- This has forced a certain number of paid domestic workers to continue going daily to their workplaces using public transport with the resulting contagion risk. Another group of domestic workers has had to change their work arrangement temporarily and remained at their employers’ homes as a live-in employee for weeks or months, which resulted in an increase in working hours and a loss of privacy.

- In **Argentina**, domestic workers were given a fundamental role for the good health of families and workers in charge of caring for 10 people with disabilities; people who need assistance; elderly people; boys, girls and teenagers up to 18 years of age were included in a list of frontline workers who perform essential activities. Workers over 60 years of age were exempted from going to work, as well as pregnant women who belonged to a risk group or with minor dependent children. Sanitary protocols similar to those applicable to other economic sectors were established: mandatory use of face masks, frequent handwashing and personal hygiene measures, disinfection of rooms and objects, social distancing, restricted use of public transport.

Has your employer adopted measures to ensure your safety when you commute to work?





- In **Brasil**, the definition of essential or non-essential paid domestic work was determined by the entity establishing it, the kind of tasks to be performed and the type of employers. The Public Ministry of Labour established that paid domestic work was not included among essential occupations during the pandemic and paid domestic workers were not obliged to go to their workplaces, with certain exceptions. Paid domestic workers who provided care services or were employed by people who worked in essential sectors (health, food, logistics) were considered essential, and had the obligation to go to work, which excluded them from the right to a paid quarantine. At the same time, some states —Pernambuco, Pará and Maranhão and Rio Grande do Sul— challenged this federal decision and recognized the work as essential and the obligation of paid domestic workers to go to work.

In response to these contradictory governmental decisions, the National Federation of Domestic Workers, FENATRAD, launched a national campaign #EsencialesSonNuestrosDerechos (#EssentialAreOurRights), which challenges and questions the Brazilian society: What is considered “essential” by society in connection with domestic work? The health and dignity of workers or that they provide services at any cost, including risking their lives? According to Luiza Batista, president of FENATRAD, this situation “reflects the Brazilian custom of always having a domestic worker available at any cost. The kind of work we do is very important, right, but it is necessary that we become aware of the fact that our rights are even more important, particularly our right to life”.

- In **Chile** mobile quarantines were initially established in the areas that presented the highest number of cases. The first quarantines were declared in high-income sectors, which is where paid domestic workers usually perform their services. These workers were considered “non-essential” and, therefore, they were not only exempted but also banned from traveling to go to their workplaces. This measure did not affect live-in workers, as they did not have the need to travel. As a result, many workers who had a live-out arrangement were pressured to stay at their employers’ homes working during the quarantine. This form of work became more widespread as the confinement measures were extended in time and to larger areas. The government made an initial calling to keep paying salaries to those workers who were not able to go to work and later adopted, for the entire wage-earning sector including paid domestic workers, a law providing for a temporary stay of the

work relationship for up to six months at the same time making it easier to have access to unemployment insurance (to which they were not eligible before) in exceptional circumstances. This law allowed for the use of the compensation fund that paid domestic workers have and for employers to suspend the payment of salaries.

- In **Costa Rica**, the figures of the National Institute of Statistics and Census (INEC in its Spanish acronym) confirm that domestic servers have suffered the worst impact on their work resulting from COVID-19: more than 60,000 of them have lost their jobs. That is to say, almost 45% of domestic workers lost their job between June 2019 and June 2020, the highest relative figure in all the sectors of the population, according to the analysis resulting from the Continuous Employment Survey (ECE in its Spanish acronym) published by the INEC in August with data as of the first half of the year. The situation is even worse for migrant women, 40% of whom provide domestic services and account for one out of three household employees, according to data from the ECE.
- **Uruguay** did not establish mandatory confinement, but in March in-person school classes were suspended at all levels, and restaurants, bars and shopping malls were closed. The government did not establish any criteria regarding the essential nature of DW. Some workers continued working, some did not go to their workplace following instructions by their employers, and others were dismissed and thus requested unemployment insurance. The situation of workers who were asked not to go to work in their usual work schedule was contemplated in the collective bargaining agreement signed in 2010, which provided for the obligation to pay their salaries for the days they did not work if the decision was made by the employer. The Single Domestic Workers Union of Uruguay (SUTD) called on the workers to go on a voluntary quarantine so that they could stay home and prevent the spread of the virus by using public transport to and from their work places.
- The lack of clear policies and the need to earn an income for their homes have led many workers to feel pressured to continue working. Some of them had to use public transport, with the resulting risk, while others have had to change their work arrangement temporarily and stayed at their employers' homes for weeks or even months. Workers in this second group have seen their work hours increase and have lost their privacy; this in addition to being exposed to a higher risk of harassment and not being able to be with their families.

# 2

## Social inequality: Domestic workers face food insecurity, poverty or the risk to fall in poverty and suffer hunger

- ▶ It is estimated that before this pandemic, there were between 12 and 18 million domestic workers in Latin America. Many of them are now unemployed.
- ▶ Most domestic workers are heads of household and are in charge or earning a livelihood for their homes. The loss of income puts their situation and that of their families at risk. The loss of employment puts their survival of many families in the region at risk.



*“Totally affected, without work, with a pregnant daughter and a 7-year old granddaughter. We ran out of savings, we need to pay rent, buy food and gas; we are really in bad shape”.*  
(Chile)

Domestic work accounts for 14.3% of the jobs for women in the region; however, over 77.5% works informally<sup>1</sup>.

- ▶ According to the IDWF Survey, 68% of domestic workers supports their families with their salary. For the large majority (92%, according to the IDWF Survey) this is their only income.

**Their #QuedateEnCasa (#StayAtHome) campaign promoted by almost all the governments in the region is merely a slogan and not an option in practice for the 18 million Latin American domestic workers. Most of them, in the 14 countries where the survey was conducted, have not been included in the measures implemented by the government.**

<sup>1</sup> Domestic Workers in Latin America and the Caribbean during the COVID-19 Crisis. ILO. ECLAC and UN Women 2020.

- For 92% of domestic workers (DWs) in the region their employment is the only or main source of income.
- 68% of DWs are the main or only breadwinners of their family.
- Job insecurity is accentuated and debts accumulation in consequence.
- Working conditions worsen: change in work modalities and arrangements, more or less hours of work and increase in violence, mistreatment and labor rights abuses

• Social governmental support has been insufficient both in terms of coverage and the amounts) to meet the needs of the workers and their families. The countries in the region have reinforced their social programmes and have adopted a series of measures intended to cover the basic needs of the population. However, the measures have been limited in scope and domestic workers' organizations in the region have pointed out that many workers were not able to have access to them.

In some cases, the process and bureaucracy to apply for governmental assistance is difficult to understand for domestic workers or the application has to be done online or by electronic means, which requires that they use smart phones or that they have access to a computer. In other cases, the measures are mostly focused on the population working informally, which excludes formal workers. Alternatively, sometimes measures are addressed to those having social security coverage, leaving aside most domestic workers. In most countries, domestic workers themselves have had to fight to be included in support programs.

- 60% of domestic workers who responded the IDWF survey states not having received support, and those who did receive it point out that the amounts given out are not sufficient to cover the needs of their families.

Workers are not able to pay rent and basic services, and some state they are going hungry. Faced with this situation, domestic workers' organizations have had to carry out solidary campaigns to deliver social assistance —mainly baskets with food, medications and personal hygiene items— to the workers who are most in need.

- The International Domestic Workers Federation has contributed with these campaigns to provide support to the unions with basic food baskets, protection equipment kits and resources for the payment of prepaid cell phone services, so that they can continue operating and communicating with their members.



*“In these times of crises, I think the government’s help should reach the people that don’t have any kind of subsidy and live on an extremely low salary”.*

(Migrant domestic worker in Argentina)





***“I only received one basic basket around two months ago”.***

(El Salvador)

- In the Dominican Republic the three domestic workers' unions, UNFETRAH-FENAMUTRA, ATH-CNUS and SINTRADOMES-CASC were mobilized in a coordinated way through strategic advocacy actions in the government program called #QuedateEnCasa (#StayAtHome) to provide temporary assistance to informal workers who are currently unemployed.

Domestic workers were initially excluded from this program since there was no registry for them with the various social security offices or other governmental entity. In a 10-day period, the three unions were able to put together a registry of domestic workers to operationalize the delivery of a coupon to workers of the domestic sector.



Regarding the pandemic, the ATH General Secretary, Elena Pérez states:

***“Many of the comrades are more afraid of not being able to put food on their tables than of the coronavirus itself. They are going through difficult times but they sort it out the best they can because they have mouths to feed”.***

# 3

## Domestic workers organizations have taken the lead in the protection of workers' rights and have developed the regional campaign #CuidaAQuienTeCuida (#CareForThoseWhoCareForYou)

Given the governments' message saying #QuedateEnCasa (#StayAtHome), domestic workers answer #CuidaAQuienTeCuida (#CareForThoseWhoCareForYou) demanding pragmatic and real labour and social protection measures for a sector that does not have them. Regionally, the main demands of the sector are three:

- a) Paid quarantine .
- b) Measures to protect jobs and income.
- c) Social protection measures.

Through different campaigns and actions throughout the region, they demand to be included and receive the same protection as other workers:

### El Salvador: SIMUTHRES



### Paraguay: SINTRADI y SINTRADESPY



### Dominican Republic: ATH-UNFETRAH-SINTRADOMES



## Argentina: UPACP



## Brazil: FENATRAD



## Chile: FESINTRACAP



## Costa Rica: ASTRADOMES





**Panama: SINGRETRADS**



**Colombia: SINTRASEDOM**



**Colombia: UTRASD y SINTRASEDOM**



**Mexico: SINACTRAHO**



## Guatemala: SITRADOMSA



## Peru: SINTRAHOL



## Peru: IPROFOTH



## Peru: FENTRAHORARP



# 4

## **The conditions of informality in domestic employment leave workers without protection and make them more vulnerable to the pandemic**

*“In Peru the pandemic unveiled a reality that nobody wanted to see: it made apparent the lack of protection and the risks to which the domestic sector is subject, both in terms of health and labour rights. I feel that every cloud has a silver lining. This situation has given visibility to the domestic workers’ problems and has triggered huge tokens of solidarity, sisterhood and humanitarian aid.*

*Additionally, all existing domestic workers’ organizations have mobilized their members in different ways in the context of the pandemic and this allowed us to see our strength and possibilities we have to keep fighting jointly to materialise essential labour rights for domestic workers”.*

Martha Dolorier, CCTH General Secretary

*As established by ILO Convention 189, domestic workers are salaried workers; regardless of the tasks they perform, their working hours or the number of employers for which they work, they should be covered by labour laws and social security.*

- Article 14 of ILO Convention 189 provides that domestic workers must enjoy conditions that are not less favourable than those applicable to workers generally in respect to social security protection, including with respect to maternity.

Despite the fact that most countries in the region provide that there must be mandatory enrolment with social security for domestic workers, coverage is —with a few exceptions— very low. According to the UN Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean CEPAL, on average, 3 out of every 4 domestic workers in Latin America are not registered with social security. There's a high level of non-compliance with the law that is not punished.

*“I’m afraid to lose my job because my employer told me she can no longer pay me if I don’t go to work. I asked her to issue a permit because I live far from work and I need two bus lines to get there. She told me I don’t need one but I’m afraid I might be stopped by the police and will have to pay a fine”. (Argentina)*

- High informality levels prevent domestic workers from having access to protection measures during the pandemic: unemployment insurance, protection in cases of suspension of employment, redundancy payments, sick leave in case of infection, etc.



*“I have been dismissed with no salary and with no entitlement to unemployment insurance”. (Mexico)*

- In very few countries domestic workers are entitled to unemployment insurance. Uruguay is one of the few that provides for it and it even made it more flexible to allow part time workers to have access to it. Chile adopted it on 1 October thanks to the advocacy work done by domestic workers' organizations. In Brazil, domestic workers with a formal status have access to unemployment insurance but daily labourers are excluded. Costa Rica does not have unemployment insurance for domestic workers but created a programme called “Protetger” (Protect); a subsidy granted to formal workers who have lost up to 50% of their income during the pandemic.

*“I was fired because of the virus because I cared for a cancer patient and I could be a contagion vector”. (Chile)*



- Given the particular characteristics of domestic work and the place where it takes place, it is essential to have formalized work relationships and terms of employment. That is why it is so important for legislation to provide the obligation to have a written contract to govern the work relationship and establish the rights and duties of both parties.
- Article 7 of Convention 189 establishes that measures shall be taken for workers to be informed of their terms and conditions of employment in an appropriate, verifiable and easily understandable manner and preferably, where possible, through written contracts. Despite this, most countries in the region do not have a requirement that a written contract be executed between the worker and the employer.
- Not too long ago the laws in Bolivia, Chile, Costa Rica and Paraguay established that it is mandatory to have a written work contracts, although in Bolivia a written contract may only be demanded when the labour relationship is longer than a year. In Chile, Costa Rica and Paraguay the contract must be registered with the applicable public authority. In Argentina and Brazil, it is mandatory for domestic workers to have a work card, which is proof of the work relationship. In México, the amendments introduced in 2019 to the Federal Labour Law and the Social Security Law regarding DW provide for the obligation to have a written contract which must include specific information.

*Major progress was achieved in Peru thanks to the mobilization of domestic workers' organizations during the COVID-19 pandemic. Legislative Decree 1499, approved on 10 May 2020, established that a written contract must be executed for the paid domestic work sector, which must be registered with the website established for that purpose by the Ministry of Labour and Work Promotion.*

# 5

## Union's proposals to cope with situations of extreme unemployment



There is deep concern and uncertainty among workers' organizations about the loss of employment and about when they are going to return to the workplace. While they continue to demand that their own governments comply with their obligation to assist men and women workers suffering from the crisis, organizations show pragmatism and resilience to find creative, self-managed, and agile solutions.

The domestic workers' unions in Central America and the Caribbean have started to coordinate revenue generation proposals through the creation of common funds for undertakings related to the production of crafts and face masks, the sale of food and beverages, the organization of soup kitchens and solidarity raffles in order to earn an income for their families

# 6

## Developments and achievements of domestic workers' organizations

### Peru:

The active mobilisation of domestic workers led to the adoption of the decree that prescribed mandatory written contracts, which had to be duly registered with the Ministry of Labour.

The contract must include: place of work, schedule, start date of the employment relationship, specific tasks to be carried out by the domestic worker, pay, mutually-agreed weekly day off, access to educational opportunities, working hours and benefits. Moreover, the employer must provide a pay slip to the domestic worker including applicable contributions and discounts.



In October, a new domestic workers law was approved; it seeks to equate labor rights and protections of the domestic sector with those of the other sectors. The new legislation regulates minimum wage, working hours, the right to overtime pay, and incorporates prevention and protection against sexual harassment at work, among other provisions.

## Chile:

In the midst of the pandemic, domestic workers have managed to become eligible for unemployment insurance, which came into force for the sector on 1 October and which will protect them especially throughout high unemployment times. The law creating this insurance, adopted in 2002, had originally excluded domestic workers.

The new law prescribed that every formal domestic worker is now able to access this benefit, thereby being protected for an unemployment period of up to 6 months. Workers with lower salaries or shorter contribution periods will receive a supplementary amount provided by the solidarity fund.



Additionally, workers will keep the severance fund, which protects them upon termination of the employment relationship even under voluntary termination situations. This milestone is the result of a broad campaign of the union organizations within the sector that have demanded compliance with Article 14 of ILO Convention 189 and protection of domestic workers' right to social security under conditions that are not less favourable than those of other workers.



## Brazil:

### FENATRAD demands that domestic workers be considered NON-ESSENTIAL.

FENATRAD has been advocating for the approval of Bill 2477/20, which declares domestic workers as “non-essential” during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Although paid domestic work is not regarded as an “essential activity” at a national level both by the Federal Law passed at the beginning of the pandemic and the following presidential decrees, certain states and cities have issued their own resolutions in this regard; some of which contradict the applicable national legislation



This law seeks to prevent, making specific emphasis on the non-essential category of the domestic work sector throughout the Brazilian territory.

# Mexico:

Due to the crisis generated by the pandemic, SINACTRAHO launched in April a permanent survey on social media in order to obtain and document information regarding the difficulties of domestic workers in times of pandemic.

This survey gathers weekly (anonymous) testimonials that detect the level of employers' compliance with the measures to guarantee health, safety, and labour rights of domestic workers.

**Los derechos de las trabajadoras del hogar frente al COVID-19**

El capítulo XIII de la Ley Federal del Trabajo establece los derechos laborales fundamentales para las y los trabajadoras del hogar. **Los derechos que se están incumpliendo son:**

- Información sobre las labores y condiciones de empleo (Artículo 312 de la Ley Federal del Trabajo)
- Horario de trabajo (Artículo 336)
- Remuneración (Artículo 132)
- Seguridad, Descanso y Salud (Artículo 311 en la Fracción V, Artículo 318, Artículo 317 en la Fracción I)
- Seguridad social (Artículo 317 en la Fracción IV del inciso I)
- Las normas relativas a trabajadoras y trabajadoras que viven en la casa de sus empleadores (Artículo 312 en la Fracción I del inciso I)

**¡El incumplimiento de estos derechos pone en riesgo a cientos de trabajadoras del hogar!**

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**Los derechos de las trabajadoras del hogar frente al COVID-19**

Porcentaje de trabajadoras del hogar con dificultades en el acceso de trabajo, salarios, condiciones y apoyo. (en miles)

Categoría	Si	No	Si	No
Acceso de trabajo	54.2%	45.8%	54.2%	45.8%
Salarios	44.2%	55.8%	44.2%	55.8%
Condiciones	34.2%	65.8%	34.2%	65.8%

**La mayoría de las trabajadoras del hogar nos han dicho que su horario de trabajo ha cambiado, que eso ha afectado su salario y que han perdido su empleo.**

<sup>11</sup> No me permiten de descansar en la noche desde hace tres meses.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Me afectó mucho, con reducción de sueldo o la mitad y tengo muchos problemas ya que soy madre soltera de 2 adolescentes y para no me alcanza.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Estoy embarazada, tengo 8 hijos, mi esposo no quiere un trabajo y nada estamos con mi poco sueldo -porque me restaron el sueldo-...<sup>16</sup>

Logos: UNAM, RED, Secretaría de Trabajo y Previsión Social, Sindicato de Trabajadoras del Hogar.

Supplementary to this, SINACTRAHO hosts online conversations (Zoom and FB live) every Sunday in order to follow up and provide counselling to anonymous complaints received through the surveys. This strategy has allowed them to reach territories that never before had the presence of the union and recruit new members.

# 7

## Health and Safety Risks

Domestic work has been classified as high risk during the pandemic since it entails personal interactions; making social distancing impossible. Workers may find themselves in the need to assist people who are infected and are exposed to the risk of becoming infected in the homes of their employers. They can also be the ones spreading the virus. Therefore, it is key for the workplace to be a safe space in which mutual care measures are applied.



*"My employer required me to take a coronavirus test".*

(Peru)

▶ **• The worker's health and her risk of becoming infected are associated with the prevention and care measures that both the employers and the workers take.**

▶ • It is necessary to define clear protection and care protocols in order to minimize the risk of transmission and have the necessary information and equipment that would reduce risks to a minimum in a scenario in which the need for thorough cleaning tasks using chemical products that can be hazardous to the workers' health has increased.

▶ • The IDWF regional survey showed a high prevalence of co-morbidity conditions that make the situation of many workers even more risky: overweight, diabetes, and high blood pressure. This is coupled with the fact that this sector has a large proportion of workers who are at high risk as they are over 60 years of age. The risks of becoming seriously ill are increased by the lack of access to health services and the high level of informality of the sector. Moreover, the cost of the COVID test in many countries is high and unaffordable for domestic workers.

- Almost half of the domestic workers who have continued carrying out their tasks do not have basic protection equipment to use in their workplace and have not received protection items

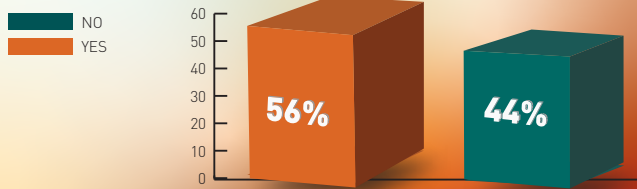
*“We are providing medication kits and protection equipment to the affiliates because many of them have cancer and high blood pressure and cannot afford the medication they need. Others [do not even have] resources to pay for their soap and alcohol sanitizers”.*

[Dominican Republic]



to be used while commuting to and from work. Workers have expressed their fear to become infected when they eventually return to work.

### Workers who have basic protection equipment to use in their workplace



Occupational hazards of paid domestic work under the COVID-19 pandemic have been portrayed in the case of Brazil. The first person to die of coronavirus was a domestic worker who contracted the virus at the workplace.

**Cleonice Gonçalves, a 63-year-old black worker, died on 24 March 2020 after contracting the virus at the workplace. Her employers turned out to be COVID positive when they returned from a trip to Italy. Even so, they neither informed the worker nor took any measures to protect her.**

- Finally, psycho-social risks at the workplace have also escalated during the pandemic. A high percentage of surveyed workers report an increase in their working hours with no appropriate breaks, as well as a more intense workload and new tasks they have to perform since most of the

family members are at home all day. As a result, more workers are suffering both physical and emotional consequences.

- Likewise, safety conditions in the workplace have been jeopardised due to the increase in harassment and violence related to the fact that more men employers are now working from home.

Live-in workers in particular and those who were asked to remain at their employers' homes during lockdown are the ones who have experienced more psychological, physical and sexual violence.

*“One of my employers is doing home office and has touched me while she [wife/employer] is not present.*

*He has been harassing me”.* [Mexico]



## Workers' organizations have mobilised for a safe return to work during the pandemic

Whilst the pandemic continues, lockdown measures begin to ease in several countries of the region in order to boost local economies. However, reopening the economy poses new occupational health and safety risks for the domestic sector as some workers return to work, mostly without the protection they need to do so.



**Panama:** SINGRETRADS obtains work permits for domestic workers given the cancellation of the issuance of travelling documents due to the fast spread of COVID-19 in the last few weeks. SINGRETRADS carried out advocacy actions that caused the government to demand that the procedure to obtain these travelling documents be carried out by SINGRETRADS instead of them being granted at the mere request of employers.

According to the Ministry of Labour and Employment Development (Mitradel), 5,473 travelling documents were requested for domestic workers in Panama as of 23 July.

**Argentina** - UPACP developed, with the technical support of the University of San Martín, the mobile app #RetornoSeguroServicioDoméstico (#SafeReturnForDomesticWorkers). This App, free and available to the community, offers COVID-19 safety protocols and protection tips for workers and employers and promotes dialogue and interaction between them. Argentina is the only country to develop a tripartite protocol for the domestic sector.

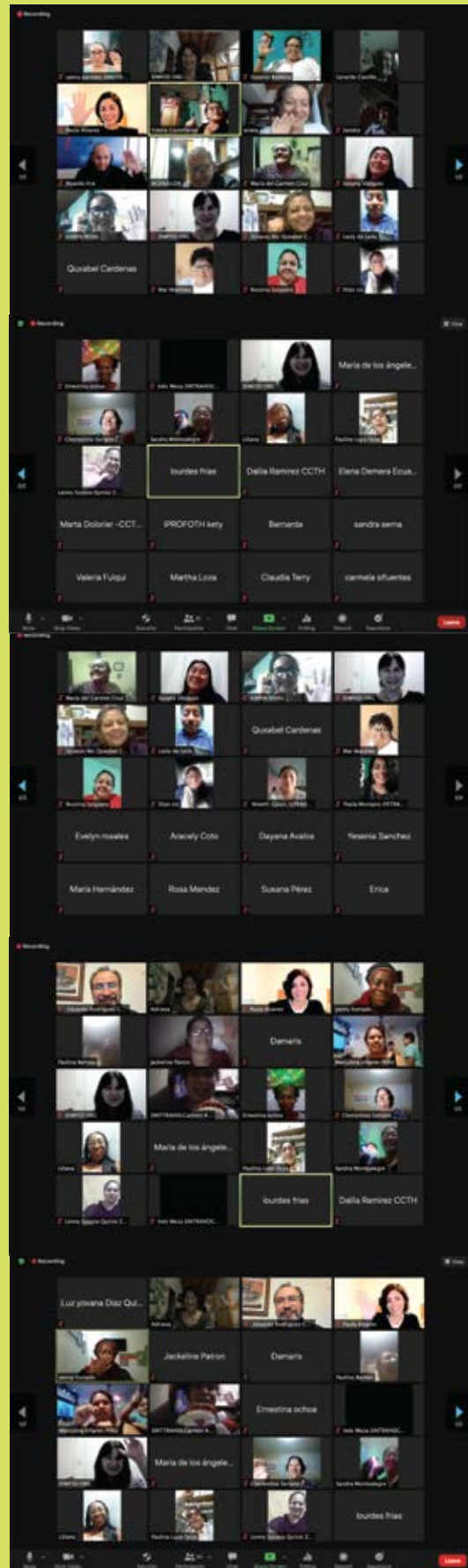
**Sharing experiences COVID-19 prevention protocols:** Last July, the Latin American team at IDWF held a training activity on “COVID-19 prevention protocol for members of union organizations”, which was a great success in terms of attendance and positive impact, with the participation of over 100 regional leaders and 28 union organizations. The materials and contents of the training activity were designed by the UPACP School, the Argentine Union of Domestic Workers led by Carmen Brítez, a pioneer in the development of a tripartite protocol for the sector.

## Regional training sessions and exchange of experiences promoted by the IDWF and the ILO-CTRAV Latin America

- The exchange of experiences activity held last July on the COVID-19 tripartite prevention protocol for the domestic sector in Argentina served as a basis and inspiration for other unions in Peru, Colombia and Brazil to develop their own guidelines to educate and inform their members on how to take care of themselves and prevent the spread of the disease. However, these same union organizations observed the limitations of these protocols when they are developed only by the workers' sector and are limited to the context of the pandemic.
- They quickly realised that these protocols should go beyond and cover more than occupational health and safety (OHS) in a more comprehensive manner and from the perspective of labour rights for the domestic sector, as well as the need to include and work with the employers' side. In this sense, the ILO in Mexico developed a set of guidelines, "COVID-19 Occupational Health and Safety Orientation Guidelines for Employers and Domestic Workers", which served as the basis to articulate regional training sessions for 16 countries that were coordinated by the IDWF together with the technical assistance of the ILO Latin America and the regional offices of ACTRAV for the Andean, Southern Cone, Central America, Mexico, the Caribbean, and Cuba regions.



- As a closing to the activities in response to COVID-19, the “Training on COVID-19 Occupational Health and Safety for Domestic Workers’ Union Organizations: Guidelines for Employers and Workers” was held from 29 October to 13 December. 32 domestic workers’ union organizations from 16 countries and more than 221 leaders, counsellors and partners participated in these training sessions. They were focused on international occupational health and safety regulations and their connection with C189 in the context of a pending decent work agenda for the domestic sector, the creation of COVID-19 protocols, the development of a roadmap for advocacy and union strategies to support the union organizations in their advocacy and social dialogue with their governments on related matters.
- The ILO-IDWF’s regional guide on COVID-19 occupational health and safety for domestic workers and employers is scheduled to be published in February 2021. These guidelines are expected to serve as a tool for dialogue and a proposal for employers and governments so that they can be officially accepted as was the case of Argentina.



## Post-pandemic times: Rebuilding the economy with a focus on the care economy and social and gender equality

- The COVID-19 pandemic has triggered a global crisis that is not limited only to economics and health, but also includes matters of care and social reproduction. This is a crisis that demands a gender-based response that focuses on the care economy, where domestic work is recognized and protected by national legal frameworks and valued by society as a whole.

- Despite the fact that Latin America has the highest number of ratifications of Convention 189 and that most countries in the region have implemented substantial legal reforms to eliminate discrimination and place domestic workers' rights on an equal footing with those of other workers, a comparative law analysis shows that the reform process has not been completed and that some countries still have face the challenge of starting the process.

- A significant shortcoming in domestic workers' labour conditions makes reference to the high levels of non-compliance with the legislation that protects them. Even though most countries in the region establish the right of domestic workers to social security, only 1 in 4 workers are covered. Progress needs to be made towards a culture of compliance and an improvement in the monitoring systems.



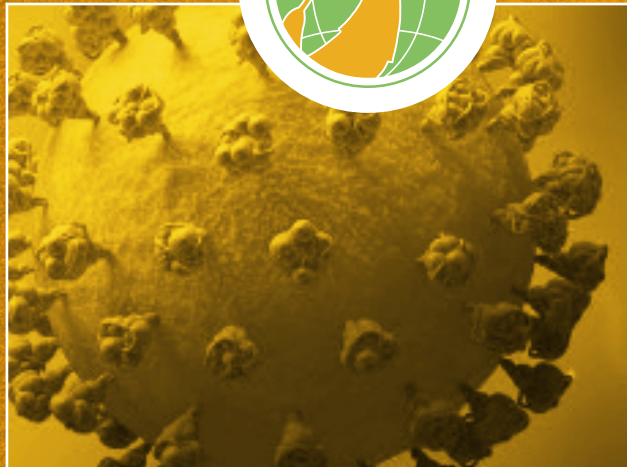


- Domestic workers' organizations have a very valuable oversight role and the responsibility of making workers' voices heard. In Latin America there are over 40 domestic workers' organizations (federations, unions and associations) that have mobilised since the beginning of the pandemic, leading the movement for the protection of workers' rights through solidary campaigns and political advocacy actions.
- Based on the experience drawn from previous crises, it is possible to predict that in the aftermath of the pandemic there will be high job insecurity and unemployment. That is why it is necessary to ensure that government support measures and basic income programs reach domestic workers.

Despite the distressing context the pandemic will leave behind, and the post-pandemic situation with significant unemployment in the sector, this crisis has strengthened the union organizations in their ability to timely call upon decision-makers, give visibility to the sector, self-manage social networks, enhance leadership, secure coordinated union action and, above all, it has brought to the forefront a poignant and inspiring resilience shown by the entire domestic workers' movement in the region.



To learn more about the IDWF and affiliate organizations' activities during the pandemic please go to <https://idwfed.org/es/recursos/boletin-mensual-de-america-latina>



## **THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON DOMESTIC WORKERS IN LATIN AMERICA:**

Resultados de la Encuesta Regional de la FITH.

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