



International
Labour
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An overview of domestic work in Africa

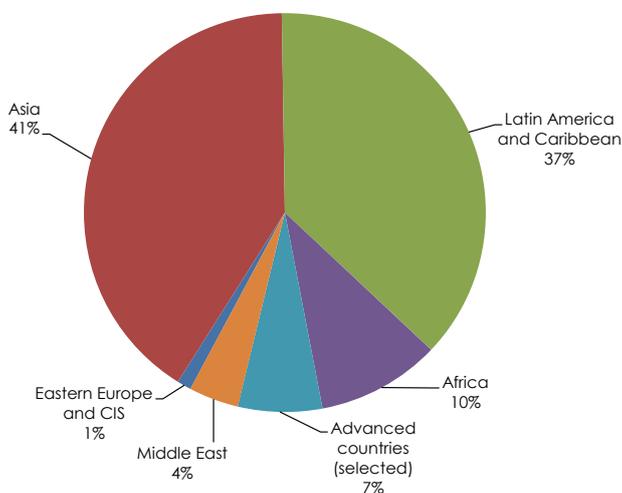
International Labour Office
**Making Decent Work a Reality for Domestic Worker in Africa:
a regional knowledge sharing forum**
Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, 28-30 May 2013

Domestic Workers: How many are they?

According to official employment statistics, 5.2 million workers are estimated to be employed as domestic workers in Africa, making it the third largest employer of domestic workers, after Asia and Latin America.

This figure however is widely seen as an underestimate in a region where many say that “almost everyone has a domestic worker” and “even domestic workers in urban areas have domestic workers”. In Ghana for example, general knowledge claims that there is at least one domestic worker in each house, and large houses could have as many as six.¹

Distribution of domestic workers by region, 2010 estimates

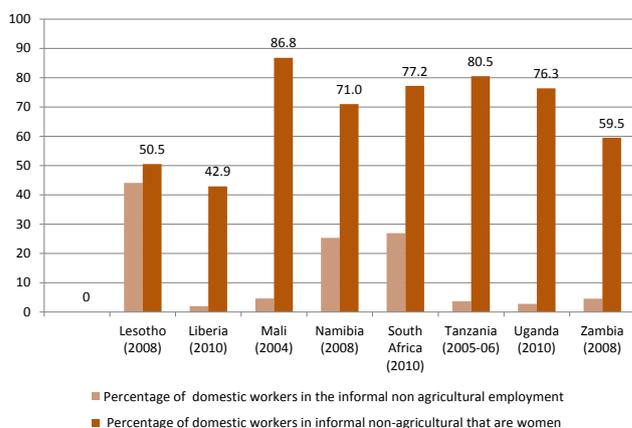


There are three major explanations for the low figures in Africa: first, employment data are lacking and insufficiently disaggregated for many African countries; second, labour force surveys fail to recognize and capture less visible forms of domestic work, such as child domestic labour and domestic servitude; and third, domestic workers may not be recognized as workers by the households that employ them nor by the workers' themselves. Because of social stigma, domestic workers may refuse to identify themselves. In some cases, domestic work arrangements may be based on traditional practices of reciprocal obligations between households, regarded as kinship arrangements, not employment relationships.

An important workforce

The available official data show that domestic workers account for at least 4.9 % of total wage employment. Roughly three quarters of non-agricultural employment in Africa is informal, and with the majority of new jobs being informal, domestic work is expanding. Domestic work accounted for 44 % of informal non-agricultural employment in Lesotho (2008), and 27 % in South Africa (2010).²

Domestic workers in the informal economy



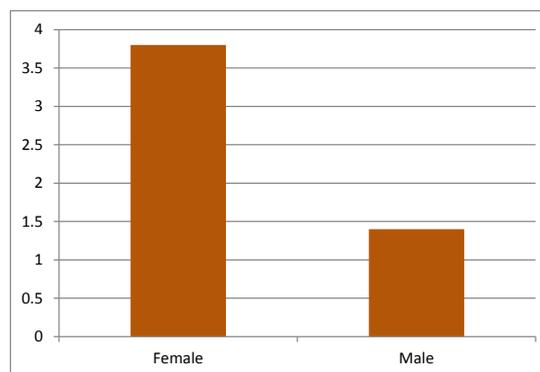
Source: ILO 2012. New enhanced database on informal employment produced by the ILO in partnership with WIEGO. International Labour Office: Geneva. http://www.ilo.org/global/statistics-and-databases/WCMS_179795/lang-en/index.htm

A female-led sector

Predominantly undertaken by girls and women, domestic work is a very important source of paid employment for them. Of all female paid employees in Africa, 13.6 % are domestic workers. In South Africa (2010) more than three quarters of domestic workers were women, and in Ethiopia (2005) the female share of the sector was 91 %.

Chronic poverty and widening inequality, HIV/AIDS mortality, lack of educational facilities, and the legacy of domestic servitude from the colonial period are among the factors that explain the growing size of the domestic work sector. For most girls and women escaping poverty and lack of jobs in rural areas, domestic work is the easiest entry occupation in the cities.

Total domestic workers in Africa by sex (million)



Source: ILO 2013. Domestic workers across the world: Global and regional statistics and the extent of legal protection. International Labour Office: Geneva

Child domestic workers

In sub-Saharan Africa, 65 million children, or 1 in 4, are child laborers.³ Because of the hidden nature of child labour in domestic work, it is difficult to obtain representative data. Nonetheless, it is a serious issue in Africa.⁴ In Kenya, 2006, the ILO estimated about 200,000 children below the age of 18 engaged in domestic labour.⁵ Part of this has been linked to the increasing vulnerability of fostered children to situations of exploitation.⁶ The lines between "helping in the house of a relative" and working as an employee may be blurred and ambiguous. Realities of unequal benefits exist and fostered children may not end up going to school but working as servants instead. In Ghana, 2005, a study showed that 8 % of fostered children were below 10 years old, and 14 % were between 10-12 years of age.⁷ In Africa, 9 out of 10 child domestic workers are girls.

Internal and international labour migration

Geographical movements in Africa remain largely internal, i.e. from rural to urban centers and from rural to other rural areas; and international migration remains largely within the continent. With few resources, domestic workers are most likely migrants from the poorer, rural areas within the same country or migrants from adjacent countries in the region. South Africa is the

largest receiving country, with most workers originating from Zimbabwe, Malawi, Mozambique and Tanzania. Ethiopia is a growing country of origin of domestic workers in the GCC, Lebanon and Jordan. For 2011, it was estimated that 100,000 domestic workers (mostly women) left through legal channels. However, far more migrants use irregular channels, using the so-called desert route or through operations of unregistered private employment agencies.⁸

Wages and working conditions

As in most parts of the world, wages of domestic workers in Africa are significantly below wages received by other workers. In Tanzania (2006) domestic workers earned around 23.9 % of average wages. In Botswana (2005/06), domestic workers earned around 14% of average wages.⁹ In Namibia (2008) the Labour Force Survey found that 60 percent of domestic workers earned less than 600 Namibian dollars (N\$).¹⁰ Such extremely low wages are far less common in the formal sector, where only 7 % of employees earned between N\$1 and N\$599 in 2008.¹¹ In South Africa, workers in domestic work earn 15 % less than other workers purely because of their occupation even with same age, sex and educational attainment.¹²

Long working hours are characteristic of domestic workers, especially those who live in the house of their employers. In Namibia (2007) domestic workers on average worked 62 hours per week, and in Tanzania (2006) domestic workers on average worked 63 hours per week.

Coverage by labour laws

ILO research on the extent of legal protection of domestic workers shows that a large majority of domestic workers in Africa, in one form or another, come under the legal coverage of the labour laws.¹³ The most common pattern is that general labour laws partially regulate domestic work alongside specific instruments for domestic workers. For instance, domestic workers in South Africa are covered by the Basic Conditions of Employment Act, 1997, while the Sectoral Determination 7 issued under the Act provides more detailed labour standards for domestic workers. Similarly, in Zambia, the Minimum Wages and Conditions of Employment (Domestic Workers) Order, 2011 was issued under the Minimum Wages and Conditions of Employment Act. In Senegal, the Labour Code's provisions on certain issues apply to domestic workers, such as contracts, leave or pay slips, while the general conditions of employment are set out in the Decree issued by the Ministry of Labour (Decree No 0974 of 23 January 1968).

With regard to specific areas of protection, the ILO estimates that 70 % of domestic workers in Africa benefit from limitation of normal weekly working hours on an equal footing with other workers. Some 57 % have the same legal entitlements to annual leave as other workers, while 87 % are covered by a minimum wage and a similar coverage, by law, exists in respect of maternity protection. An important question that arises, however, is to what extent domestic workers enjoy these rights in practice and what are the strategies needed to make decent work a reality for domestic workers.

¹ Leadership and Advocacy for Women in Africa-Ghana, LAWA-Ghana, 2003. *Domestic Workers in Ghana: First to Rise and Last to Sleep*. Washington: GULC.

² ILO, 2012. *New enhanced database on informal employment produced by the ILO in partnership with WIEGO*. International Labour Office: Geneva.

³ ILO, 2010. *Accelerating Action Against Child Labour: ILO global report on child labour*. International Labour Office: Geneva.

⁴ D. Thorsen, 2012. *Child domestic workers. Evidence from West and Central Africa*, UNICEF; ILO, 2013. Briefing note No. 3: *Eliminating child labour in domestic work and protecting young domestic workers, of legal working age, from abusive conditions*, International Labour Office: Geneva.

⁵ ILO, 2006. *Emerging Good Practices on Action to Combat Child Domestic Labour in Kenya, Tanzania, and Zambia*, International Labour Office: Geneva.

⁶ Human Rights Watch, 2012. *Lonely servitude. Child domestic labor in Morocco*, HRW, Nov. 2012; Confederation syndicale internationale, Dec. 2009: *Vision Syndicale Numéro 16*; M. Jacquemin, « "Petites nièces" et "petites bonnes" à Abidjan. Les mutations de la domesticité juvénile », cité dans *Travail, Genre et sociétés*, No. 22 édité par A. Michel, A. Fine, et I. Puech (Broché : 2009) ; Le Monde, May 2010. « Au Maroc les "Petites Bonnes" se comptent par dizaines de milliers », http://www.lemonde.fr/planete/article/2010/05/11/au-maroc-les-petites-bonnes-se-comptent-encore-par-dizaines-de-milliers_1349313_3244.html ; UNICEF, Nov. 2010. "Senegalese Girls Forced to Drop out of School and Work as Domestic Help", http://www.unicef.org/education/senegal_56856.html ; Human Rights Watch, June 2007. *Bottom of the ladder: Exploitation and abuse of girl domestic workers in Guinea*, (Vol. 19 No.8(A)).

⁷ Apt, N., 2005. *A Study of Child Domestic Work and Fosterage in Northern and Upper East Region of Ghana*. UNICEF.

⁸ European Commission. 2011. *Thematic Programme of cooperation with third countries in the areas of Migration and Asylum*. Grant Application Form.

⁹ ILO, 2013. *Domestic workers across the world: Global and regional statistics and the extent of legal protection*. International Labour Office: Geneva

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

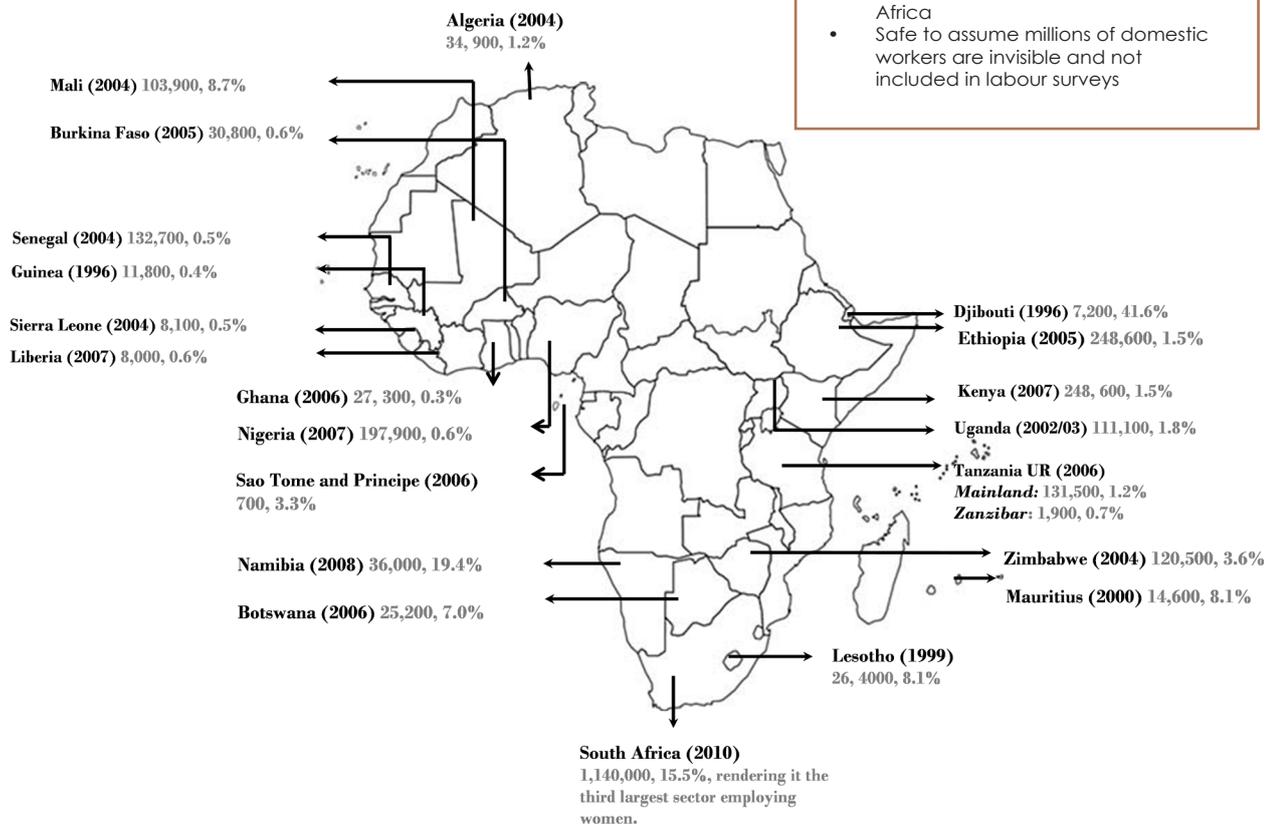
¹¹ D. Budlender, 2011. *Informal employment in Namibia in 2008*, International Labour Office: Geneva.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ ILO, 2013. *Ibid.*

Available data on estimates of domestic workers and percentages of female domestic workers of total employment, in Africa

- 5.2 million domestic workers
- Domestic workers account for 4.9% of wage employment
- Data in Africa covers only 20 countries, accounting for 62% of the region's total employment
- Figures should be read with caution since data collection is weak in Africa
- Safe to assume millions of domestic workers are invisible and not included in labour surveys



Source: ILO 2013. Domestic Workers Across the World: Global and regional statistics and the extent of legal protection. International Labour Office: Geneva.

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