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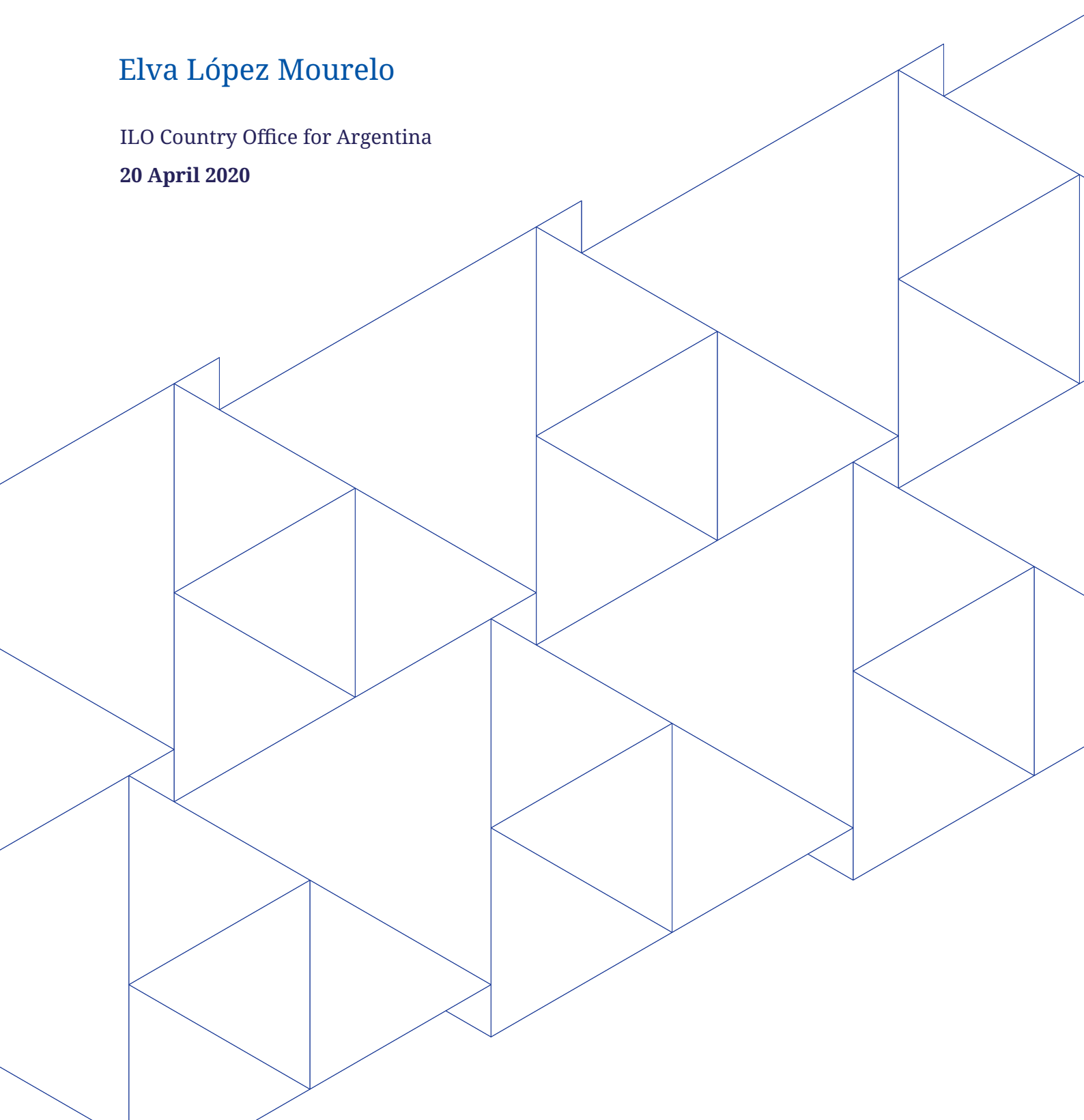
TECHNICAL REPORT

# ► COVID-19 and domestic work in Argentina

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► This report highlights the effects of the COVID-19 crisis on domestic work in Argentina, and it describes the reasons why this economic situation is placing domestic workers in a highly vulnerable position. Moreover, the document details the measures implemented in Argentina that have a direct effect on the sector, and it analyses the extent to which they are in line with the recommendations for offering a comprehensive response to domestic workers in this crisis.

The ILO Country Office for Argentina will update this report as new data and information become available. Visit the ILO's web page for more information and updates about the COVID-19 crisis: [www.ilo.org/buenosaires](http://www.ilo.org/buenosaires).



## 1. Introduction<sup>1</sup>

The crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic is having a major impact on Argentina's labour market. While the economic, labour and social consequences are generalized, there are a number of worker groups that are particularly affected.

Domestic workers<sup>2</sup> are on the front line of the response, and their function is essential to maintaining a good state of health of families and communities. In fact, in Argentina people who provide personal assistance and caregiving tasks<sup>3</sup> continue to work, despite the measures of social isolation, because the government declared the activity to be essential. Conversely, people who perform general domestic tasks (cleaning, washing, ironing, maintenance, cooking, etc.) must comply with the mandatory quarantine measures, and in turn, employers must guarantee the right of workers to remain in their homes while receiving wages.

Due to the socio-demographic profile of these workers and the conditions under which they perform their activity, they are in an especially vulnerable situation within the current context, given that they are more exposed to the economic and social impacts of COVID-19. There are various reasons to explain this situation: the high presence of female heads of household with low income and with children and adolescents under their care, together with the precarious labour conditions marked by a major incidence of informality, a lack of access to labour rights and exposure to risks, both in the workplace and while commuting, among other reasons.

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1 The author would like to thank the comments and suggestions of Cristina Antúnez (Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Security), Claire Hobden (ILO, Geneva), Lucía Martelotte (UN Women), Francisca Pereyra (Universidad Nacional de General Sarmiento), Michela Pizzicannella and Magalí Yance (ILO, Argentina), as well as the comments and suggestions of Carmen Britez, Carlos Brassesco and Marta Roncoroni of the Domestic Workers Union (UPACP) in Argentina.

2 Even though in Argentina the law that regulates this activity uses 'private household labour', this note maintains the expression 'domestic workers' for consistency with the name proposed in ILO Convention No. 189, as well as to facilitate information search processes on the subject within the scope of technical and academic studies.

3 The Decree of Need and Urgency (DNU), No. 297/20, establishes the following as essential activities in Article 6, paragraph 5 thereof: 'Persons who must assist others with a disability; assist relatives who need care; assist elderly persons; assist children and adolescents'. However, those workers who are over the age of 60 years, who are pregnant, who belong to the risk groups established by the National Ministry of Health, who have school age children under their care or who perform their job at a household with persons under mandatory quarantine have a right to paid leave.

In the case of workers who perform caregiving tasks, they will likely be forced to work longer workdays due to the closure of schools, care centres and other places that provide care. Moreover, they are exposed to taking care of ill persons, often without adequate preventive measures or without the necessary hygiene materials. In the case of workers who perform general domestic tasks, especially those who work by the hour, their right to remain at home while receiving a wage during the mandatory quarantine period could be breached.

In any event, regardless of the tasks they perform, all domestic workers face the risk of losing their jobs because their employers have difficulties paying the corresponding wages. Likewise, the high incidence of informality in the sector prevents most workers from having unemployment insurance or compensation, coverage for occupational risks, sick leaves or health insurance that allows them to be covered under all these contingencies.

Within this context, the government implemented income assistance measures—such as the Emergency Family Income (IFE)—which covers all domestic workers, regardless of the type of work they perform (general tasks or caregiving) or their situation in terms of registration of the employment relationship. However, the workers' lack of information regarding their rights hinders completely effective coverage. In this regard, other measures are needed to guarantee a comprehensive and effective response to all the vulnerabilities faced by these workers.

This note highlights the effects of the COVID-19 crisis on domestic work in Argentina, it details the implemented measures that have a direct effect on the sector and it analyses the extent to which they are in line with the recommendations for offering a comprehensive response to domestic workers within this context.



## 2. Domestic work in Argentina

In Argentina, the weight of domestic services in the labour structure is considerable. According to the latest National Survey of Workers on Employment, Work, Health and Safety Conditions (ECETSS),<sup>4</sup> in Argentina there are nearly 1.4 million domestic workers. This labour force represents 5.6 percent of employment, 17.4 percent of employed women and 22 percent of female wage earners. These figures show the relevance of this occupation for female employment, as well as the feminization of the sector: almost all workers who perform this activity are women (99.3 per cent).

Unlike what is observed in other countries or regions, the presence of migrant workers is relatively low in the sector, given that only 9.1 per cent were born in another country<sup>5</sup> (Graph 1, Panel B). Moreover, the age of the majority of domestic workers is concentrated in the central age range, and mainly between 45 and 54 years (Graph 1, Panel A). Domestic work is an employment opportunity for many women who join the labour market at an advanced age, after a long period without having performed remunerated activities. This type of labour insertion frequently arises because of a critical situation in the household, such as separation from the spouse or because the spouse becomes ill or loses their job (Trujillo & Sarabia, 2011).

In fact, a very high proportion of domestic workers are heads of household (44 per cent), with 87 per cent taking care of children under the age of 18 years. Among these women, 31 per cent have children under the age of 5 (Graph 1, Panels C and D). This situation reflects the dual care burden faced by domestic workers, who have to combine the remunerated care tasks they perform outside the household with non-remunerated care in homes that are often characterized as being single-parent households with the presence of children and a large number of family members. Specifically, 37 per cent of domestic workers live in homes that include 2 or 3 family members, while 56 per cent live in homes with at least 4 inhabitants (Graph 1, Panel F).

The fact that such a high percentage of workers are economically in charge of households with large families, including the presence of young children, leads to vulnerability that is exacerbated by the relatively low wages in the sector. It is therefore no surprise that over half live in households in which the monthly

<sup>4</sup> The ECETSS was conducted during the second half of 2018. Even though the Permanent Household Survey (EPH) offers more recent data about the volume of domestic workers, the ECETSS is used because it contains more detailed information on working conditions.

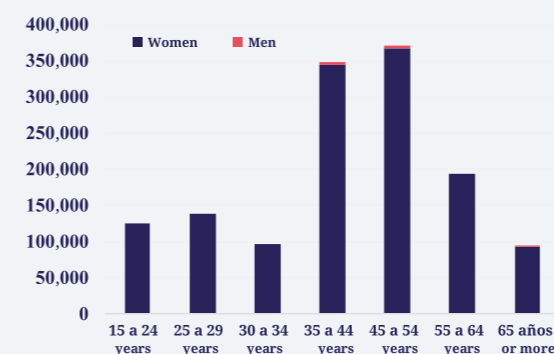
<sup>5</sup> While the presence of migrant workers is relatively low, specifically in Buenos Aires the percentage of the migrant population engaged in the sector is higher, especially migrants coming from Paraguay, Bolivia and Peru (Rodríguez Nardelli, 2016).

income is below 15,000<sup>6</sup> pesos (ARS) (Graph 1, Panel E). Moreover, they live in neighbourhoods where many families are in the same situation and where there are major deficits related to services from and the presence of the State. This leads many of these women to perform non-remunerated community work, which means a triple burden of care.

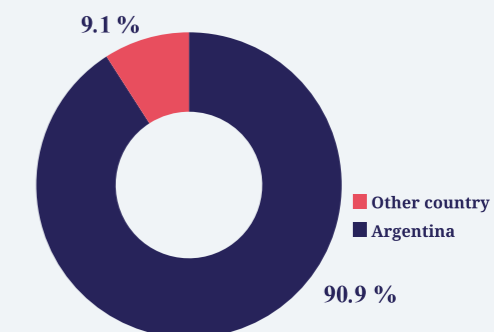
The socio-demographic profile of domestic workers shows aspects of their vulnerability with respect to facing the COVID-19 crisis. That vulnerability is compounded when their labour conditions are considered. This situation clearly shows the importance of having labour market institutions that offer suitable protection for workers, especially in a crisis context such as this one. Over the last decade, Argentina took major steps in this area (see Box 1), although there are still major challenges pending, as it is detailed in the next section.

**Graph 1: Socio-demographic characteristics of domestic work in Argentina**

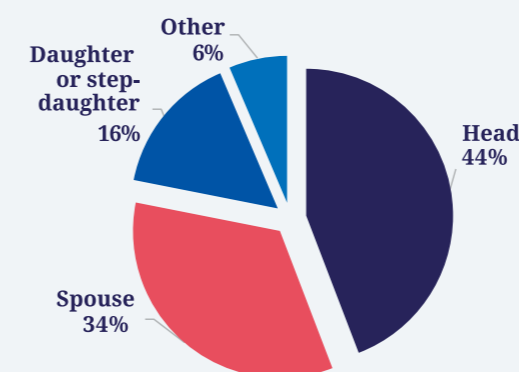
► Panel A - Sex and age



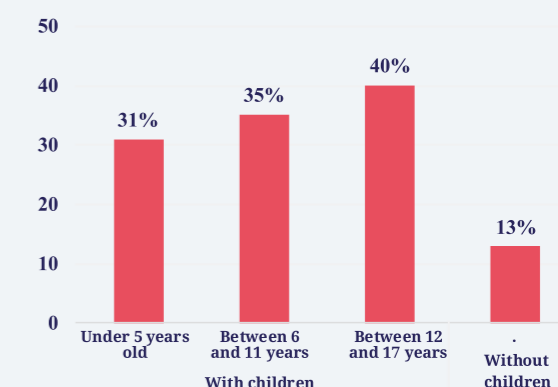
► Panel B - Place and birth



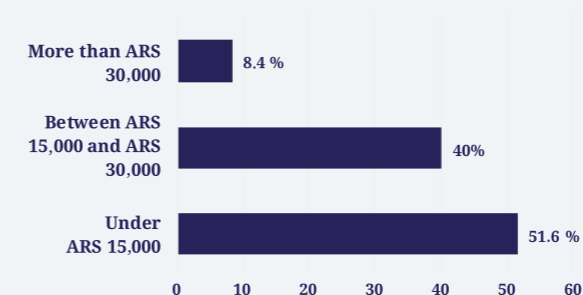
► Panel C - Function in the household



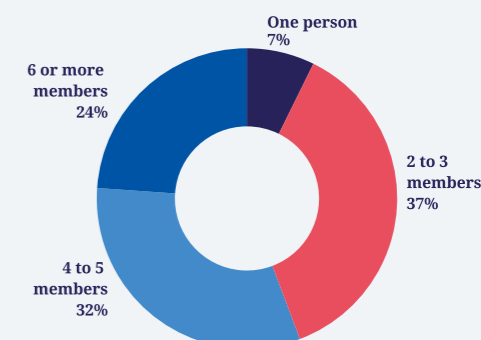
► Panel D - Presence of children in the household



► Panel E - Household income



► Panel F - Size of the household



<sup>6</sup> This value is slightly above the ARS11,300 corresponding to the Minimum Adjustable Wage (SMVM) of December 2018. In turn, it is significantly below the average income of wage earners in the fourth quarter of 2018 (ARS19,464).

► Source: Own preparation based on the ECETSS - 2018.



## Box 1

## ▶ Labour institutions for domestic work in Argentina

In 2013, Argentina enacted **Act 26844, ‘Special Employment Contract Scheme for Private Household Labour’**. This Act regulates the labour rights of all domestic workers, regardless of how many hours they work. The law establishes equality with rights that already existed for all other wage earners, such as sick leave, holidays and compensation for dismissal. In addition to maternity leave (90 days financed by the National Social Security Administration, ANSES), the act also includes leaves due to the death of a spouse, parents or children. Moreover, it makes occupational risk coverage mandatory, given that employers have to contract the services of an Occupational Risk Insurer (ART). Finally, domestic workers are included under the benefit of non-contributory family allowances, such as the Universal Child Allowance (AUH) and the Universal Allowance for Pregnancy (Pereyra, 2017).

Within the framework of this act, in 2015 the **National Commission on Private Household Labour (CNTCP)** was implemented, a negotiation body formed by unions of the sector, by organizations representing the employer sector and by the Government, and it has the authority to negotiate wages and working conditions. This space for social dialogue demonstrated the Commission’s efficacy at establishing improvements to wages and to working conditions in the sector (Pereyra, 2018), a capacity that is especially relevant in the current crisis context.

The **Labour Court for Private Household Labour**, which comes under the Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Security (MTEySS), is the body that holds jurisdiction in the City of Buenos Aires for resolving any conflicts that occur between workers and employers of the activity. During the entire process, the court seeks reconciliation between both parties. It was established by Act 26844, and it gives provinces the possibility of adhering to the system.

In 2014, Argentina ratified the **ILO Domestic Workers Convention (No. 189)**. This instrument establishes that all domestic workers have the right to a safe and healthy working environment and that effective measures must be adopted to ensure their occupational safety and health. Likewise, Argentina undertook to adopt appropriate measures in order to ensure that domestic workers enjoy favourable conditions that are the same as all other workers with respect to social security protection, normal work hours, compensation for overtime and daily and weekly time off.

▶ 

## 3. Labour conditions of domestic work in Argentina

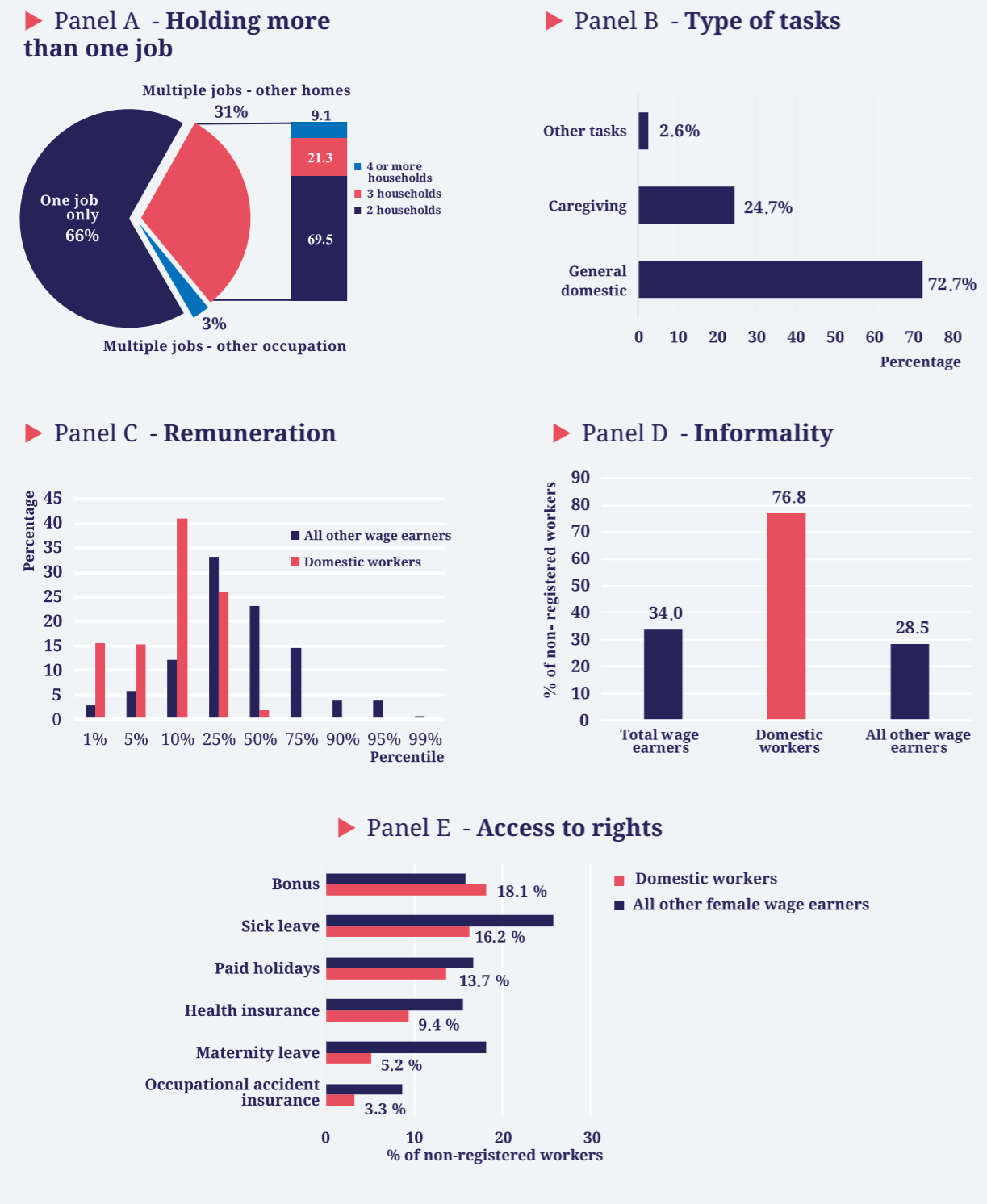
Domestic work in Argentina, just like other countries in the region, takes place under certain labour conditions that place workers in a position of greater exposure to the risk of infection and greater exposure to the possible effects of the established health measures, such as the social isolation policy. For example, the live-in mode—meaning when a worker lives in the home of their employer—means that, among other aspects, the health of these workers and their exposure to the risk of infection depends to a large extent on the actions that their employers take.

In the case of workers who are not live-in, they quite commonly work for more than one employer. The figures show that of the 32 per cent of domestic workers who work for more than one household, 69.5 per cent work for two and 21.3 per cent work for three (Graph 2, Panel A). This situation exposes them to a greater risk due to having to travel between homes and due to the fact that they depend on the protective measures adopted by more than one employer. In turn, this means that there must be an instance of dialogue with each employer regarding the physical and economic risks faced by these workers.

While the majority of domestic workers in Argentina (72.7 per cent) perform general domestic tasks (cleaning, washing, ironing, maintenance, cooking, etc.), one out of every four performs caregiving tasks (Graph 2, Panel B). In the case of these workers, declared to be an essential activity according to DNU 297/20, the situation caused by COVID-19 means that they have to assume an extraordinary burden: due to the closure of care centres, many households and families have a greater demand for remunerated care services.

In turn, their wages are generally lower than the country average. Practically all domestic workers are below the 25th percentile of the country in the distribution of monthly labour income (Graph 2, Panel C). As stated in the preceding section, considering that domestic workers usually represent the main breadwinner for their households, they are in a situation of extreme vulnerability due to any reduction of their income. In many cases, these workers live in poverty, and their savings or other financial resources are scarce or insufficient for facing periods of economic shutdown.

**Graph 2: Labour characteristics of domestic workers in Argentina**



► **Note:** General domestic tasks include cleaning, washing, ironing, maintenance, cooking and all other tasks typical of the household.

► **Source:** Own preparation based on the ECETSS - 2018.

Despite the advances in labour market regulations and institutions, fewer than one in four domestic workers are registered. The non-registration rate reaches nearly 77 per cent and places nearly one million workers in the informal economy (Graph 2, Panel D). Notable among the factors that reveal the incidence of informality are those that, in turn, explain the vulnerability of domestic workers to the COVID-19 crisis (see Box 2).

Within the current crisis context, the high incidence of informality means that the vast majority of workers do not have access to protection mechanisms in order to ensure income during the time when they cannot perform their activity. Predictably, registration is closely associated with receiving other essential labour rights. In fact, domestic workers see that their labour rights are barely covered, including coverage due to an occupational accident or illness (3.3 per cent of non-registered workers have access to this benefit), maternity leave (5.2 per cent), health insurance (9.4 per cent), paid vacations (13.7 per cent), sick leave (16.2 per cent) and bonuses (18.1 per cent). Access by non-registered domestic workers to social rights is considerably less than in the case of non-registered wage earners (Graph 2, Panel E).

Regarding the working conditions over which the COVID-19 pandemic could have a greater impact, the most notable are having to commute to the household where they work, having to work overtime and having to handle harmful or toxic chemical substances.

The travel times from their homes to the workplace are especially important within the current context of a health crisis. It is an instance when people face the possible risk of infection. In this regard, it can be observed that when domestic workers travel from their homes to their job, they take longer on average than all other workers. To a greater extent, they travel by public transport (nearly 15 percentage points higher than all other workers), and they are more likely to travel under bad conditions (Graph 3, Panel A). These are situations that could clearly exacerbate the risk of infection during the current pandemic.

Moreover, it is likely that the workers that perform caregiving tasks face the prospect of working longer days due to the increased workload. Along this line, it is important to keep in mind that, while domestic workers work fewer overtime hours in comparison with all other workers, such additional hours are commonly not remunerated (Graph 3, Panel B).

Finally, due to the possible demand to perform thorough cleaning tasks because of the current health crisis, it is important to consider that, even under normal conditions, domestic workers face the risk of handling harmful or toxic chemical substances. Thirty-four percent of workers declare that they handle such substances at least sometimes, while this percentage drops to 22 percent in the case of all other workers (Graph 3, Panel C).

**Box 2**

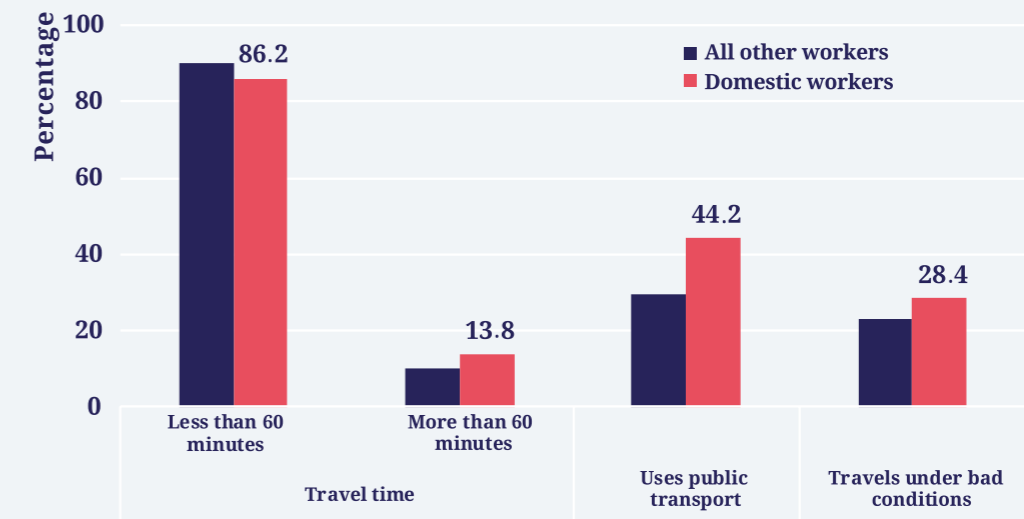
**Determinants of the incidence of informality in domestic work**

A qualitative study of the factors that explain the high incidence of informality among domestic workers was conducted in 2017 (Pereyra, 2017). The main findings help to explain the vulnerability these workers face in the current crisis context:

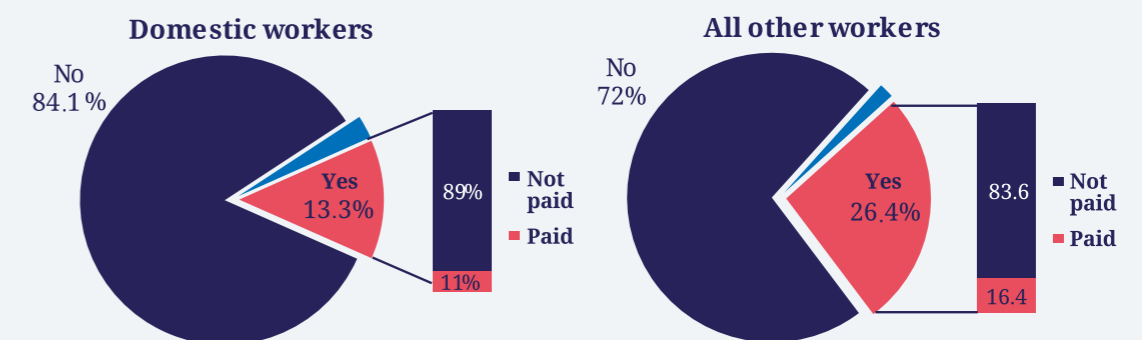
- In general, domestic workers’ manoeuvring and negotiating room with their employers is highly limited. The discretionary capacity of employers is significant. For example, ‘labour dispensability’ without any type of compensation is accepted as perfectly normal.
- The consolidation of labour relationships and the associated emotional ties means that there is a greater likelihood of accessing some rights, but it could reinforce some discretionary practices, such as changing schedules.
- Registration and more working hours help to access labour rights. Thus, part-time work or working ‘by the hour’ is usually excluded from any kind of legal consideration.
- Employers blame the actual workers for non-registration, stating that they didn’t want to be registered in order to keep certain social benefits (“planes”). Yet the large majority of workers positively assess registration.
- Among the most positive factors for registering domestic workers, employers note the peace of mind of knowing that they are ‘covered’ due to potential occupational accidents and note that the process is economically accessible. However, among the majority of employers that do not register their employees, the explanations allow a glimpse at certain ‘hidden’ costs of formalization that employers seek to avoid: registration leaves record of the existence of the employment relationship, it makes discretionary disconnections more difficult and it is mandatory to provide a written explanation about access to various rights (schedules, wage level, holidays, bonus, etc.).

**Graph 3: Labour conditions of domestic workers in Argentina**

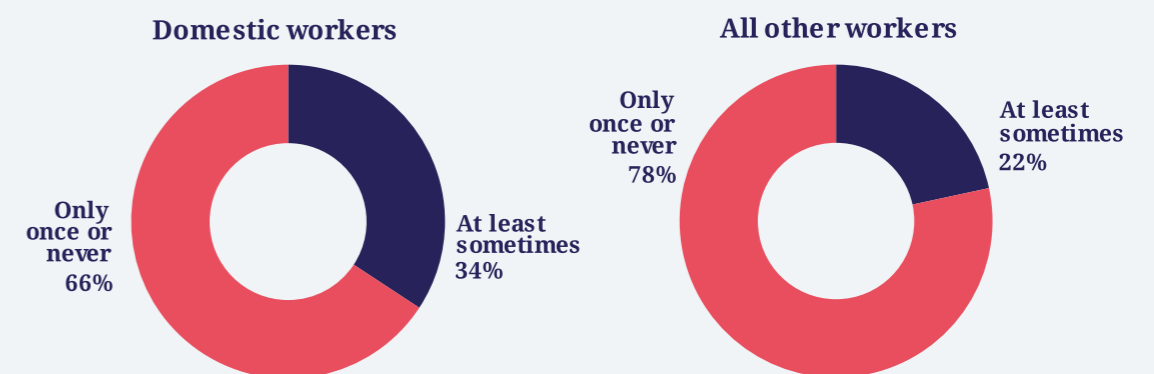
▶ **Panel A - Commuting from home to the job**



▶ **Panel B - Overtime hours**



▶ **Panel C - Handling of harmful or toxic chemical substances**



▶ **Source:** Own preparation based on the ECETSS - 2018.



## 4. What is the impact of COVID-19 on domestic work?

The socio-demographic profile of domestic workers, characterized by a high presence of female heads of household with low income and children and adolescents under their care, together with the precarious labour conditions marked by a major incidence of non-registration, a lack of access to labour rights and exposure to considerable risks at the workplace, mean that these workers are more exposed to the economic and social impact of COVID-19. Some of the effects that the crisis caused by this pandemic have on the sector are detailed below:

- ▶ **Loss of employment, without income support.** The economic crisis associated with the COVID-19 pandemic is jeopardizing the employment of many domestic workers due to the difficulties that their employers could have to make payment of the workers' wages. In the case of workers who perform general domestic tasks and whose activity has not been declared essential, employers can temporarily interrupt the employment relationship while the mandatory confinement measures last. This practice is probably more common in the case of workers employed by the hour and who charge per day worked, given that many employers are unaware of the obligation to pay a worker's wage in these cases also<sup>7</sup>. The high incidence of informality in the sector means that the majority of workers do not have access to measures such as unemployment compensation or insurance, which would allow them to obtain income during the time when they cannot work.
- ▶ **Difficulties collecting wages.** There are employers that, in compliance with the law, maintain the employment relationship and the wages of the workers during the mandatory social isolation, but they have difficulties with respect to making payment. This is due to the fact that the cash payment method is extensively used in the sector, given that many workers do not have access to a bank account. While measures were implemented that allowed workers to have access to cash through automated tellers by introducing their National Identity Document and a code generated by the employer through home banking, neither all employers nor all workers have knowledge of this possibility.
- ▶ **Longer workdays and higher workload.** The closure of schools, assistance centres and other places for providing care could lead workers who perform caregiving tasks (24.7 per cent of the domestic workers in Argentina, totalling over 330,000 people) to work longer hours, within the context of anxiety and stress caused by this crisis.

<sup>7</sup> Dismissals and temporary disruptions of employment relationships are occurring despite the decreed prohibition of dismissals throughout the duration of the pandemic.

- ▶ **Lack of weekly time off.** In the case of live-in workers, the mandatory confinement measures can hinder the weekly time off to which they have a right.
- ▶ **Occupational health and safety deficits.** Working in households during the period that the pandemic lasts requires special preventive measures, which must be accompanied by suitable materials. It is possible that in many households, employers of domestic work are unaware of these measures or they lack the necessary equipment. Moreover, the current health crisis could lead to the demand to perform very thorough cleaning and disinfection tasks using chemicals that could be harmful to the health of those who perform the tasks if they do not follow the necessary preventive measures and have adequate protective equipment for using them.
- ▶ **Risks when caring for ill persons.** Workers who perform care tasks for persons have the right to not provide the service when a member of the employer household might be completing the mandatory quarantine due to being infected or due to having been exposed to the risk of infection by COVID-19. However, some workers could be in a situation of having to take care of persons who are ill from the coronavirus, without knowing it. In these cases, a lack of knowledge about the symptoms and about preventive measures, as well as the failure to provide the required materials, could have a negative effect on the worker's protection. The declaration of caregiving activities as essential did not necessarily mean the establishment of training programmes or the allocation of essential materials for performing the activity under the current circumstances.
- ▶ **Exposure to the risk of infection.** Caregiving was declared an essential activity in Argentina, which means that workers who perform these types of tasks have to go to their workplace. As it was indicated in the preceding graph (Panel A), 13.8 per cent of domestic workers in Argentina commute for over 60 minutes to reach their workplace. Public transport is used by 44.2 per cent, and over 28 per cent declare that they commute under bad conditions. These factors suggest a major exposure to the risk of infection.
- ▶ **Lack of access to health services.** Only 9.4 per cent of non-registered domestic workers have access to health insurance, as it was stated in the preceding section. While Argentina does have a universal public health system, nearly 950,000 workers lack health coverage that would allow them to have access to higher quality care if they became ill. In this case, the care deficits would represent an incommensurate risk for these workers, their families, their employers, the families of their employers and society in general.
- ▶ **Discrimination.** The expansion of the COVID-19 pandemic could worsen discriminatory practices towards domestic workers. This discrimination can be observed both in a new job (distrust of the worker's health status) and in existing relationships (due to the fear associated with the time that the employee spends outside the household).
- ▶ **Lack of information about worker rights.** Due to the particular nature of this profession, which is performed in the intimacy of a home and with few possibilities of interaction with other workers, it is likely that a high percentage of these workers

are unaware of their rights. According to data from the ECETSS (2018), only 3.7 per cent of workers are affiliated with a union, only 2.1 per cent contacted the union over the last year and barely 8.5 per cent consulted the law on the sector. Within the current context of uncertainty, in which news about the evolution of the pandemic coexists with announcements about various response measures, there is a high possibility that many workers have difficulty accessing all the available information.

- ▶ **Breaches of the duty to protect public health.** The lack of information about the rights and obligations of domestic workers and of their employers, which is necessary for preventing infection, could have a major impact in terms of public health. If the workers who perform caregiving tasks do not have access to preventive measures and protective equipment, they could become infected and in turn become a spreader of the virus. Moreover, if workers who perform general domestic tasks cannot exercise their right to comply with the mandatory quarantine while receiving their wage, and they are therefore forced to go out to work, they could be contributing to spreading the virus.
- ▶ **Vulnerability of migrant workers.** Compared to other countries, migrant domestic workers in Argentina represent a smaller percentage of the labour force in the sector. However, they face greater vulnerability in certain aspects. Added to the risk of losing their job is the uncertainty about the impact on their residency in the country and the impact on their access to housing, as well as the uncertainty about the impossibility of returning to their place of origin due to the closure of borders. Moreover, due to the fact that the majority of banks and money transfer businesses are not operating during mandatory isolation, migrant workers face major limitations to transferring money abroad, as long as they receive their wages.
- ▶ **Increase of violence.** Various organizations have warned about the greater vulnerability and danger of violence against women during confinement due to the difficulty of fleeing from violent situations or accessing victim assistance services. This circumstance exposes domestic workers to a greater risk of violence, whether directly—by the employer—or indirectly—as a witness of episodes of violence in the household.

## 5. Support measures for domestic work implemented in Argentina

Argentina is one of the countries that reacted the quickest in response to the economic and employment effects caused by the COVID-19 health crisis. Measures that have a direct impact on domestic workers are described below:

- ▶ **Reinforcement of social plans and of allowances.** From the very beginning of the crisis, the government of Argentina reinforced non-contributory income support programmes through the following measures: (i) the payment of an extraordinary supplement of the Universal Child Allowance (AUH) and the Universal Allowance for Pregnancy (AUE), equivalent to the monthly total (3,103 pesos (ARS)); (ii) the payment of an extraordinary supplement to retirees who receive a single retirement amount or a minimum pension; and (iii) the postponement of payment of the instalments for ANSES credits corresponding to the months of April and May. These non-contributory income support measures contemplate domestic workers as a beneficiary population, whether or not they are registered.
- ▶ **Emergency Family Income (IFE).** With the objective of compensating for the complete loss or a major decrease of income, the Argentinian government established the Emergency Family Income, an exceptional and non-contributory monetary benefit. Designed for unemployed persons, informal workers and small contributors under the simplified tax scheme (*monotributistas*) of the lower categories, the IFE also includes domestic workers (registered or not) as a recipient population. The benefit, which is equivalent to the amount of 10,000 pesos (ARS), is paid to a single member of the family unit, one time only in the month of April 2020, and it is compatible with the AUH<sup>8</sup>.
- ▶ **Wage increase.** The National Commission on Private Household Labour (CNTCP), a tripartite body integrated by representatives of workers, of employers and of the State, established an increase of the hourly and monthly minimum wage for domestic workers. The increase amounts to 10 per cent, which is effective in two periods: one increase of 5 per cent as from 1 March 2020 and another 5 per cent increase as from 1 May 2020. It is important to keep in mind that this wage increase did not result from an agreement between the parties, rather it was established by the Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Security, given that the Ministry did not accept the increase agreed on by the representative organizations of workers and employers.
- ▶ **Awareness-raising campaigns.** Ever since the first effects of the COVID-19 crisis began to be felt in Argentina, domestic worker unions of the country have conducted various awareness-raising campaigns about the exposure suffered by workers in the sector due

8 Decree 2020-310-APN-PTE of 23 March 2020.

to this pandemic. Specifically, the Domestic Workers Union (UPACP) and its vocational training school, together with the support of the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung Foundation, launched a campaign on social networks ( #CuidaAQuienTeCuida<sup>9</sup> ) about matters such as respect for the quarantine and preventive measures for workers who continue their employment activity during the mandatory confinement period.

- ▶ **Information campaigns about rights.** On the occasion of Domestic Workers Day in Argentina (3 April), the Domestic Workers Union, UPACP, launched a campaign with the support of the ILO, which offered a response to the most frequent questions received by the union regarding the rights of workers with respect to the COVID-19 crisis (see Box 3).

### Box 3

#### ▶ Campaign: Questions about domestic work in times of COVID-19

—**Do I have to work on days when the quarantine is in effect?**

—Only those who care for children, the elderly and/or ill persons must go to work, given that these activities are considered essential according to decree 297/2020.

—**Does the worker get paid for quarantine days, even though she has not gone to work?**

—Yes, the worker must be paid her usual wages, even though she does not go to work.

—**My salary was paid in cash. How do I get paid if I can't travel?**

—If you do not have a bank account, you can ask your employer to make a money transfer using the 'Punto Efectivo' system of automated tellers so that you can get paid.

—**The quarantine began when I was at my employer's house. Can I go home?**

—Yes, you have the right to return to your home when the workday or the work week ends. You are not obligated to stay at the workplace.

—**How do I inform my employer that I don't have to go to work?**

—You have to tell them that, according to Decree 297/2020, you are relieved from having to go to work. If they do not agree, you must send them a telegram (when the quarantine ends), telling them that you did not go to work because you were complying with the quarantine. It is important that you notify them by email or mobile phone so that there is record of having given them that notice.

—**If I don't go to work because of respecting the quarantine, can they fire me?**

—No, during the quarantine they cannot fire you (in any event, you should keep a record of having given notice).

—**How do I obtain a permit to be able to commute?**

—Your employer should issue a certification and make the arrangements through the 'Trámites a Distancia' web page, in which they will indicate the reason for travelling. It is also advisable for you to keep a copy of your wage receipt with you when commuting.

—**I am registered as a worker. Can I still collect the Emergency Family Income (IFE)?**

Yes, the ANSES established that the IFE is available to all domestic workers. To receive it, you must register on the web page of the ANSES.

9 More information about the campaign at: <https://www.fes-argentina.org/e/cuidaaquientecuida/>

## 6. Policy recommendations for mitigating the impact of COVID-19 on domestic work

The policy response to reducing the impact of COVID-19 on domestic work must follow a multi-dimensional approach that allows taking on the aforementioned impacts. In addition to not only ensuring the health of workers, employers and their families but also minimising the risks of spreading the virus, coordinated actions resulting from social dialogue must be adopted to maintain the jobs and income of an especially vulnerable group. Therefore, the following actions are recommended:

- ▶ Apply measures that favour the **retention of employment**, such as economic aid for households in order to pay for the care services performed by domestic workers. For example, to hire caregiving services Italy established the payment of supplements of up to a maximum of 600 euros for wage earners and self-employed workers and up to 1,000 euros for health workers and other occupations on the front line of the COVID-19 response. In France, the government announced the reimbursement of 80 percent of the wage that employers pay to their domestic employees who cannot work due to confinement measures. In this case, the employer will advance the wage to the worker and will obtain the reimbursement afterwards.
- ▶ Extend **access to labour rights** to domestic workers. In many countries, including Argentina, domestic work is regulated through special schemes that, while they do take into account the particulars of the sector, they occasionally do not allow access to the same rights that all other workers have. The ILO Convention on Domestic Workers (No. 189) defends the adoption of appropriate measures for guaranteeing that domestic workers enjoy conditions that are not less favourable than those applicable to workers generally in respect of social security protection. In this regard, Spain announced a temporary employment subsidy that had not existed for this sector up to now, which can be applied for by domestic workers if they lose their job or their hours are reduced as a consequence of this crisis.<sup>10</sup>
- ▶ Extend **sick leaves or leaves to provide care**, while continuing to receive wages, in order to ensure the economic security of workers who are ill, are under quarantine or are caring for children, older adults or other relatives. If domestic workers are ill or under quarantine or they have relatives who are ill, they must be able to stay at home and be covered by sick leaves. Currently, this right is only guaranteed for registered workers. The percentage of non-registered workers who access sick leave is 16.2 per cent, which means that 877,000 workers do not have this coverage.

10 This measure only applies in the case of those workers who were already registered before the announcement of this intervention.



- ▶ Improve **universal access to public health services** for domestic workers and their families, even for those who do not have health insurance or health coverage. This is of utmost importance, given that care deficits, if the illness is contracted, would represent an incommensurate risk for workers, their families, their employers, the families of their employers and society in general.
- ▶ Establish **health and safety measures** to guarantee a **workplace that is safe and free from the risk of infection**. The ILO Convention on Domestic Workers (No. 189) establishes that all domestic workers have the right to a safe and healthy working environment and that effective measures must be adopted to ensure their occupational safety and health. Considering that many workers provide caregiving tasks during this stage of the health crisis, the following aspects are key: establishing actions for informing how to recognize the symptoms associated with COVID-19, disseminating preventive measures for reducing the risk of infection and providing the necessary equipment, as well as training on how to use those materials. Moreover, governments must ensure that domestic workers have the same access to protective measures as all other workers.
- ▶ Reinforce the **necessary measures to guarantee the health and time off of all workers**, including preventive measures regarding the use of toxic materials and information about the right to time off. The closure of schools, care centres and other places that provide care could lead workers that perform caregiving tasks (declared to be essential tasks) to work a greater number of hours. This situation is worse in the case of live-in workers because the condition of mandatory confinement could make it difficult for them to take the weekly time off to which they have a right. The necessary measures that guarantee the right to time off by all domestic workers must therefore be established, as it is set forth by law. These interventions must be complemented by preventive and training measures about the environmental risks that these workers generally face, which are exacerbated by the current health crisis due to the demand for thorough cleaning and disinfection tasks.
- ▶ Guarantee that the **social protection** measures established by existing mechanisms or by ad hoc payments reach all domestic workers. Measures of this type seek to safeguard economic security during this period of crisis, thereby considering the low income of the sector, regardless of a worker's registration or formalization status. Argentina established significant income support measures such as the AUH supplements and the IFE, but it is important to guarantee that, in practice, these actions reach all workers and overcome any possible barriers to access.
- ▶ Guarantee that **information** about the pandemic and the response measures are **disseminated extensively** among all domestic workers, including those who, for various reasons, may have difficulty accessing that information (for example, indigenous populations, migrants or inhabitants of remote or marginal areas).

- ▶ Establish **awareness-raising campaigns** about the rights and obligations of workers and employers in the current context. Such awareness-raising measures can help employers to assume their responsibility to a greater extent with respect to guaranteeing the health and protection of workers. In turn, these measures can also contribute to greater worker empowerment when enforcing their rights and minimizing their risks. Campaigns that provide information about the preventive measures that must be adopted to reduce the risks of exposure when caring for people who are ill with the coronavirus are also necessary.

## 7. Final considerations

The COVID-19 pandemic is affecting an endless number of dimensions that go beyond the health aspects. It is estimated that the economic, social and development scopes will be heavily affected. In Argentina, the coronavirus crisis arrived within a national context marked by economic weakness, in which the labour market was already immersed in a difficult situation before this health emergency, stressed by the fact that more than 3 out of every 10 wage earners was in a situation of informality. This informality represents precarious work that mainly affects certain groups that will also be most adversely affected by the impact of COVID-19.

Among them, there are over 1,300,000 domestic workers in the country, 3 out of 4 of whom work in the informal economy. In the case of workers who perform personal care tasks, it is likely that they will be forced to work longer hours due to the closure of schools, care centres and other places that provide care. Their exposure to caring for people who are ill with the coronavirus could also increase, often without suitable preventive measures or without the necessary equipment. Moreover, workers who carry out general domestic tasks have the right to stay at home while receiving their full wage. Yet there are doubts by employers and workers about the implementation of this right, thereby jeopardizing effective compliance with the right.

In any event, regardless of the type of tasks that domestic workers may perform, in Argentina they all face challenges related to the incidence of informality. The lack of registration limits their access to labour rights that guarantee protection, which is crucial in the current context, notably including access to sick leave, coverage for occupational risks, unemployment compensation and access to health services.

In Argentina, measures that are headed in the right direction were already announced and implemented. Extending income support policies such as the extraordinary supplement of the AUH and the Emergency Family Income to all domestic workers, regardless of the tasks they perform or their registration status, will allow reaching hundreds of thousands of workers whose income has been partially or completely reduced. Moreover, the 10 per cent wage increase agreed on within the framework of the CNTCP will lessen the impact on income that this crisis will have on a group that does not have the possibility of savings to face an economic impact such as the current one.

Despite the positive assessment of Argentina's response to the crisis, special attention needs to be paid to a number of aspects. While Act 26844, which has been regulating the sector since 2013, establishes fundamental rights, such as sick leaves, coverage for occupational risks, compensation in the event of dismissal and access to health insurance, the high incidence of informality leaves workers highly exposed to the discretionary capacity of their employers, especially regarding certain basic compliance aspects such as respect for the duty of quarantine. Due to this situation, it is important to point out that Argentina does not have systematic and well-established control mechanisms over compliance with the rights of domestic workers, such as through labour inspection.

Within the framework of this health crisis, special attention must be paid to the gaps that exist with respect to health coverage among domestic workers. Nearly 950,000 workers in Argentina do not have access to health insurance that would allow them to access higher quality health services if they became sick. In this case, the care deficits would represent an incommensurate risk for the workers, their families, their employers, the families of their employers and society in general.

While income support policies that do include domestic workers were implemented, it is essential, on the one hand, to assess their effective coverage and adapt the response to the extent that we observe the existence of vulnerable worker groups beyond the margin of this aid. On the other hand, non-contributory social protection mechanisms, while necessary, should never replace the function of institutions such as minimum wage and the updates thereof based on collective bargaining and social dialogue, which contribute to prioritizing and valuing the sector. In this regard, the procedure followed in the latest wage increase is worrisome, which was unilaterally established by the MTEySS within the framework of the CNTCP, despite the agreement between worker and employer organizations regarding a higher increase.

Finally, yet just as importantly, strengthening the gender perspective in the response to domestic workers must be emphasized. In Argentina, a large percentage of these workers are heads of households with low income, with children and adolescents under their care, and they depend on their low wages to maintain their families. And right now, these workers are taking on an extraordinary burden of care within their family circle due to the closure of schools and other places that provide care, added to which is all the additional work they have at the households where they work. This circumstance could be incompatible with their job as it is currently organized, and greater measures to alleviate the burden of care of families are therefore required.



The COVID-19 pandemic will bring a period of reflection about a number of aspects. Regarding domestic work, there is space for thinking about how different the impact would have been if workers in this sector were registered. This highlights the importance of moving towards formality in the sector so that everyone is protected, from the workers themselves to society in general.

While the pandemic continues to grow, domestic workers, who total over one million in Argentina, will be caring for homes and loved ones. Their health, safety and economic stability have to be protected and guaranteed as a part of the essential efforts for fighting against the virus and its effects.



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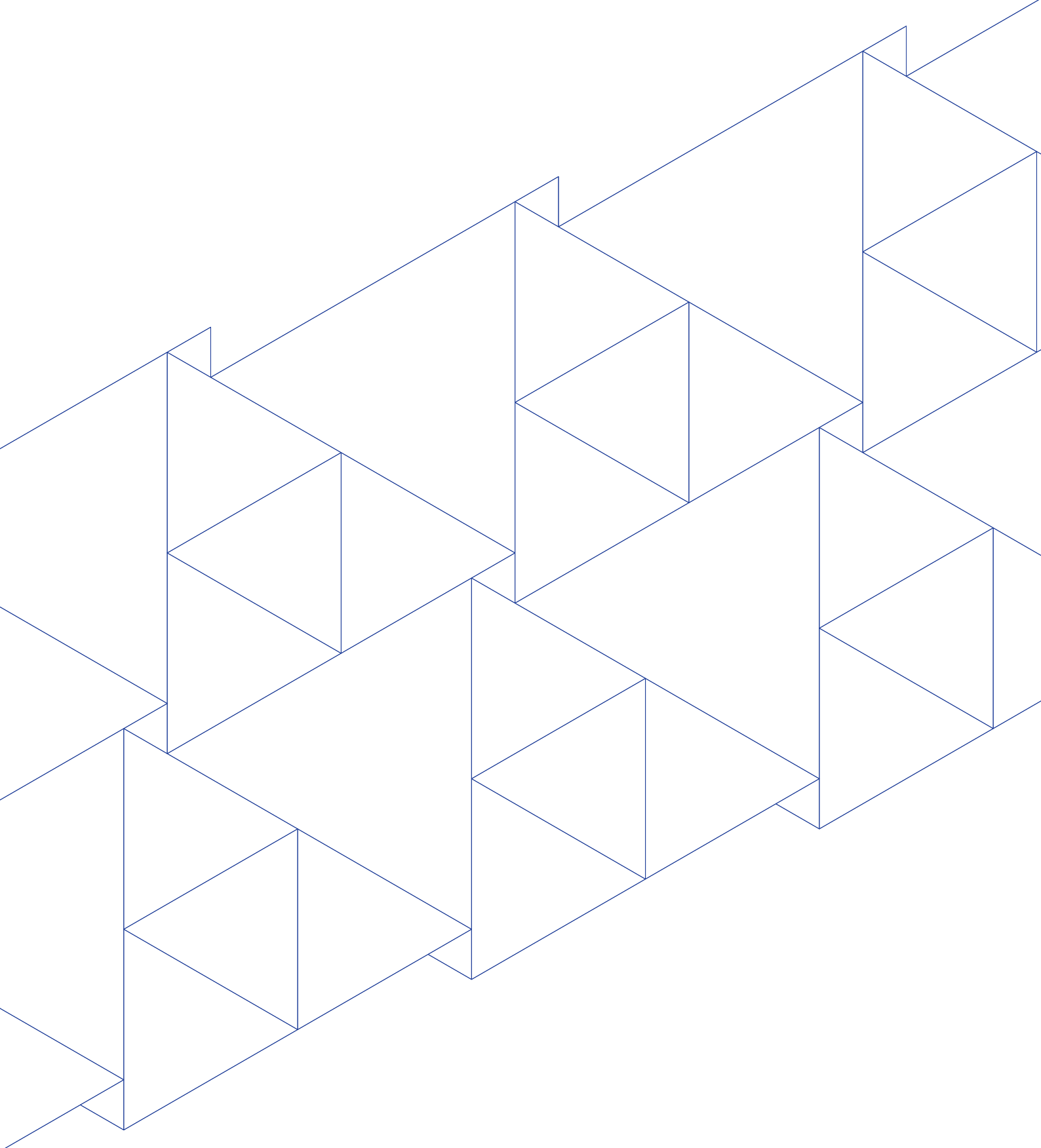
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► NOTICE

The use of language that does not discriminate or mark differences between men and women is one of the concerns of our Organization. However, there is no agreement among linguists about how to do so in Spanish. In this regard and in order to avoid the graphic overload that would be meant by using ‘o/a’ (male/female gender markers in Spanish), we have opted to use the classic generic masculine marker in the Spanish version, thereby understanding that all mentions in such gender always represent both men and women.

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