

Bibliographic Note

Title: The impact of COVID-19 on domestic workers in Africa

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Introduction

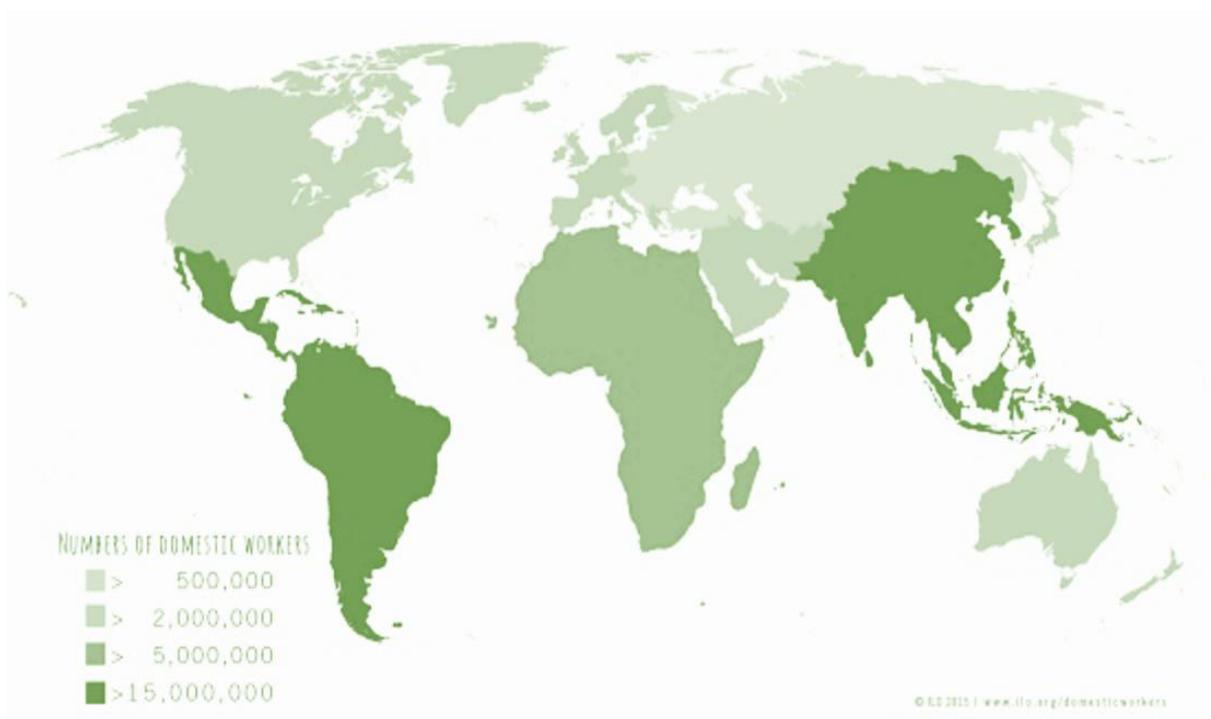
The Covid-19 pandemic has had a disastrous impact on employment and working conditions across the globe (ILO 2020a). Already a sector characterized by low wages, excessive working hours, occupational health and safety hazards and the absence of social security, domestic workers' conditions became even more precarious (IDWF 2020). This study explores how the pandemic affected the lives of domestic workers and their families on the African continent. Drawing on 3,419 surveys across fourteen African countries, it addresses the following questions:

- What was the impact of lockdown measures on domestic workers' working conditions?
- What kinds of State support did domestic workers receive during the lockdown period?
- What alternative sources of sustenance did domestic workers turn to in the absence of State support?
- How have domestic workers navigated the ongoing occupational health and safety hazards of intimate work during the pandemic?
- How can the experience of domestic workers during the first waves of the pandemic shape State policy, employer and union responses towards a post-pandemic recovery?

The scope and scale of domestic work in Africa

The ILO estimates that there are approximately 5.2 million domestic workers across the African continent (ILO 2016). However, because most labor force surveys do not accurately capture the scope and scale of domestic work, the real number is projected to be much larger. After all, less than 20 percent of African countries explicitly collect data on domestic work (ILO 2016). Furthermore, because domestic work is often embedded in familial practices of support, reciprocity and interdependence, it is often not declared as employment.

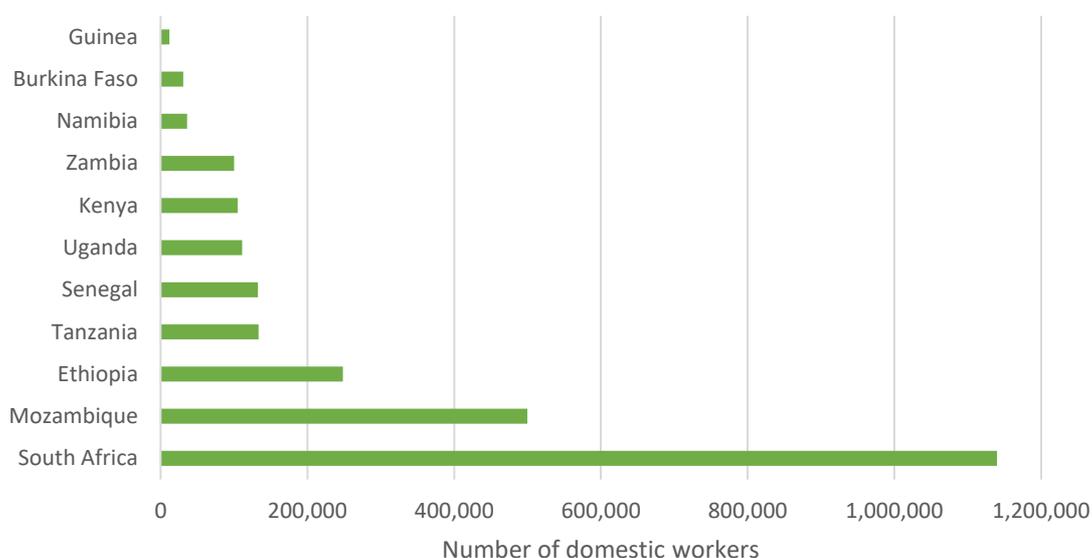
Figure 1: The global distribution of paid domestic work



Source: ILO (2013a)

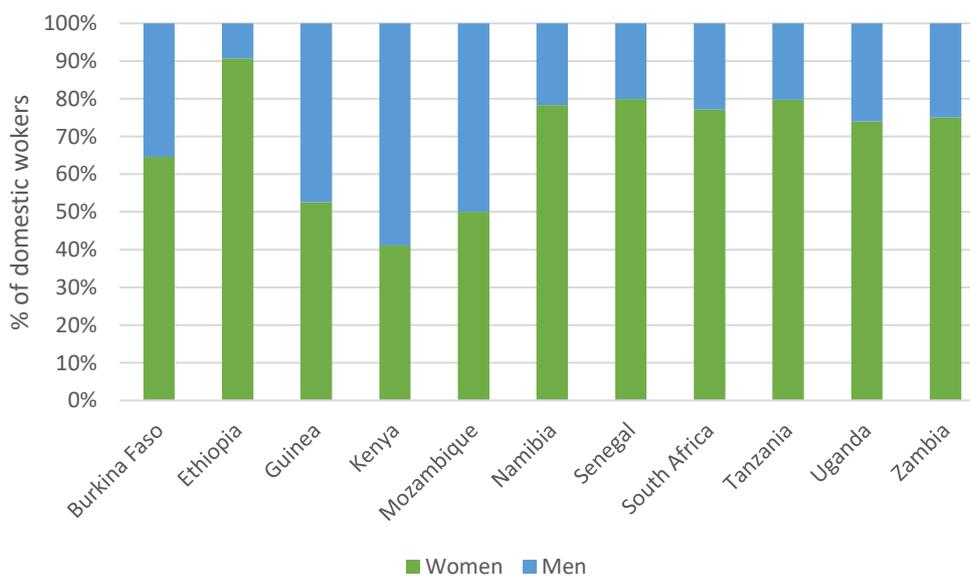
Despite the limitations of national statistics, some general trends can be identified. Three-quarters of domestic workers are women – and domestic work is often women’s primary economic activity after own-account work and small-scale agriculture (ILO 2013b). Male domestic workers are more commonplace in less industrialized countries and in regions where norms discourage women from engaging in economic activities outside of their own home. Women domestic workers tend to be more highly educated than men, pointing to pervasive gender discrimination in the formal labor market, which leaves women little option but to eke out a living as a domestic worker. While paid domestic work is concentrated in urban centers, it is also widespread in rural areas, where child labor is not uncommon (ILO 2013a).

Figure 2: The prevalence of domestic work in select African countries, 2013



Source: ILO(2013a)

Figure 3: The gender division of domestic work in select African countries, 2013



Source: ILO (2013)

Labor and social protections for domestic workers in Africa

In 2011, ILO member states adopted Convention 189, which stipulates the following protections for domestic workers, consistent with the legal framework for other formal sector employees: protection against abuse, harassment and violence; the right to a written contract; the definition of a minimum age and minimum wage; the delineation of reasonable working time and the right to daily, weekly and annual leave; the elaboration of occupational health and safety standards and dignified conditions for live-in workers; the right to social security benefits; paid repatriation in the case of migrant domestic workers; and the effective access to dispute resolution mechanisms and labor inspection, among other aspects (ILO 2011). So far, 31 countries have ratified the Convention, including Guinea, Madagascar, Mauritius, Namibia and South Africa on the African continent.

Meanwhile, in 2019, ILO member states adopted Convention 190, which recognizes workers' right to work in a world free of violence and harassment, including gender-based violence (ILO 2019a). The Convention applies to all workers, including those in the public and private sectors, and formal and informal economy; and to all situations arising from work, including the workplace, travel to and from work, and in employer-provided accommodation. Convention 190 not only calls on member states to adopt legislation prohibiting violence and harassment at work but also to introduce mechanisms of dissemination of information, inspection, and enforcement of labor protections and support for survivors of violence and harassment in the workplace. So far, only four countries have ratified Convention 190, including Namibia on the African continent.

Despite the adoption of international conventions to protect workers in this crucial sector of the global economy, domestic work across the African continent continues to be characterized by low and irregular wages, rigorous schedules and everchanging boundaries of work, the lack of paid sick days, the absence of occupational health and safety protections, limited access to daily, weekly and annual leave, inadequate social security coverage, contract violations and widespread discrimination, harassment and violence (Castel-Branco 2018; 2019). As Figure 4 illustrates, almost all African countries have adopted some labor protections for domestic workers (ILO 2013a). However, these have generally been parallel to and inconsistent with labor protections for formal sector workers, in contravention of Convention 189. Disparities are greatest in terms of in-kind payments, leave policies, and minimum wages. Furthermore, the particularities of paid domestic work – it is intimate work performed in private and dispersed households – means that labor protections are difficult to enforce. Because the enforcement infrastructure is generally designed with formal sector workers in mind, it has proven largely inadequate. As a member of the domestic workers' union in Senegal explains:

“We are treated as different; there is no real protection. Even our dress tells us apart from other workers. And if we lodge a complaint, try to claim our rights, we are simply dismissed.”

Figure 4: Labor protections across African countries, 2013



Source: ILO (2013)

The ILO estimates that 90 percent of domestic workers are effectively excluded from social insurance schemes. The largest coverage gaps are in developing countries, which also have the largest share of domestic workers worldwide. In Africa, only 25 percent of countries provide social insurance to domestic workers. Of those, fewer than four-fifths offer coverage through a general scheme with equal benefits to formal sector workers. Most schemes are voluntary. The most common benefits are long-term pensions and short-term compensation for employment injuries. The least common are unemployment benefits and medical care. Only half of the schemes include migrant domestic workers. Ultimately, only African countries with mature social security systems and relatively small populations such as Cabo Verde and Mauritius have been able to achieve significant domestic worker coverage. Figure 5 provides an overview of social insurance schemes for domestic workers in select African countries, based on existing ILO data.

According to the ILO (2016), limited effective coverage suggests that voluntary social insurance schemes are inadequate. However, even those countries with mandatory schemes such as Angola, have achieved only minimal coverage, pointing to the existence of other barriers (Castel-Branco 2018). Additional barriers include low wages and the limited contributory capacity of domestic workers, onerous administrative procedures, weak or inappropriate enforcement mechanisms, and social norms, which continue to conceive of domestic work as something other than employment (Castel-Branco and Sambo 2020). In an attempt to increase coverage, some countries have introduced differentiated social security schemes. However, differentiated schemes generally exclude maternity benefits from their basic package. Given that domestic workers are primarily women, this not only undermines domestic workers' benefits but reproduces gender inequality in the workplace (ILO 2019b).

Figure 5: Social insurance coverage across select African countries

Country	Type of scheme	Type of coverage	Type of benefits covered for domestic workers						
			Medical care	Pensions	Sickness benefit	Unemployment benefit	Employment injury benefit	Family benefit	Maternity benefit
Algeria	Special	Mandatory	•	•	○	○	○		
Cabo Verde	General	Mandatory	•	•	•	○	•	•	•
Egypt	Special	Mandatory	○	•	○	○	○	○	○
Gabon	General	Mandatory	○	•	○	○	○	○	○
Kenya	General	Mandatory	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS
Mauritania	General	Mandatory	○	•	○	○	•	○	○
Mauritius	General	Mandatory	○	•	○	○	•	○	○
Mozambique	General	Voluntary	•	•	•	○	•	•	•
Senegal	General	Mandatory	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS
South Africa	General	Mandatory	○	○	•	•	○	•	•
Togo	General	Mandatory	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS
Zambia	General	Mandatory	NS	•	•	○	•	○	•

Key:

- With coverage for domestic workers
- No coverage for domestic workers
- NS Not specified

Source: ILO (2016)

Income-support measures in response to the Covid-19 pandemic in Africa

In an effort to curb the spread of the virus, African countries introduced a series of public health measures, including the closure of schools, restrictions on the circulation of public transport, the prohibition of large gatherings, stay at home ordinances, and the imposition of social distancing measures (MTDWA 2020). As the IDWF (2020) noted, these measures were based on the dubious assumption that workers living in crowded urban peripheries could safely quarantine. Despite the subsequent relaxation of lockdown measures amidst growing evidence that they were neither effective nor economically viable, many of the jobs lost have not returned.

The ILO estimates that at the height of the lockdown period, approximately three-quarters of domestic workers – or 50 million workers globally – were severely impacted by a reduction in working hours and a decline in remuneration (2020b). The most severely affected were domestic workers living in Asia, the Middle East and Africa, where income security measures are extremely limited. In response to the fallout from the Covid-19 pandemic, African countries introduced a myriad of emergency measures, including the suspension of utility payments, the distribution of food and personal protective equipment, and the introduction of emergency cash transfers. The following sections explore whether domestic workers did indeed receive some kind of state support during the lockdown period, what alternative sources of sustenance they turned to in the absence of income-security measures, and how they have navigated the ongoing occupational health and safety hazards of the Covid-19 pandemic. The report concludes with a series of recommendations for the State, employers and domestic workers' unions.

Figure 6: income support measures in case countries during the lockdown period

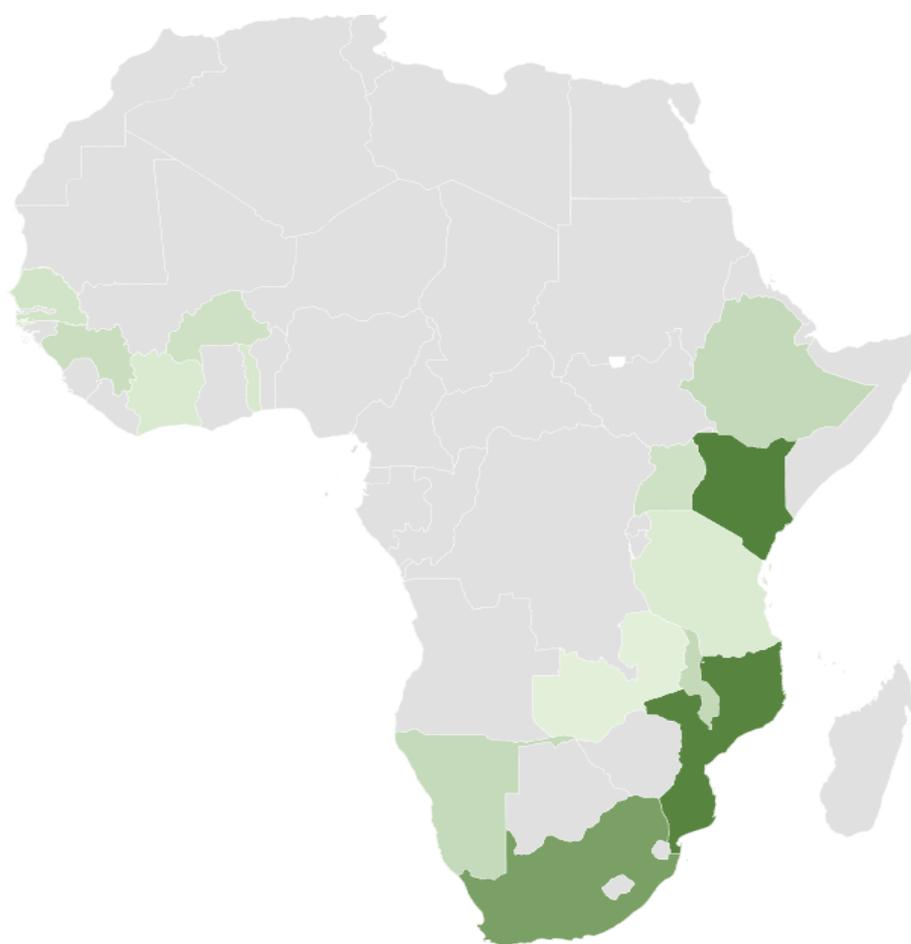
Country	Measures
Burkina-Faso	New emergency cash transfer for informal workers, particularly women. Price controls for staple foods including cereals, sugar, oil, cooking gas. Subsidies for water and electricity bills.
Ethiopia	In urban centers, beneficiaries of the Productive Safety Net Programme received a 3-month advanced payment and were able to draw on 50per cent of their savings, an expansion of the project to low-income citizens. In rural areas, the program was expanded to a million people for 3 to 6 months. The work conditionality was suspended.
Guinea	New emergency cash transfer of \$25 to a million people over a period of 6 months. Introduction of labor-intensive public works. Distribution of sanitation kits to 850,000 people. A waiver on payment of utilities.
Kenya	Introduction of an \$80 cash transfer for 1,094,238 InuaJamii beneficiaries. Expansion of the NSNP o 3,000,000 new households.
Mozambique	Introduction of a \$20 cash transfer for 1,102,825 poor households in urban and peri-urban areas for a period of six months. An additional three months of payments for existing beneficiaries.
Namibia	A one-off emergency unemployment grant of N\$750. Subsidized water. Subsidized loans for tax-registered employees and own-account workers.
Senegal	Subsidized electricity and water for 975,522 vulnerable households over a period of two months.
South Africa	The child support grant increased by \$26 per month from May to October. Other social grants increased by \$13 per month during the same period. Introduction of a new \$18 grant for 20 million people who are unemployed but not yet receiving any social grant or support from the Unemployment Insurance Fund, over a period of 6 months with the possibility of extension.
Togo	A new transfer for informal workers who could prove that they had lost income, equivalent to \$21 for women and \$17 for men. Expansion of existing cash transfer schemes from 274,500 to 630,000 beneficiaries.
Uganda	Emergency labor-intensive public works in urban centers for 500,000 beneficiaries over a period of 2 months for a daily wage of \$1.75. Distribution of food packages to 1.5 million vulnerable people in urban areas.
Zambia	An emergency cash transfer for a period of six months.

Source: World Bank (2020)

Research methodology

IDWF affiliates surveyed domestic workers across fourteen African countries (Figure 7). With a few exceptions, the questionnaire design (appendix 1) was identical to surveys conducted by domestic workers' unions in Latin America and the Middle East, so as to allow for cross-regional comparisons. The questionnaire was divided into the following sections: a) demographic information, b) working conditions prior to the lockdown, c) the impact of the lockdown on the conditions of work, d) the conditions of work in the post-lockdown period, e) the role of domestic workers' unions. The questionnaire was developed in English and translated into French, Portuguese and Amharic– the official languages in most of the case countries. Enumerators then verbally interpreted the survey into national languages and captured the responses electronically using Google Forms.

Figure 7: **Map of African countries surveyed by IDWF affiliates**



To be selected for the survey, African countries had to have a domestic workers' union affiliated to the IDWF, with the capacity and interest to undertake the survey. Domestic workers' unions were then purposefully selected to reflect both the experiences of established organizations as well as newer affiliates across the African continent. While domestic workers' unions in Kenya, Mozambique, and South Africa are well established and have the highest number of members; those in Ivory Coast, Tanzania and Zambia are much newer and have among the lowest. Within each country, domestic workers' unions surveyed 5 percent of their membership, selected purposively on the basis of union membership records.

To train domestic workers as researchers, IDWF held three online workshops in English, French, and Portuguese in October 2020. The workshops involved a discussion of research methodologies and ethical considerations when undertaking research in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, an explanation of how to collect survey data online, and the piloting of the survey instrument. Field research took place between November 2020 and January 2021 using Google Forms. The use of Google Forms allowed for the online submission of survey data amidst lockdown conditions. However, because of language barriers, high levels of illiteracy and uneven access to the internet (Gillwald, Mothobi, and Rademan 2019), the data was verbally collected in English, French and Portuguese, and then submitted to a centralized, password-protected database by enumerators. The data was then translated, cleaned, and analyzed using SPSS. In February 2021, the data was presented back to IDWF affiliates for comment.

Figure 8: **Map of African countries surveyed by IDWF affiliates**

Country	Union	Membership	Sample
Burkina-Faso	Syndicat National des Employés de Maison et de Gardiennage du Burkina Faso	2,089	119
Ethiopia	Mulu Tesfa Domestic Workers Association (MTDWA)	2,956	212
Guinea	Syndicat National des Employés de Maison de Guinée	2,512	132
Ivory Coast	Syndicat Des Travailleurs Domestiques et Travailleurs de l'Economie Informel	1,130	61
Kenya	Kenya Union of Domestic, Hotels, Educational Institutions, Hospitals, and Allied Workers	12,383	474
Malawi	Commercial, Industrial & Allied Workers Union	3,000	150
Mozambique	Sindicato Nacional dos Empregados Domésticos	12,025	643
Namibia	Namibia Domestic and Allied Workers Union	2,870	197
Senegal	Syndicat National de l'Hotellerie de la Restauration, Café, Bar et Branches Connexes	1,790	152
South Africa	South African Domestic Service and Allied Workers Union	9,100	461
Tanzania	Conservation, Hotels, Domestic, Social Services, and Consultancy Workers Union	1,050	506
Togo	Syndicat National des Domestiques du Togo	1,345	84
Uganda	Uganda Hotels, Food, Tourism, Supermarkets, and Allied Workers Union	2,073	129
Zambia	Domestic Workers Union of Zambia	480	99

In total, 3,419 surveys were undertaken by trained domestic workers. While many respondents were union members, some were ununionized domestic workers. 87 percent of respondents were women – a higher proportion than the continental average of 75 percent– the vast majority of whom identified as Black or African. For most respondents, domestic work was their primary source of income, and they were the main breadwinner in the household. 65 percent of respondents lived in urban centers, and nearly a third were migrant workers, with 6 percent international migrants.

Figure 9: Union members surveyed in Mozambique, Burkina-Faso, Côte D'Ivoire and Senegal



Strengths and limitations

The survey was conducted by domestic workers themselves, circumventing many of the pitfalls of asymmetric power relations between researchers and research participants, endemic to research processes (Deane and Stevano 2016). According to domestic workers' unions, undertaking research helped them to raise their visibility during lockdown conditions, recruit new members and strengthen their organization. The research process not only allowed domestic workers' unions to collect useful data that could strengthen their responses amidst an unprecedented pandemic but demonstrated to both unionized and ununionized workers that the union cared about their plight. Where possible, surveys were coupled with awareness-raising campaigns and the distribution of food and personal protective equipment. As domestic workers' unions made clear, this would have been impossible without the support of the IDWF.

Nevertheless, enumerators faced numerous challenges during the research process. Although the domestic workers interviewed were effectively their peers, many respondents feared that there would be negative repercussions as a result of undertaking the survey. Concerned about retribution from employers, respondents stressed the importance of anonymity and confidentiality. Furthermore, domestic workers were hard to reach given lockdown conditions. Live-in domestic workers were particularly challenging to connect with because they had even less time and privacy than usual. But even live-out workers were hard to reach, given extended working hours and limitations on geographic mobility. Consequently, many enumerators opted for telephone surveys, but the spatially distanced nature of interviews meant that they struggled to provide respondents with the emotional support they felt they needed. As a representative of the domestic workers' union in South Africa recalls:

“It was difficult to connect personally. I couldn't physically hug them, tell them that everything would be ok.”

Language barriers, high levels of illiteracy and uneven access to the internet posed additional challenges. While the survey was translated into Amharic, English, French and Portuguese – the official languages in most of the case countries – these were not always domestic workers' mother tongues. Furthermore, many domestic workers did not feel comfortable filling out an electronic survey over Google Forms. Indeed, given the uneven nature of digital technologies, many did not own smart phones to begin with. Therefore, enumerators had to verbally interpret the survey into other national languages, on a case by case basis. This process was not only time-intensive but required that enumerators speak multiple languages. Consequently, the deadline for completing the research had to be extended from November 2020 to January 2021.

Furthermore, as with any survey instrument, respondents did not have the flexibility to prod further or capture unanticipated information. While the survey allowed for open-ended statements, the space to provide detailed data was limited. Future qualitative research could be useful in exploring the processes and forces which underlie the findings presented in this report. Finally, because of the lack of available labor force data on domestic work across most African countries, this survey is not representative of African domestic workers as a whole. Nevertheless, it constitutes the most comprehensive survey of African domestic workers to date. Importantly, it was designed in articulation with domestic workers' unions, conducted by trained domestic worker researchers and analyzed in conjunction with national workers' organizations.

The structure of the report

The report is structured along three central themes which emerged during the research process. The first theme is security of employment. It provides an overview of working arrangements prior to the Covid-19 pandemic and how these changed with the introduction of lockdown measures. The second theme is income security. It evaluates the effectiveness of income-replacement instruments introduced by the state and explores how domestic workers made ends meet in the absence of State support. The third theme centers on occupational health and safety. It discusses how domestic workers have fared amidst the ongoing health hazards posed by the Covid-19 pandemic. The report concludes with a discussion of recommendations for the State, employers and domestic workers' organizations.

Conditions of employment

ILO Convention 189 stipulates that each country should take measures to ensure that domestic workers are informed about the conditions of employment in a verifiable and easily understandable manner, preferably through a written contract. Only 16.8 percent of domestic workers surveyed had access to a written contract. Written contracts were most common in Ethiopia, Namibia and Burkina-Faso; and least common in Tanzania, Mozambique and Senegal. In many instances, the absence of a written contract meant that domestic workers had little leverage to enforce the conditions of work agreed upon prior to the Covid-19 pandemic. These included the nature of the employment relationship, the types of activities to be undertaken, the extent of working time, daily and weekly leave, and severance pay.

Figure 10: Incidence of written contracts across African countries, 2020/2021

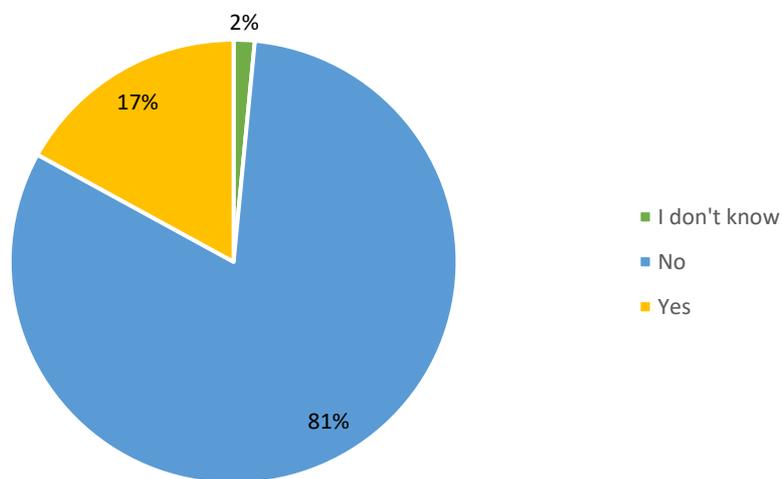
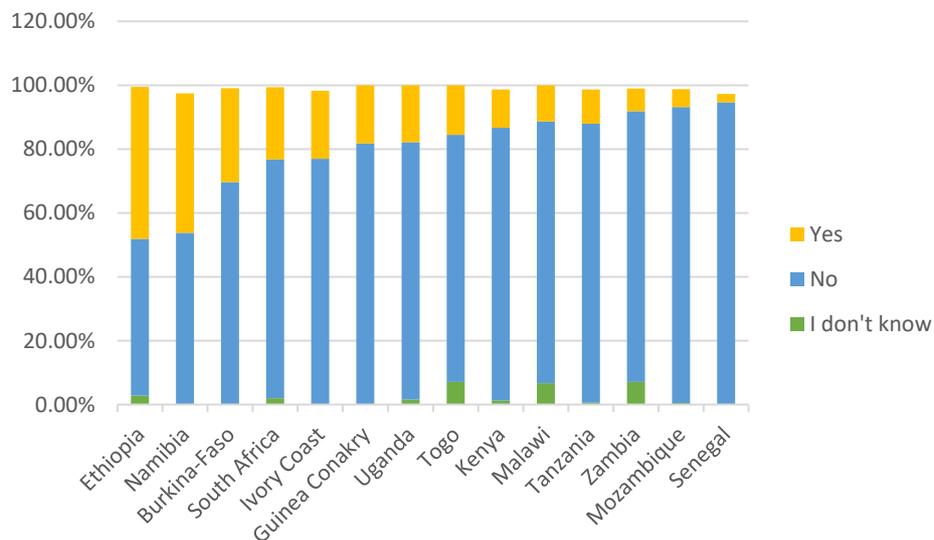


Figure 11: Incidence of written contracts by country, 2020/2021



85 per cent of domestic workers surveyed worked for one employer and 67 percent worked on a full-time basis. Other common arrangements included part time and daily work for multiple employers. Despite the recent proliferation of domestic worker agencies and online platforms such as SweepSouth in South Africa, only 2 percent of domestic workers worked for private agencies. On the one hand, the scope of digital platforms is still very limited given the uneven nature of digital penetration. On the other hand, platform domestic workers are even more dispersed, posing a challenge for organized labor. Domestic worker activities vary widely. 36 percent of domestic workers surveyed did a bit of everything, while the remainder focused on specialized activities. The most common activities were housekeeping, cleaning and cooking; and the least common were caring for the young, the elderly and people with disabilities.

Figure 12: **Type of employer across case countries, 2020/2021**

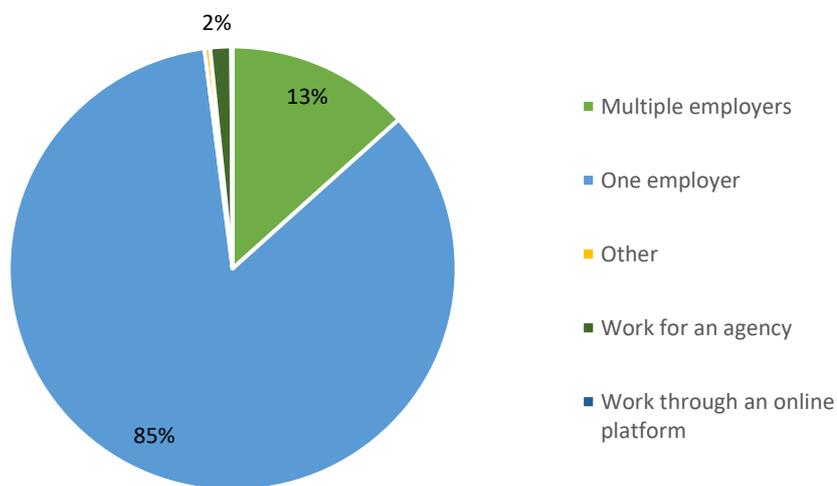


Figure 13: **Employment arrangements across case countries, 2020/2021**

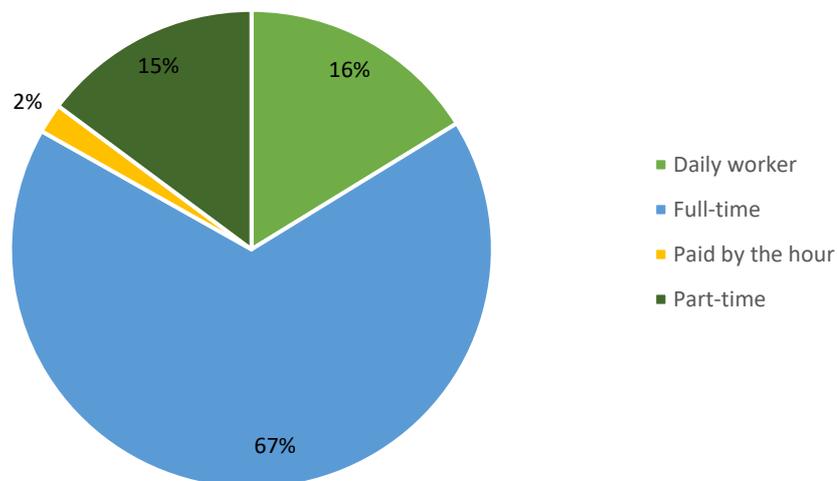
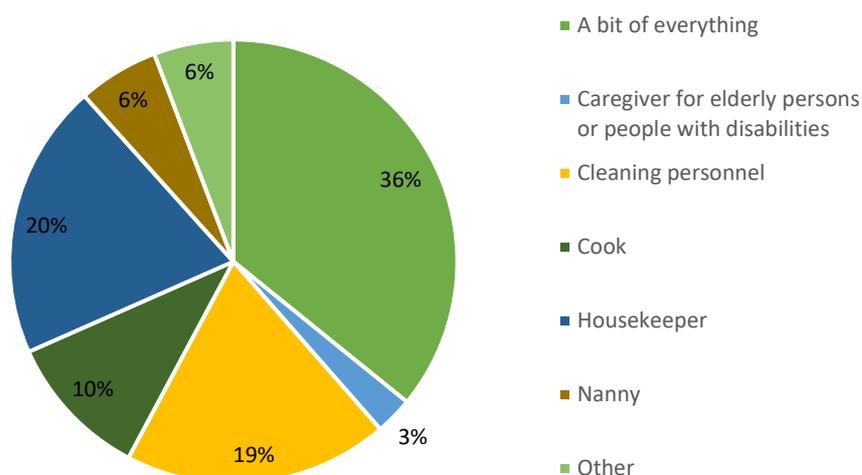


Figure 14: Domestic workers' activities across African countries, 2020/2021



81 percent of domestic workers reported that the government introduced social distancing measures in their respective countries. Despite restrictions on gatherings and movement, 47 percent of those surveyed continued to work as before, risking their lives in the face of an unprecedented pandemic in order to make ends meet. This was especially true in Burkina-Faso, Malawi, and Tanzania, where the public health measures introduced were laxer. 29 percent of domestic workers surveyed were suspended or laid off during the lockdown period, while 18 percent kept working but saw their hours and wages reduced. Suspensions and layoffs were particularly prevalent in South Africa, Senegal, and Kenya, where restrictions were stricter. Only 6 percent of domestic workers surveyed stayed home but continued to draw a salary. Because they are generally the primary breadwinners of the household, and domestic work constitutes their principal income generating activity, the decline in income ultimately impacted the entire household. As a South African domestic worker reflects:

“I lost two family members and had to pay all the expenses. As a domestic worker, I must always pay for all the funerals in my family.”

Figure 15: The impact of lockdown measures on domestic workers, 2020/2021

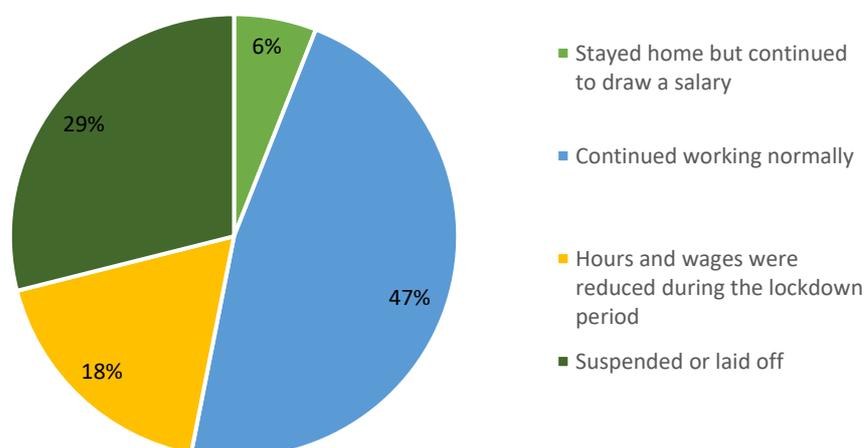
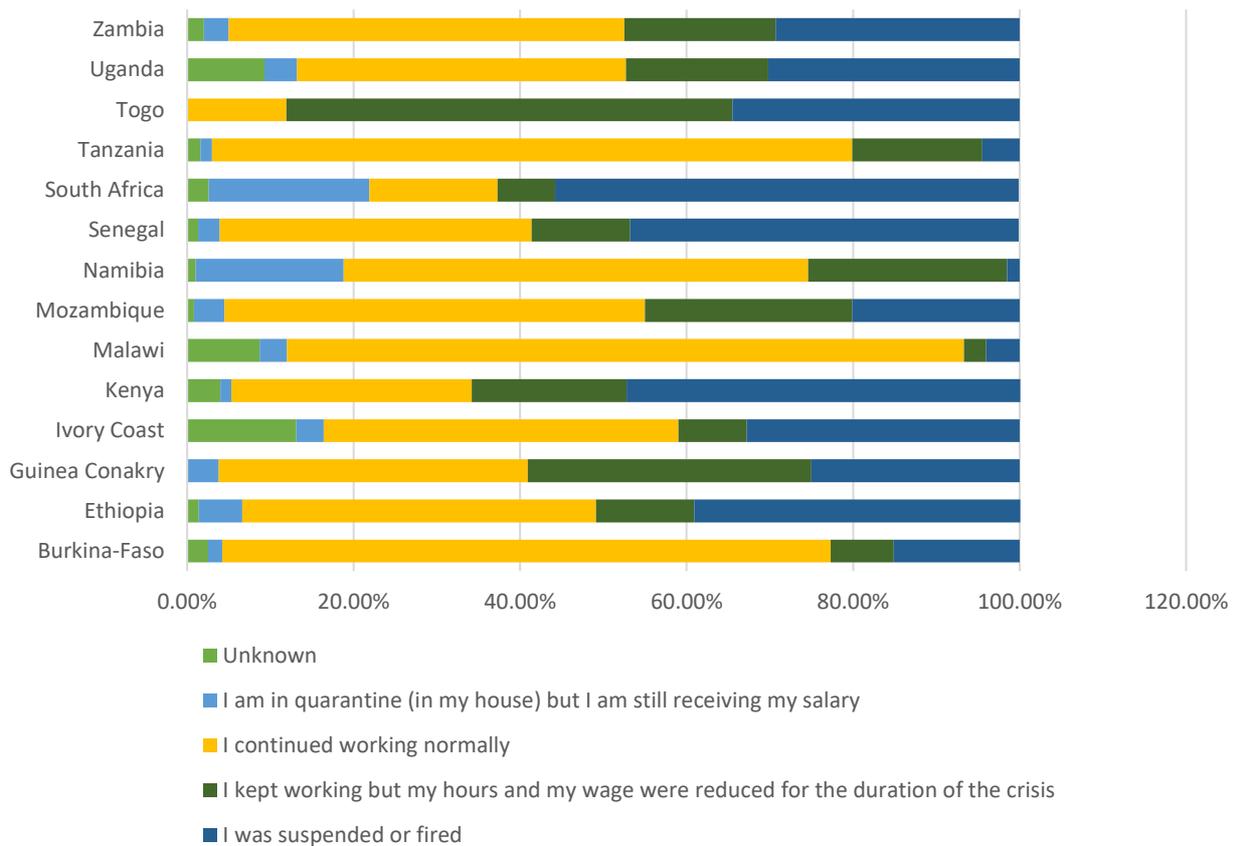


Figure 16: The impact of lockdown measures on domestic workers by country, 2020/2021



Notably, 85 percent of laid-off workers received no severance pay whatsoever, while 11 percent received between one and three months’ worth of severance. While a quarter of laid off domestic workers secured employment within two months, the majority had to wait much longer. Half only found employment after between three and six months; and it would take at least seven months for the remaining quarter to secure work. In other words, even for those lucky enough to receive severance pay, the amount was insufficient to tide domestic workers over the lockdown period – and many remain unemployed to this day.

Figure 17: The payment of severance, 2020/2021

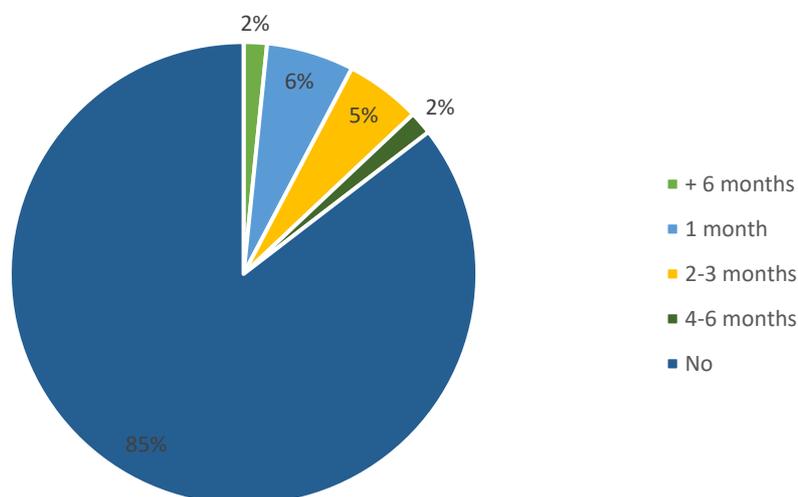
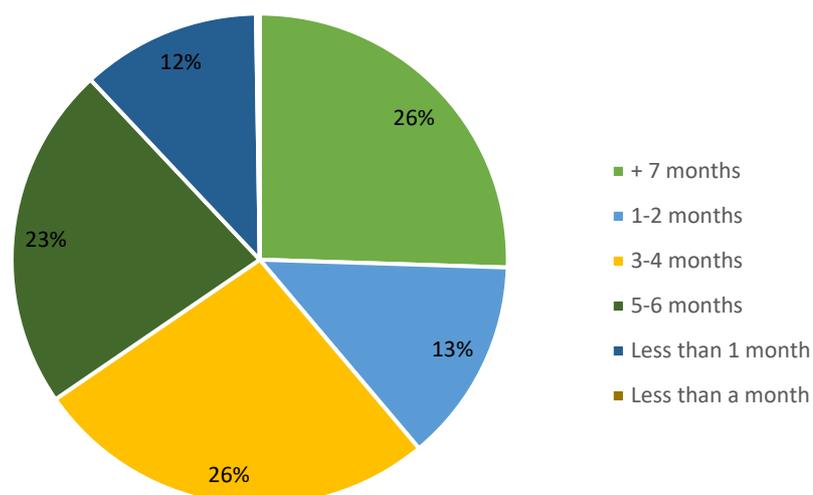


Figure 18: The length of unemployment, 2020/2021



In addition, 72 per cent of other household members either lost their jobs or experienced a reduction in income. Given the relatively large household size – 51 percent of domestic workers live in households with an additional five or more people, which is above national averages – the combined loss of income increased intrahousehold tensions. The impact of a reduction of income was exacerbated by the rising cost of food and fuel, particularly in regions dependent on imports. Indeed, 74 percent of domestic workers surveyed reported a rise in food prices and 69 per cent reported increased difficulty in accessing public transportation amidst widespread price speculation. Furthermore, 52 percent of domestic workers rent their homes and thus were vulnerable to eviction. The combined effect, a South African domestic worker explains, was increased anxiety, as domestic workers struggled to cobble together a livelihood:

“Death and hunger were a struggle which separated the rich from the poor...Our kids have lost their jobs, and now we are all in the house with nothing.”

Indeed, increased anxiety affected two thirds of domestic workers surveyed. The next section explores the extent to which domestic workers benefited from state support.

Figure 19: The impact of the pandemic on the income of other household members, 2020/2021

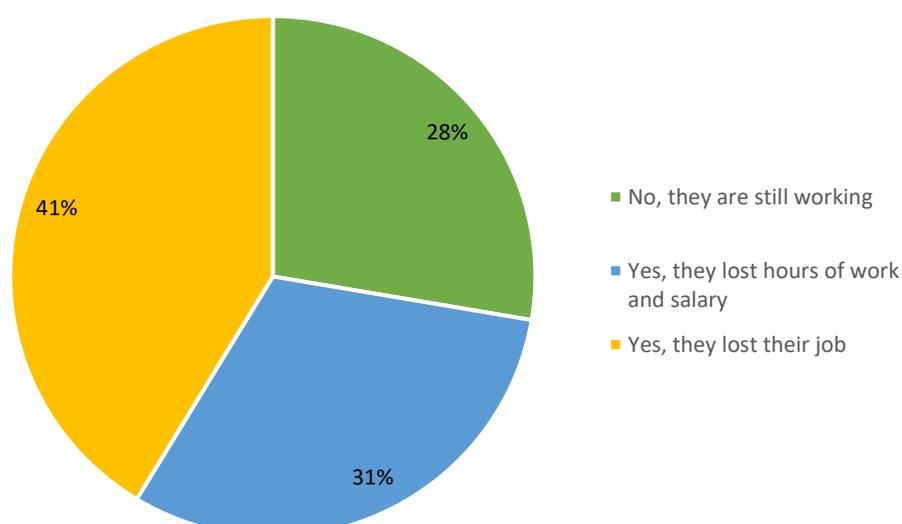


Figure 20: The size of domestic workers' households, 2020/2021

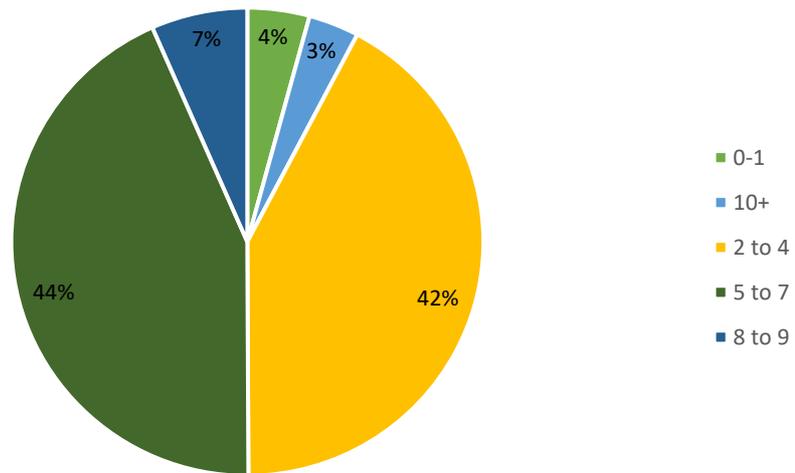


Figure 21: Domestic workers' living situation, 2020/2021

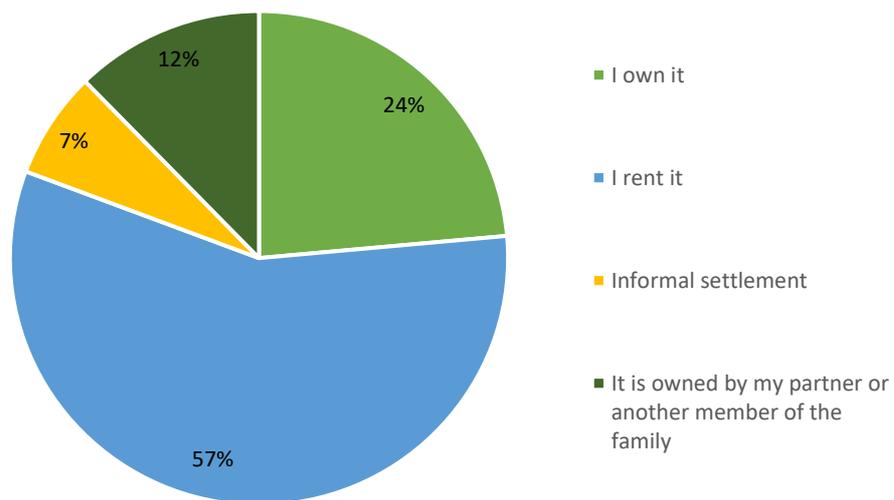
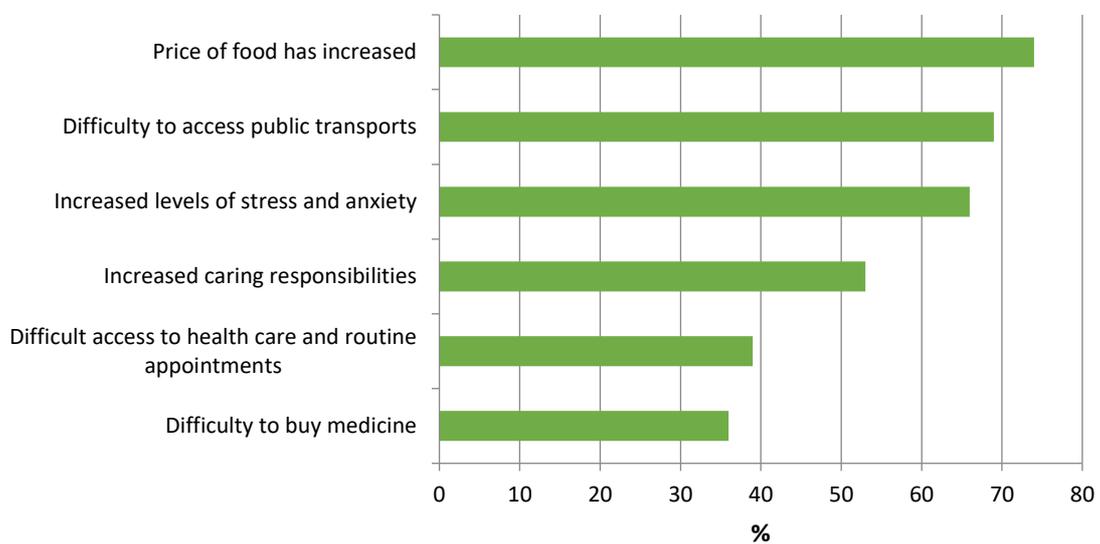


Figure 22: Overall impact of the pandemic on domestic workers, 2020/2021



The Covid-19 pandemic exacerbated the already precarious conditions of domestic workers. While both rich and poor feared the virus, the cost of lockdown measures was born primarily by the poor who found themselves without sources of sustenance overnight. As family members lost their jobs, some domestic workers turned to alternative income-generating activities, but business failed amidst widespread despair. As another South African domestic worker recalls:

“Things got very bad as I could not sell things privately. The community could not afford to purchase anything. Family members lost their jobs, and the food prices increased tremendously.”

Amidst great economic uncertainty and the confinement of large households in small spaces, domestic workers faced an increased risk of gender-based harassment and violence. Indeed, many reported that the subsequent alcohol bans were a welcome reprieve amidst growing anxiety. Ultimately, the Covid-19 pandemic thrust highlighted the needs for a comprehensive social protection system, capable of responding to contingencies along the life cycle as well as idiosyncratic risks. The following section explores

Income support: State and union responses

ILO Convention 189 stipulates that member states should ensure that domestic workers enjoy access to social security under conditions no less favorable than those applicable to other workers. 70 percent of domestic workers surveyed did not contribute to social insurance schemes and thus had no access to contributory benefits during the lockdown period. Social insurance coverage was highest in Namibia, Kenya, and Burkina-Faso; and lowest in Guinea, Senegal, and Ivory Coast. Among those domestic workers who contributed to social insurance schemes, 59 percent bore the full burden of contribution, due to their misclassification as own-account workers. Notably, even domestic workers who contributed to social insurance schemes did not generally receive unemployment benefits.

Figure 23: Social insurance coverage among domestic workers, 2020/2021

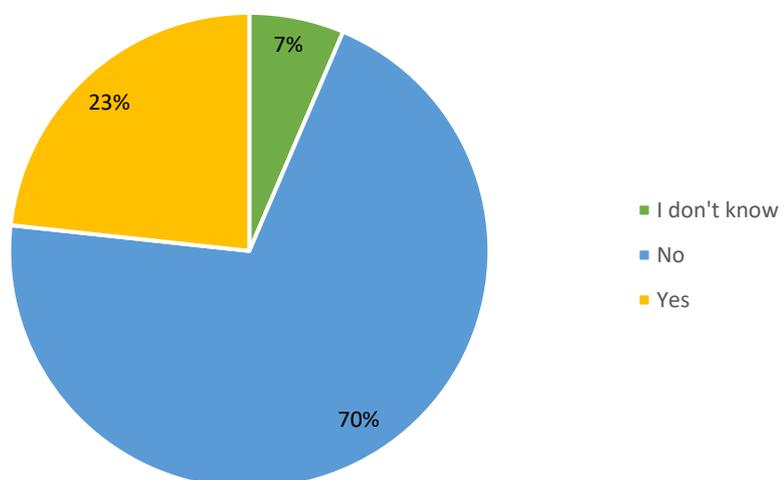


Figure 24: Social insurance coverage among domestic workers by country, 2020/2021

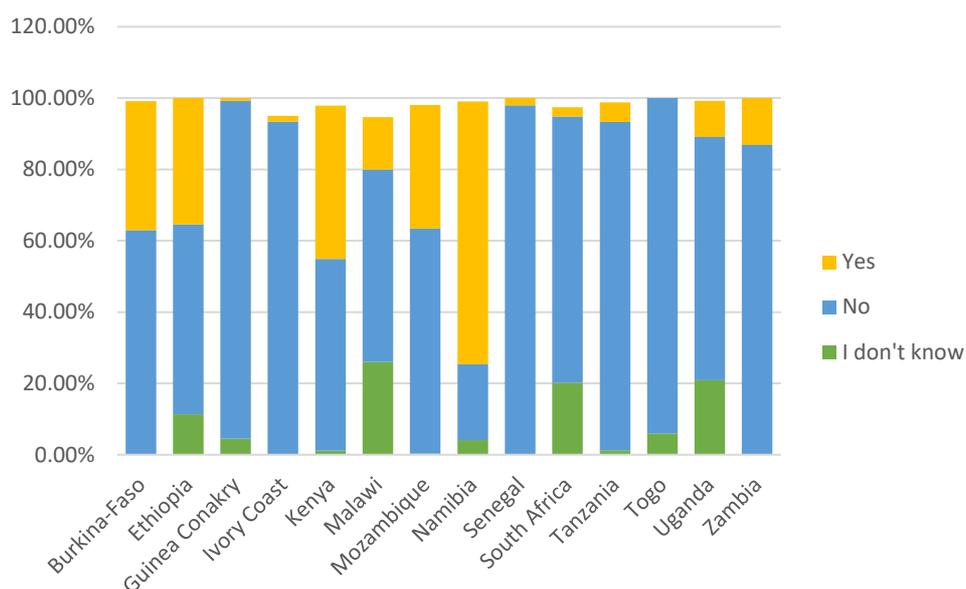
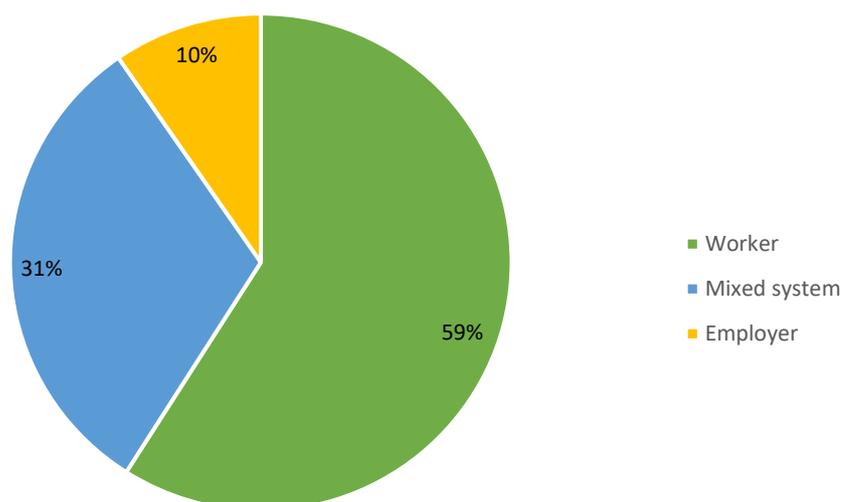


Figure 25: Contributory arrangement for those with social insurance coverage, 2020/2021



In the absence of adequate social insurance coverage, non-contributory social assistance played an important role in mitigating the negative socioeconomic impact of the pandemic. Across the African continent, states introduced various forms of income-support including the suspension of utility bills, the distribution of food baskets, and the payment of emergency cash transfers. The cancellation of utility bills was most common in Senegal, unemployment benefits and emergency cash transfers in Namibia, food baskets and vouchers in Uganda, and rent support in Burkina-Faso. However, only 14 percent of domestic workers reported that they received some form of state support. The principal reason for low levels of coverage was that most domestic workers were not eligible to apply. As a domestic worker from Guinea reflects:

“There were no specific measures for domestic workers. If workers received benefits such as sanitation kits or a waiver of utility fees, it was because they happened to be in a household that was included in the program, not because they were a domestic worker.”

Most income support measures were highly targeted and limited to the poorest households. Although domestic workers' salaries are certainly among the lowest – three-quarters of domestic workers surveyed earned less than \$100 a day – they often fall into what is referred to as “the missing middle”(Alfers and Moussié 2020). Their salaries are too low and work arrangements too irregular to contribute to social insurance but too high to benefit from residual forms of social assistance. Other reasons for not applying included onerous application processes, such as the requirement that applications be submitted online and stipulations regarding the types of documentation needed. This was particularly true in Burkina-Faso, South Africa, and Malawi.

Figure 26: Income-support measures introduced for surveyed domestic workers, 2020/2021

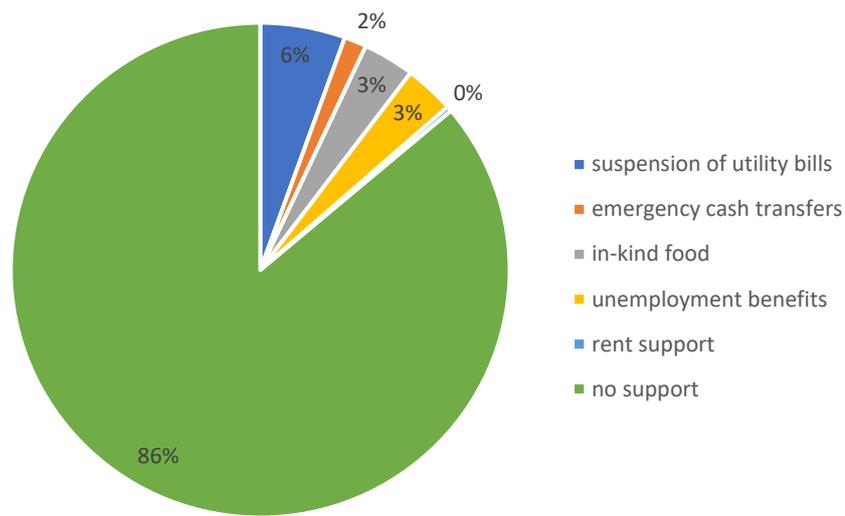


Figure 27: Income-support measures by country for surveyed domestic workers, 2020/2021

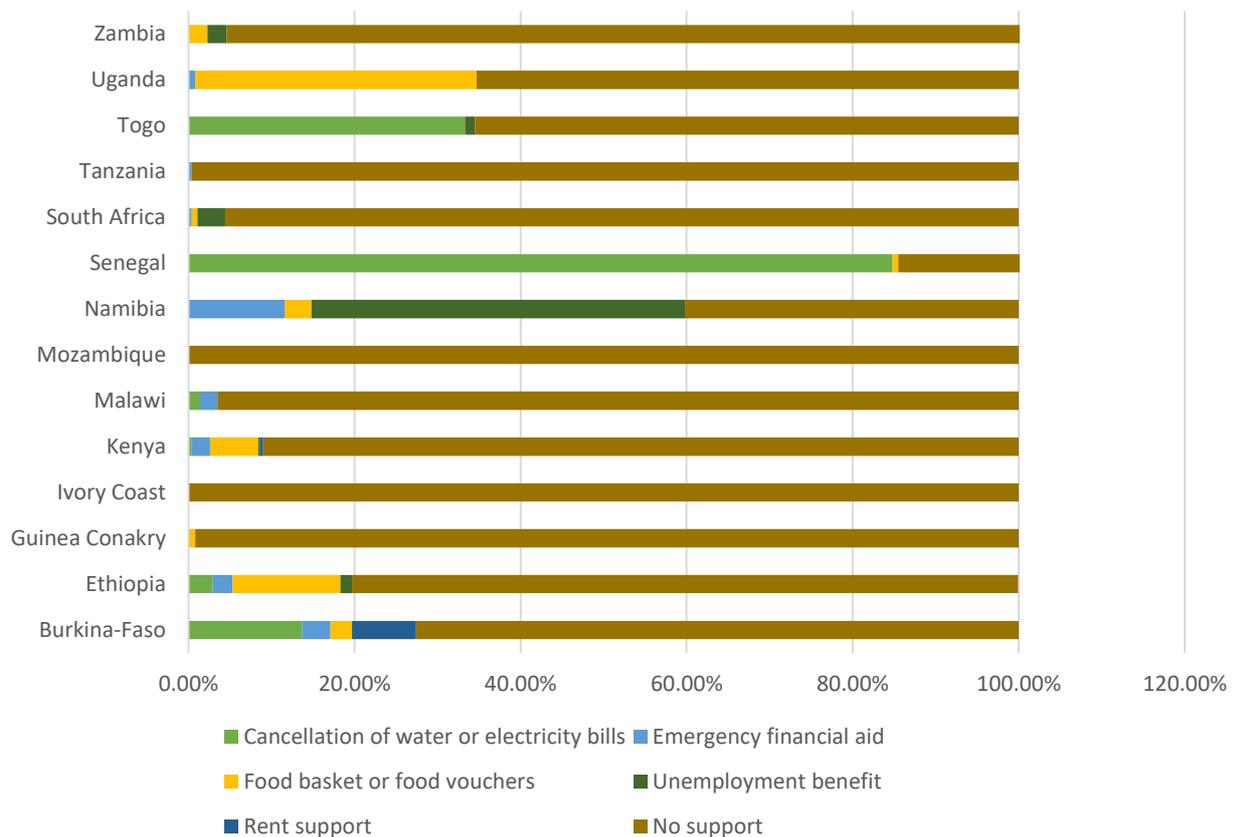


Figure 28: Did domestic workers apply for income support from the state, 2020/2021

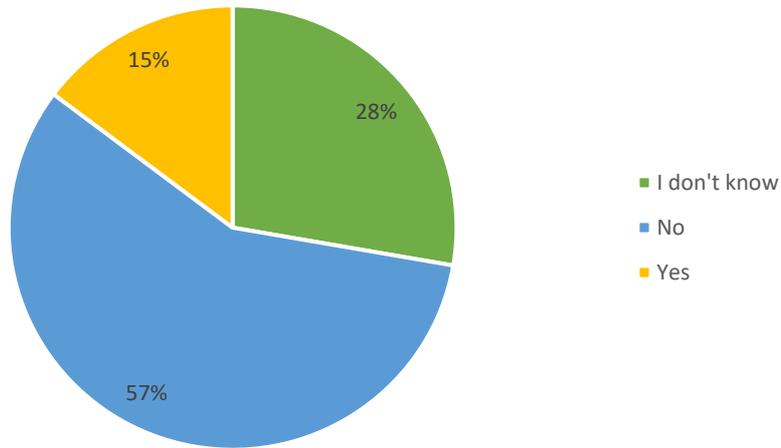


Figure 29: Reasons for not applying for income support benefits, 2020/2021

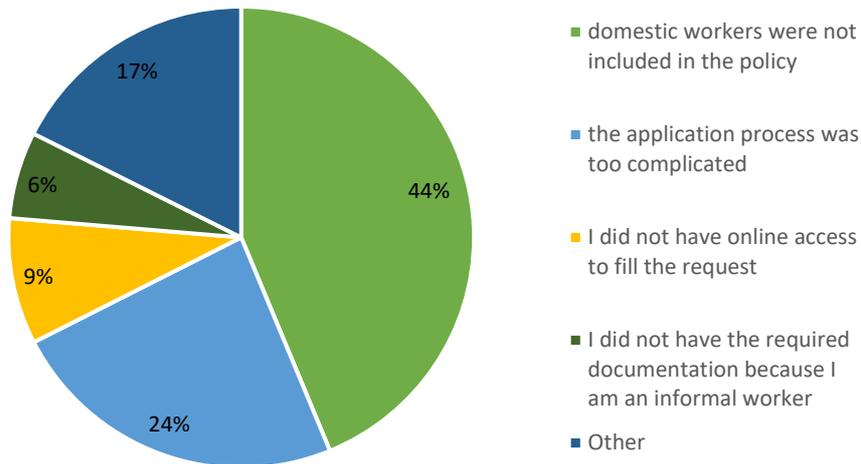


Figure 30: Reasons for not applying for income support benefits by country, 2020/2021

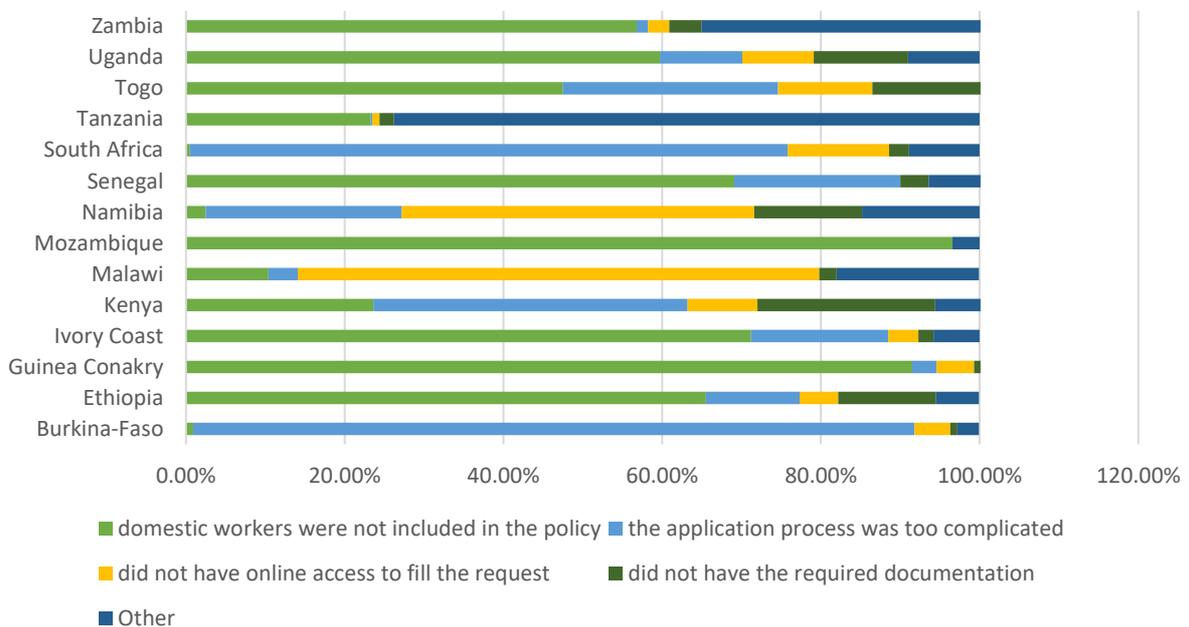
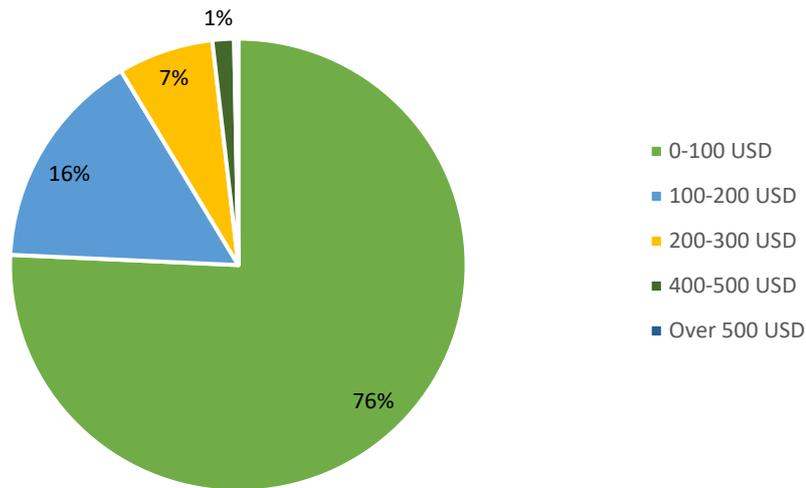


Figure 31: Domestic workers' wages, 2020/2021



In some countries, domestic workers' unions demanded the extension of emergency social assistance to this historically marginalized sector. In Mozambique for instance, the state committed to incorporate domestic workers into its emergency Covid-19 package. The package promised to provide over a million households with the equivalent of \$20 a month over a period of six months (RdM 2020). However, once the state had registered domestic workers into the system with the assistance of the union, they narrowed the scope of the program to domestic workers living in the capital city Maputo. Given the unaffordable cost of living within the boundaries of the capital city and domestic workers' low wages, only a small number of domestic workers actually lived within the eligible geographic area. Disappointingly, the state has yet to pay out the promised cash transfers, even for eligible domestic workers. In response, the union launched a public campaign to pressure the state to distribute the funds.

Figure 32: Mozambican domestic workers demand emergency social assistance, 2020/2021



Ultimately, the current framework for social protection provisioning across much of the African continent fails to provide income security to the vast majority of informal workers, including domestic workers. In the absence of adequate state support during the lockdown period, domestic workers were forced to cobble together a livelihood through other means. 67 percent of domestic workers received some form of support from their respective unions. Domestic workers' unions launched awareness-raising campaigns for both workers and employers, distributed food and personal protective equipment, and trained domestic workers in new economic activities such as making masks and soap for sale. Trade union support was especially important in Senegal, Togo, Tanzania, and Mozambique. As a worker from Cote d'Ivoire recalls:

“The union provided us with a fund to start income-generating activities. I learned to make masks for sale. Before, I did not know about the union; from today, I intend to be a member and participate in the fight for decent work.”

Figure 33: Sources of support other than the state, 2020/2021

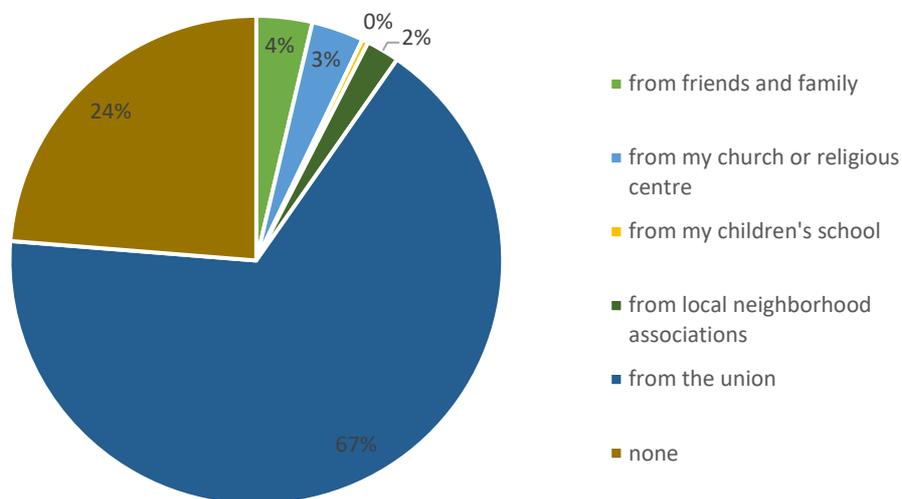


Figure 34: Sources of support other than the state by country, 2020/2021

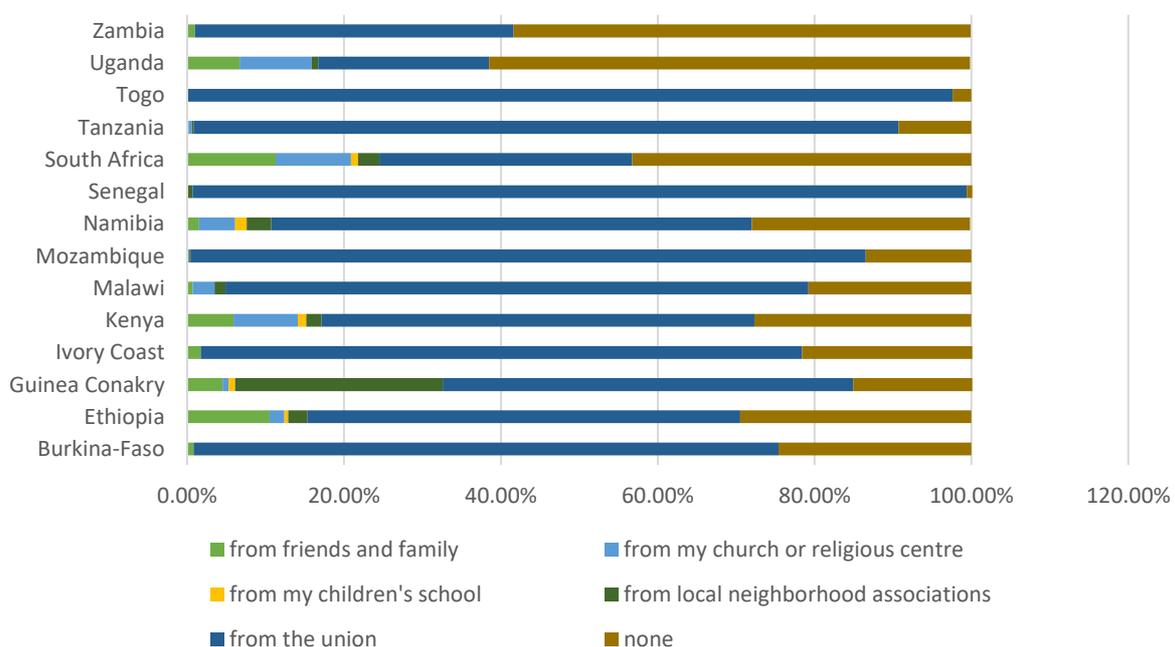


Figure 35: Domestic workers' unions distribute food and sanitation kits in Senegal, 2020/2021



Figure 36: Awareness-raising campaigns in Guinea, 2020/2021



Domestic workers also received minimal help from local neighborhood associations, the church, and friends and family. Assistance from religious institutions was especially common in South Africa, Uganda, and Kenya. In Guinea, a quarter of households received support from their neighbors. In Ethiopia, friends and family provided an important source of sustenance.

Figure 37: Strategies of support in the absence of the state provision of income-support, 2020/2021

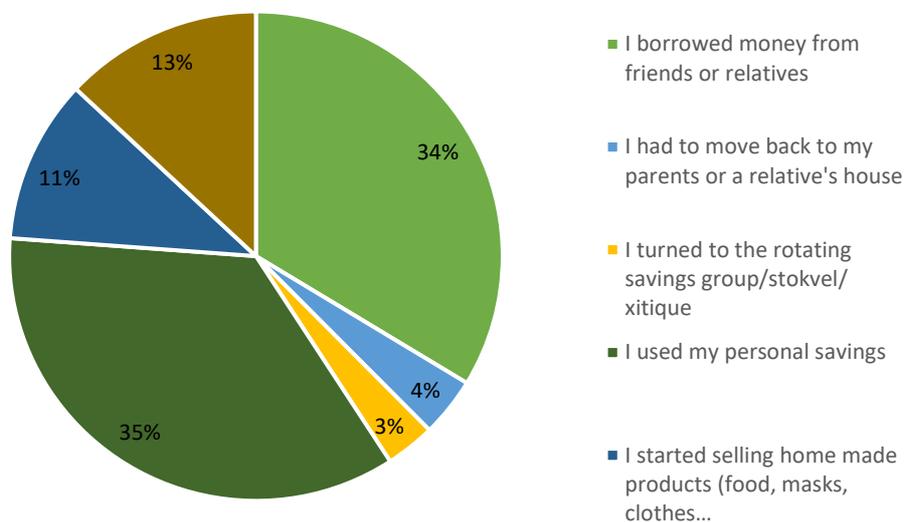
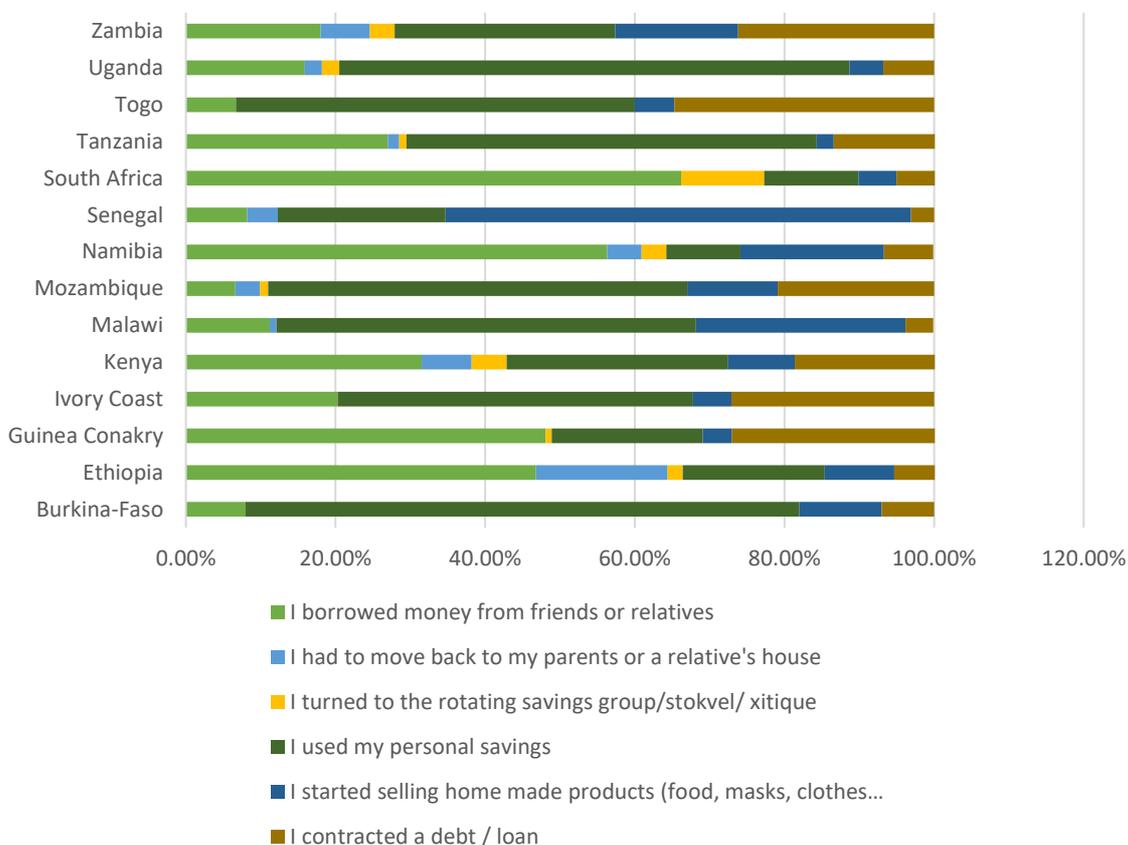


Figure 38: Strategies of support in the absence of the state provision of income-support, 2020/2021



However, as a domestic worker from South Africa reflected, help from friends and family was hard to come by in a context where everyone was suffering:

“During Covid 19, we were locked in, no visiting families, so it was impossible to borrow food from your family because of hunger. From this period of Covid-19, I learned that even your immediate family could not support you when you have a problem because everybody was just looking after themselves.”

For domestic workers who lost income during the lockdown period, personal savings were the primary form of sustenance. Personal savings were especially important in Burkina-Faso and Uganda. Once savings ran out, domestic workers borrowed money from friends, neighbors, relatives, and rotating savings associations. Debt was particularly important in Zambia, Guinea, and Ivory Coast. Others engaged in alternative income-generating activities such as petty trade and agricultural cultivation. However, the absence of income security measures meant that domestic workers had to choose between their health and economic security. The next section explores how domestic workers navigate ongoing occupational health and safety hazards.

Occupational health and safety

ILO Convention 189 stipulates that every domestic worker has the right to a safe and healthy working environment. Although three-quarters of domestic workers said that there were for their safe return to work, more than half declared that they felt either unsafe or very unsafe returning to work. Domestic workers in Burkina-Faso felt particularly unsafe, followed by workers in Mozambique, Senegal, and South Africa. After all, less than half of employers provided domestic workers with the necessary protective equipment. The lack of protective equipment was especially egregious in Togo, Kenya, Mozambique, and Tanzania. Furthermore, less than a quarter of employers provided safe transport for the journey between home and work. As one domestic worker reflects in Namibia, the lockdown period proved exceptionally challenging:

“I faced many challenges such as traveling long distances on foot. I was in danger of being killed and raped by walking long distance on foot.”

Figure 39: **Protocols in place for the safe return to work domestic workers, 2020/2021**

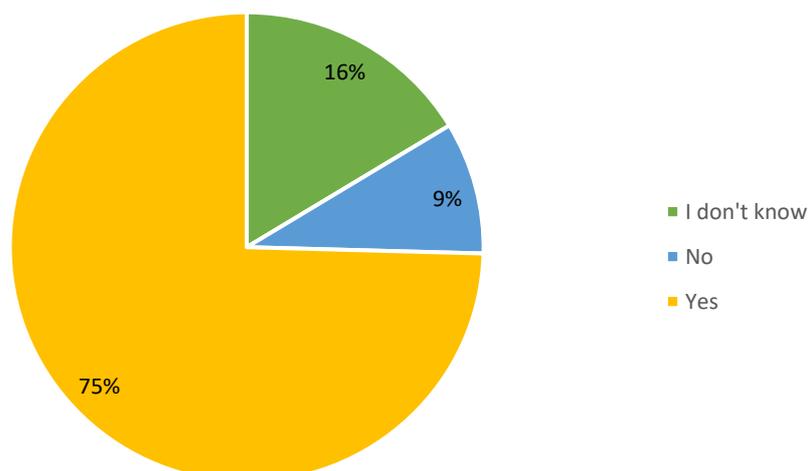


Figure 40: Protocols in place for the safe return to work domestic workers by country, 2020/2021

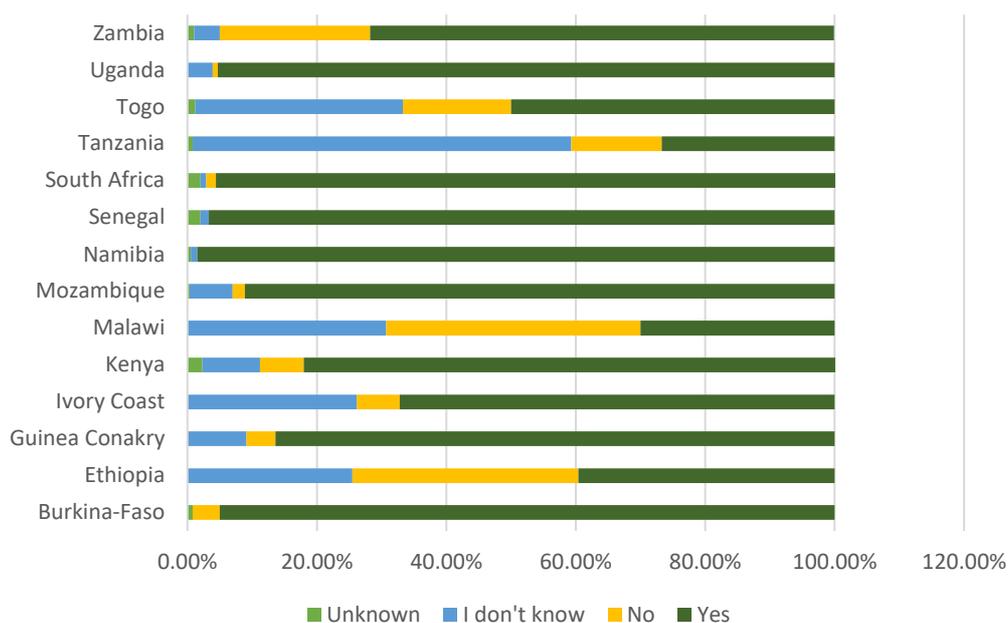


Figure 41: How safe did domestic workers feel returning to work, 2020/2021

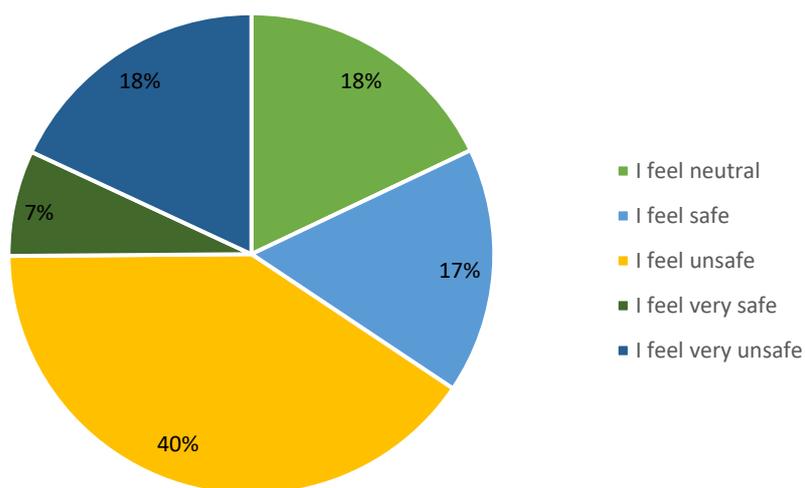


Figure 42: How safe did domestic workers feel returning to work by country, 2020/2021

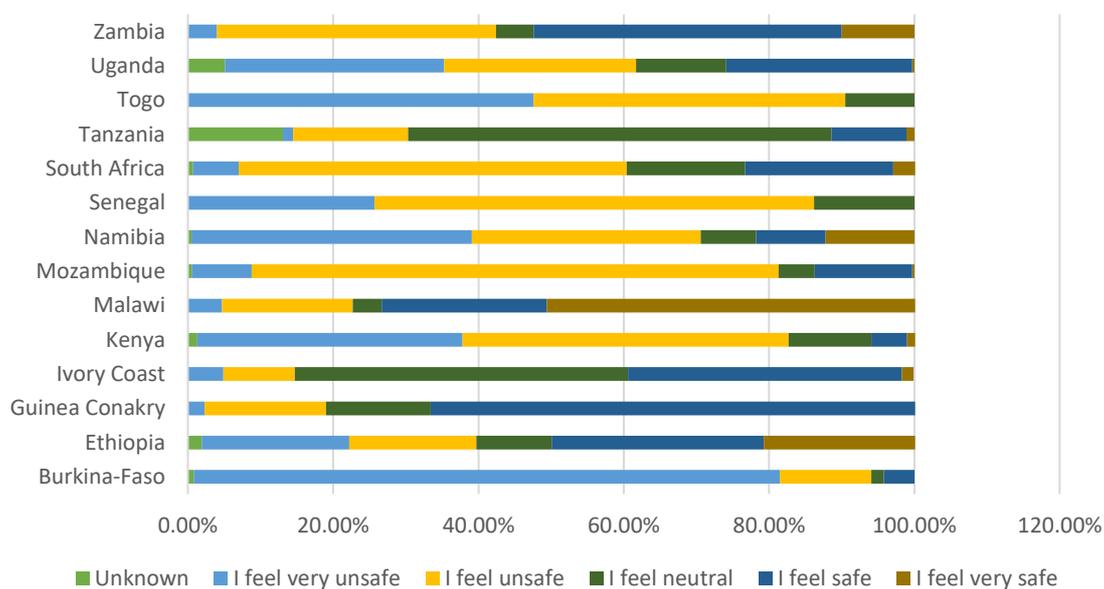


Figure 43: Employer provision of necessary protective equipment, 2020/2021

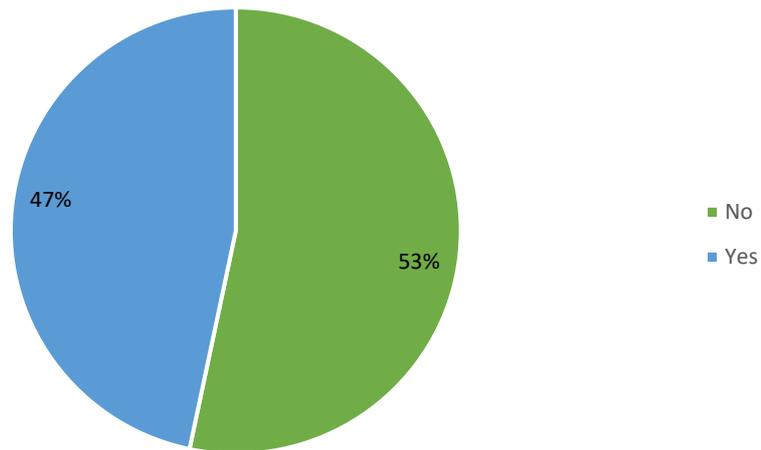


Figure 44: Employer provision of necessary protective equipment, 2020/2021

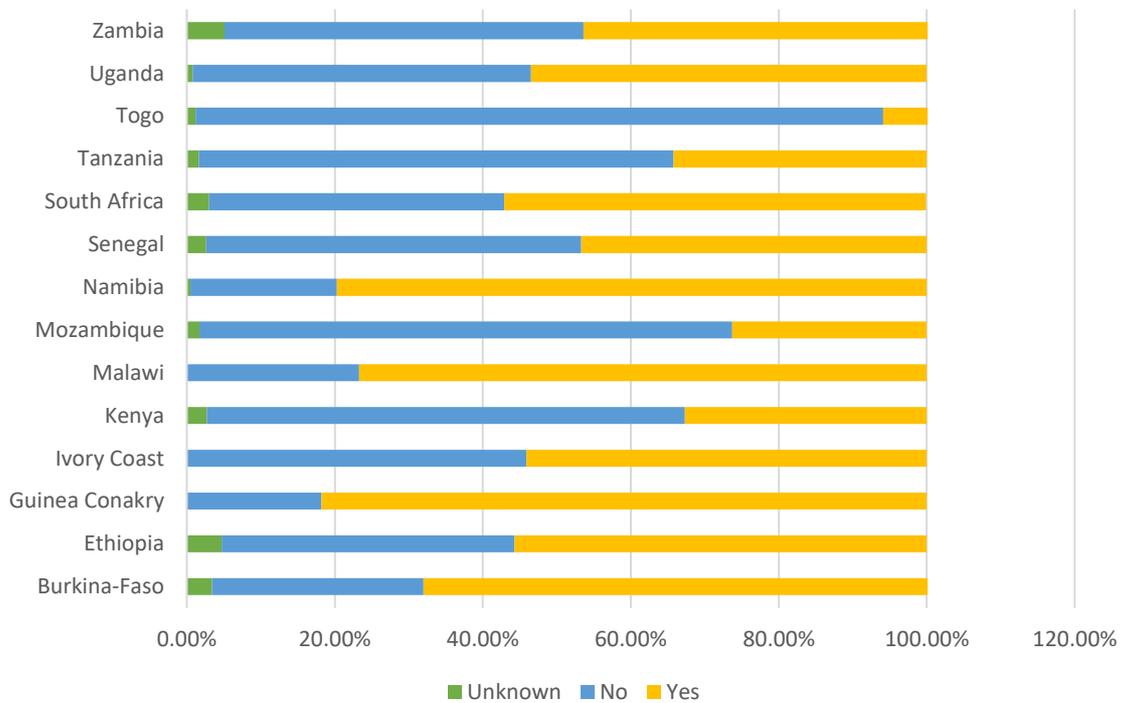
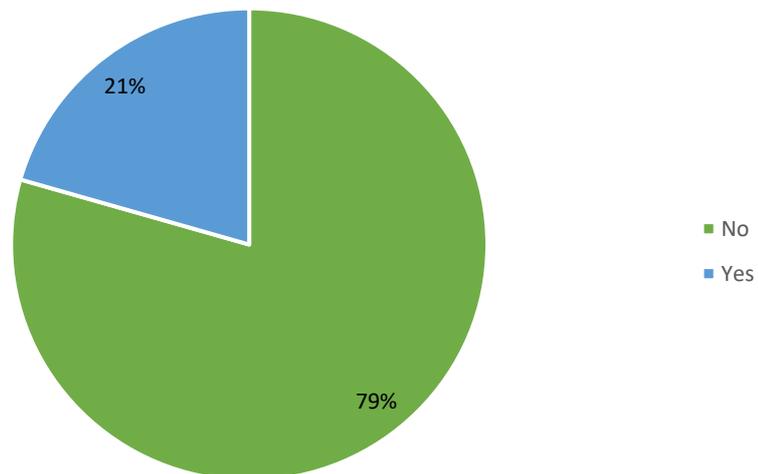


Figure 45: Employer provision of safe transport, 2020/2021



One percent of domestic workers surveyed tested positive for Covid-19, and a further 3 percent experienced symptoms but were never tested. These figures are six times higher than the average incidence of infections in Africa over the same period, suggesting that domestic workers are disproportionately vulnerable given the intimate nature of work. The emergence of new variants across the African continent has triggered a second and more powerful wave putting domestic workers at even greater risk – particularly when one takes into account preexisting conditions. 21 percent of domestic workers have high blood pressure, 9 percent respiratory problems and 2 percent are overweight. In addition, 53 percent of domestic workers do not have access to paid sick days, exacerbating the risk of succumbing to Covid-19.

Figure 46: Covid-19 Positive, 2020/2021

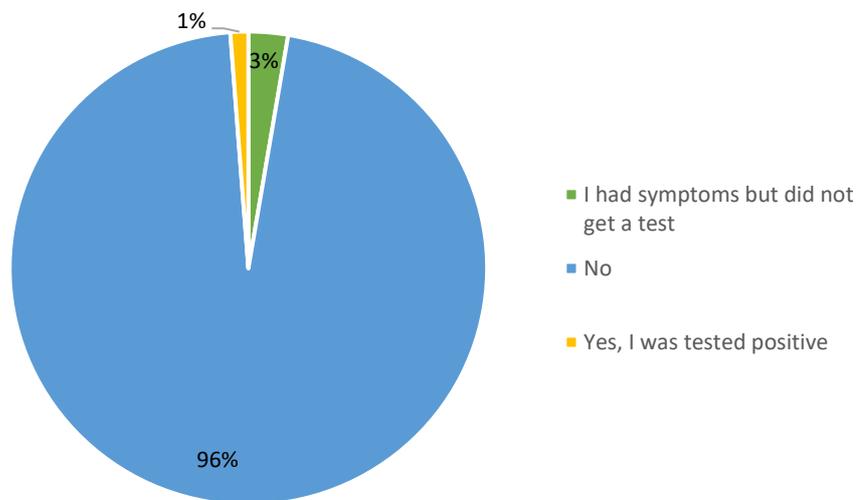


Figure 47: Preexisting conditions among domestic workers, 2020/2021

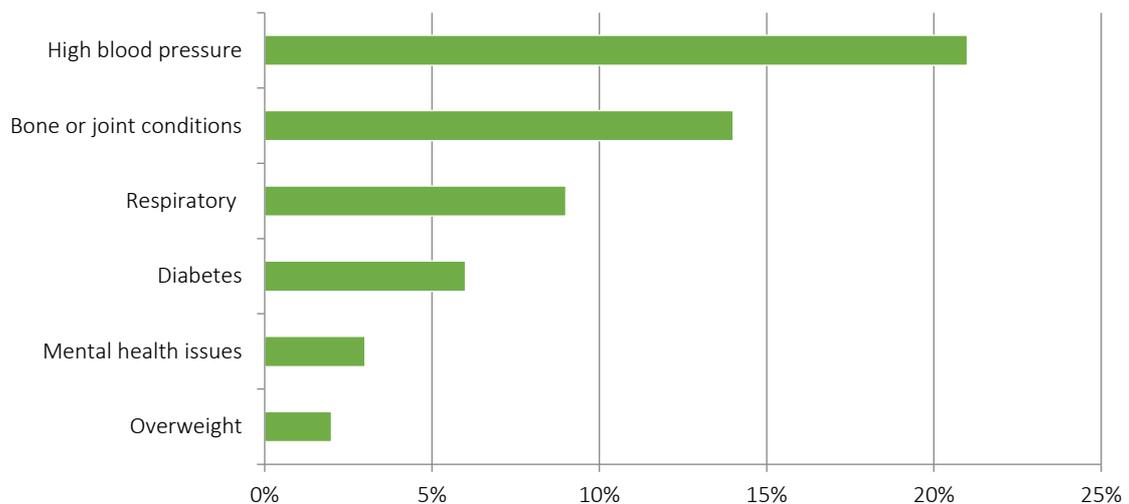
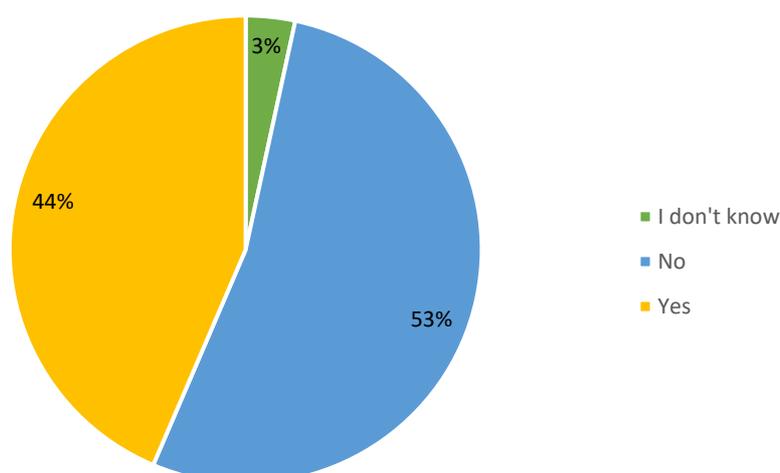


Figure 48: Access to paid sick days among domestic workers, 2020/2021



Ultimately, the Covid-19 pandemic increased domestic workers' workloads and the degree of stress in the workplace. More than half of domestic workers declared that their workload intensified as employers stayed home from work and children from school. Meanwhile, two-thirds of those surveyed stated that they experienced growing levels of anxiety. Anxiety was compounded by the broader socioeconomic situation. Three-quarters of domestic workers stated that food prices increased, and even those who retained their work were increasingly unable to make ends meet. Lockdown measures also meant that it became harder to access public transport, even when domestic workers were classified as essential workers. Furthermore, routine access to healthcare and to medication became challenging, as healthcare systems shifted their attention almost exclusively to the pandemic. Many of the problems highlighted in this report predate the Covid-19 pandemic but have been exacerbated by it. Given the slow speed with which the Covid-19 vaccine has been rolled out across the African continent – in what has been dubbed vaccine apartheid – it is likely that African domestic workers will face further waves of infection. The following section outlines a series of recommendations for the state, employers, and domestic workers' unions.

Conclusion and recommendations

Many of the challenges highlighted by domestic workers in this study – precarious working conditions, low wages, unreasonably long hours, the lack of access to social security benefits, and occupational health and safety risks – are not new. Indeed, Convention 189 attempted to improve conditions in the sector by stipulating that member states should adopt measures that guarantee domestic workers the right to a written contract; a minimum wage and reasonable deductions for payments in-kind; reasonable working time; daily, weekly and annual leave; occupational health and safety standards; dignified conditions for live-in workers; the right to social security benefits; paid repatriation in the case of migrant domestic workers; and the effective access to dispute resolution mechanisms and labor inspection, among other aspects (ILO 2011). The Covid-19 pandemic has intensified the nature of precarity, making the adoption of measures outlined in Conventions 189 and 190 even more urgent. This section outlines a series of recommendations for the state, employers and domestic workers' unions.

- Recommendations for the State, in articulation with domestic workers’ organizations:
 - Awareness-raising campaigns regarding occupational health and safety standards, workers’ rights and employer responsibilities.
 - Distribution of personal protective equipment, including gloves, masks and hand sanitizer, at key access points such as bus and taxi ranks.
 - The introduction of price controls and subsidies to ensure that basic products including food, utilities and transportation remain affordable.
 - The extension of emergency income-support measures to domestic workers through non-contributory social welfare.
 - The extension of contributory social insurance to domestic workers and the adoption of an enforcement framework which encourages employer compliance.
 - The introduction of a contributory unemployment benefit, where absent.
 - The ratification of Convention 189 and 190, the adoption of complementary national legislation and the implementation of an appropriate enforcement framework.
 - Improved access to medical assistance and safe public transportation.

- Recommendations for employers:
 - Greater communication with domestic workers regarding occupational health and safety measures, the health condition of household members, etc.
 - Provision of adequate personal protective equipment and safe transportation to and from work.
 - Provision of paid quarantine leave during lockdown periods or in the case of infection.
 - Compliance with international norms and national regulations related to domestic work, including written contracts, working time, wages, paid leave – e.g. daily rest, weekends, holidays, sick days and maternity leave– employer contributions to social insurance schemes, occupational health and safety standards, and severance pay.

- Recommendations for domestic workers’ unions:
 - Awareness-raising campaigns regarding occupational health and safety standards, workers’ rights, and employer responsibilities for domestic workers.
 - Recruitment drives to expand membership, retain members and improve the collection of dues.
 - Consolidation of unions’ emergency welfare funds through the improved collection of union dues and periodic grassroots fundraising campaigns, to distribute food and personal protective equipment on a more sustainable basis.
 - Expansion of the union training program to include “know your rights”, leadership development and income-generating workshops.
 - Campaign to pressure states to ratify Convention 189 and 190, adopt complementary legislative reforms including the effective expansion of social protection to domestic workers, and to implement an enforcement framework appropriate to the sector.

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Appendix: survey instrument

This is a survey conducted by the International Domestic Workers Federation (IDWF) intended to better understand the effects of the COVID-19 crisis in your lives. This information will enable us to provide better support systems, raise awareness, and give visibility to our collective fight to survive in these times of global crisis. The information provided here is strictly confidential and will only be reviewed by the technical team of IDWF, ensuring your privacy. This means that no personal information may be disclosed to third parties without your consent and authorisation. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact Vicky Kanyoka, the Regional Coordinator of Africa, by e-mail: vicky.kanyoka@idwfed.org or WhatsApp: +255 754 633 787.

I. Demographic / personal information

Name: _____ Email: _____

Country of residence:

- Burkina-Faso
- Ethiopia
- Guinea-Conakry
- Ivory Coast
- Kenya
- Malawi
- Mozambique
- Namibia
- Senegal
- South Africa
- Tanzania
- Togo
- Uganda
- Zambia

Place of residence

- Rural
- Urban
- Suburban / peri-urban

Are you a migrant person?

- Yes, international migrant
- Yes, national migrant
- No

What is your age?

- Under 18
- 18-29
- 30-39
- 40-49
- 50-59
- 60 +

What is your gender identity

- Woman
- Man
- Non-binary
- Transgender
- Other

What is your racial identity?

- Black/African
- Mixed Race/Colored
- Asian/Indian
- White/European
- Other

What is your marital status?

- Married or living with a partner
- Single
- Separated or divorced
- Widow
- Other

Do you have dependents?

- Children or stepchildren
- Nephews and nieces
- Brothers and sisters
- Parents
- Other
- No

How many people live in your household in addition to yourself?

- 0-1
- 2-4
- 5-7
- 8-9
- 10+

Are you the main breadwinner in your family?

- Yes
- No

Do you own or rent the property where you live?

- I own it
- I rent it
- It is owned by my partner or another member of the family
- Informal settlement
- I live at my employer's house

Do you suffer from any of the following health conditions?

- Diabetes
- High blood pressure
- Overweight
- Bone or joint conditions
- Mental health issues
- Respiratory
- Cancer
- Other: _____

Are you currently undergoing any medical treatment or taking medication?

- Yes
- No

II. The Employment Relationship

What kind of work do you do?

- Caregiver for elderly persons or people with disabilities
- Nanny
- Cleaning personnel
- Cook
- Housekeeper
- A bit of everything
- Other

Is this your main employment and/or source of income?

- Yes
- No
- If you have another source of income, do you want to specify? _____

What is your working arrangement:

- Daily worker
- Part-time worker
- Full-time worker
- Paid by the hour

What type of employer do you have?

- One employer
- Multiple employers
- Work for an agency
- Work through an online platform
- Other

Do you have a written contract?

- Yes
- No
- I don't know

How many hours do you work a week?

- Less than 21 hours
- 21 to 40 hours
- 41 to 54 hours
- 55 hours or more

On average, how long is your daily commute?

- Less than 30 minutes
- 30 minutes to 1 hour
- 1 to 2 hours
- 2 to 4 hours
- More than 4 hours

Are you entitled to paid sick days?

- Yes
- No
- I don't know

Are you covered by social security?

- Yes
- No
- I don't know

If yes, who pays for it?

- I contribute myself
- My employer contributes
- Mixed system employer/employee

What is your monthly income?

- \$0-100
- \$100-200
- \$200-300
- \$300-500
- Over \$500

III. Covid-19 and the Lockdown

Currently, are there quarantine/social distancing measures in your country?

- Yes
- No
- I don't know

If quarantine/social distancing measures were lifted; for how long was the lockdown in place (number of days)? _____

Which of the following options best describes your employment situation during the crisis?

- I continued working normally
- I am in quarantine (in my house) but I am still receiving my salary
- I kept working but my hours and my wage were reduced for the duration of the crisis
- I was suspended or fired

If you were suspended, how long were you suspended for?

- Less than 1 month
- 1-2 months
- 3-4 months
- 5-6 months
- 7+ months

If you were in quarantine or out of work, have you started working again?

- Yes
- No

If you were fired, did you receive severance pay?

- No
- 1 month
- 2-3 months
- 4-6 months
- 7+ months

Were the other members of your household also impacted by the crisis?

- Yes, they lost their job
- Yes, they lost hours of work and salary
- No, they are still working

IV. Covid-19 and the workplace

Are there protocols or guidelines in place for a safe return to work issued by the government authorities?

- Yes
- No
- I don't know

How safe do you feel going to work considering the threat of contracting Covid-19?

- I feel very unsafe
- I feel unsafe
- I feel neutral
- I feel safe
- I feel very safe

Does your employer provide you with the necessary protective equipment?

- Yes
- No

Has your employer taken any measure to guarantee your safety during your journey between home and work?

- Yes
- No

Did you experience any of the following situations at your workplace?

- I had to take care or work with someone who got Covid-19
- I was forced to stay at my employer's house during the lockdown
- I had to work more than usual

Did you contract Covid-19?

- Yes, I was tested positive
- I had symptoms but did not get a test
- No

If you contracted Covid-19, did you get paid time off?

- Yes
- No

V. Covid-19 and the Government

Were domestic workers listed as essential workers during the crisis?

- Yes
- No
- I don't know

Did the government introduce income support during the Covid-19 crisis?

- Yes
- No
- I don't know

If yes, did you apply?

- Yes
- No

Did you receive government income-support during the Covid-19 crisis?

- No
- Emergency financial aid
- Food basket or food vouchers
- Unemployment benefits
- Cancellation of water or electricity bills
- Support for rent

If you did not apply for government support, why not?

- Domestic workers were not included in the policy
- The application process was too complicated
- I did not have online access to fill the request
- I did not have the required documentation because I am an informal worker
- Other
- Other comments: _____ -

Did you receive other forms of support?

- No
- Church, mosque or religious institution
- Friends and family
- Children's school
- Local neighborhood associations
- The union

If you lost your income, did you take any of the following actions?

- Contracted debt/loan
- Borrowed money from friends or relatives
- Started selling home-made products
- Moved back to parents' house
- Rotating savings' group/stokvel/xitique
- Used personal savings

Have you been affected in other ways by the crisis?

- Difficulty accessing public transport
- Increase in the price of food
- Difficulty accessing healthcare and routine appointments
- Difficulty buying medicine
- Increased levels of stress and anxiety
- Increased caring responsibilities
- Other

VI. Covid-19 and unions

Are you a member of a union of domestic workers?

- Yes
- No

Are you aware of any actions taken by the union during the crisis in order to protect your health, labour and social rights?

- I know it is taking some action
- It is not doing anything
- I don't know if it is doing anything

If you are aware of the actions the union took during the crisis what are they?

- Financial support
- Food support
- Distribution of personal protective equipment
- Legal representation
- Other

Do you have any other comment? _____