



## GLOBAL ACTION PROGRAMME ON MIGRANT DOMESTIC WORKERS AND THEIR FAMILIES



International  
Labour  
Organization

# Migrant Domestic Workers Across the World: global and regional estimates

Based on the ILO report on “Global estimates on migrant workers”, 2015.

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## Summary

The ILO report on *Global Estimates on Migrant Workers, 2015* unveils the statistical importance of domestic work as a source of employment for millions of migrant workers worldwide and provides regional and global estimates of the share of domestic workers (DWs) among migrants and the share of migrants among domestic workers.<sup>1</sup>

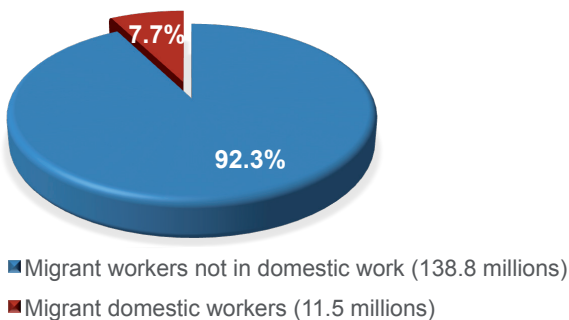
The report shows that **there are 11.5 million migrant domestic workers in the world**. This represents 17.2 per cent of a total estimate of 67.1 million domestic workers globally. This number indicates that the growing needs for personal and household services in many parts of the world are filled by migrant workers. Within this data lie significant regional differences (see Fig.3. page 2).

### Domestic work is a much higher source of employment for migrants than it is for non-migrant workers

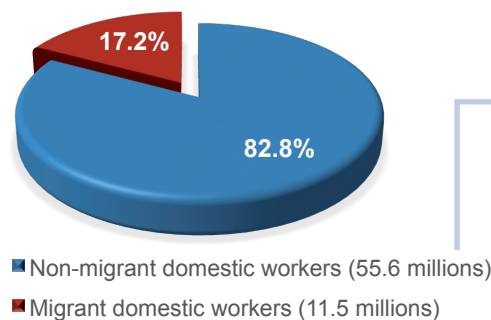
When analyzed as a share of migrant workers, migrant domestic workers (MDWs) represent 7.7 per cent of a global estimate of 150.3 million migrant workers.

Disaggregated by sex, this share is even higher, representing 12.7 per cent, or 8.45 million, of the 66.6 million female migrant workers worldwide.

**Figure 1. Migrant domestic workers as a share of all migrant workers**



**Figure 2. Migrant domestic workers as a share of all domestic workers**



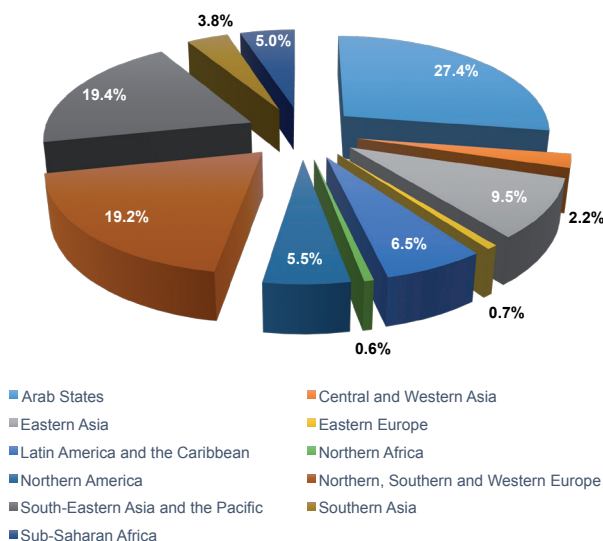
## MDWs are concentrated in high income countries

The largest number of migrant domestic workers (almost 80 per cent of the total) are found in high income countries, where they also represent the largest share of all domestic workers (almost 66 per cent).

Together, the Arab states, North America and northern, southern and Western Europe account for about 52 per cent of the 11.5 million domestic workers worldwide. This is not a surprise as these regions, which typically include high income countries, are major destination countries for migrant workers in general, accounting for more than 90 million of the 150 million migrant workers globally.

It is noteworthy that these regions, with some variations in the Arab States, are also experiencing rapid demographic aging of societies, with clear implications in terms of caring needs. In fact, the link between aging of societies, the (gendered) transformation of labour markers and family structures, and migration for the purpose of personal and household services, is well documented.

**Figure 3. Distribution of migrant domestic workers, by broad subregion**



Data show that in some regions of the world migrant domestic workers represent a significant share of all migrants. In East Asia, South-East Asia and the Pacific, the Arab States and Latin America and the Caribbean, migrant domestic workers account

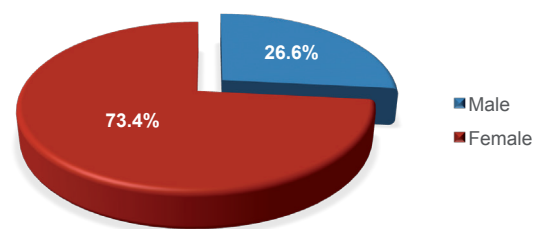
for approximately one-fifth of the total number of migrant workers, confirming the **tendency for a concentration of foreign labour in this often unprotected and informal sector of the economy.**

## Migrant domestic workers (MDWs) are predominantly women (with an important presence of migrant men in some parts of the world)

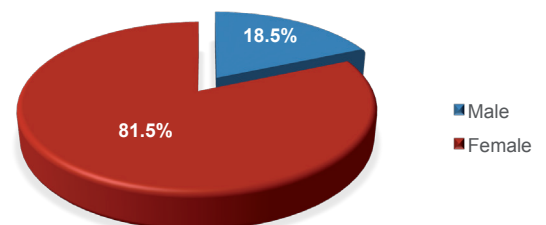
Domestic work in general is a highly female dominated sector with women representing more than 81 per cent of national domestic workers and 73 per cent of all migrant domestic workers.

This variation seems to indicate that domestic work represents an entry point into destination countries' labour markets for migrant men as well, particularly where migration policies foresee regular migration channels in the sector. ILO research in Italy<sup>2</sup> for example showed that when migration quotas allowed entry and residence permits for the purpose of domestic work, this became attractive to a significant number of migrant men. However, labour mobility outside the sector appears to be much quicker for men, reinforcing previously identified gender patterns in labour migration and labour market integration.

**Figure 4. Global distribution of migrant domestic workers, by sex**



**Figure 5. Global distribution of non-migrant domestic workers, by sex**



## About half of all male migrant domestic workers are in the Arab States

This overall dominance of women in the sector presents some interesting differences when data are disaggregated by broad sub-region. For example in the Arab States the proportion of male migrants who are in domestic work is significantly higher than in other regions; approximately one in ten is a domestic worker. Only Southern Asia and sub-Saharan Africa have a similarly significant proportion of male migrant domestic workers with values that exceed 5 per cent of the total.

### The Arab States account for more than 50 per cent of all male migrant domestic workers globally.

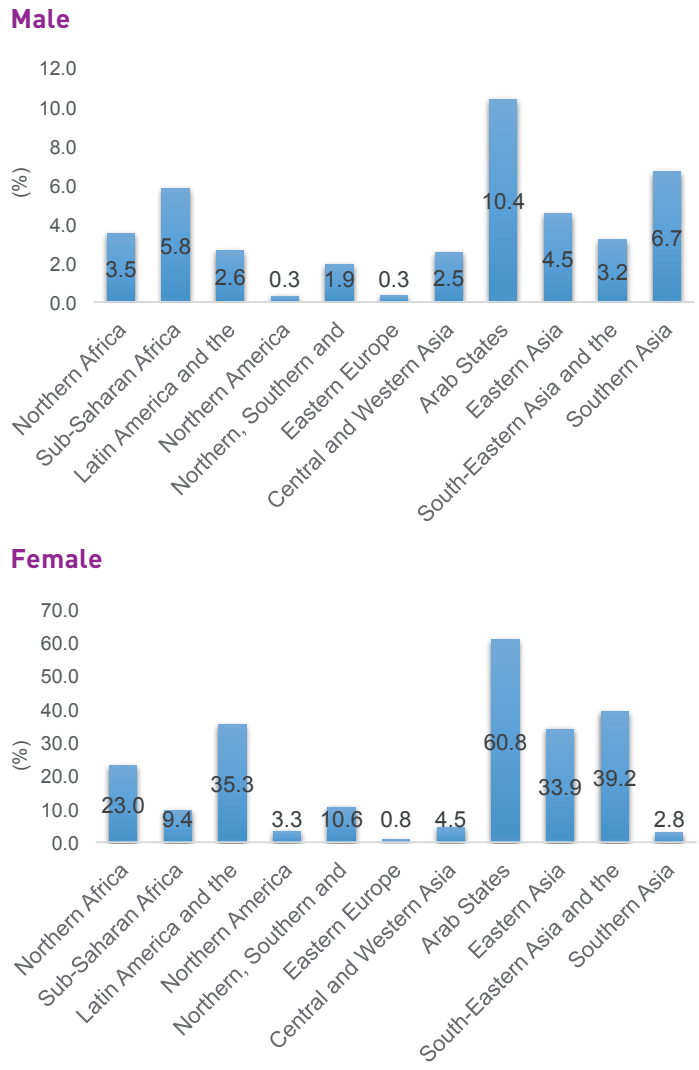
There are a number of socio-economic factors that explain these regional differences. It is also important to understand that the definition of domestic work includes a wide range of professional profiles typically dominated by men, such as gardener, driver and security guard.

Studies show that unlike many other regions of the world, the high demand for domestic workers in the Arab States is only partially linked to growing care needs due to demographic factors (such as aging of societies) and increased labour market participation of national women. In the Arab States the demand is driven by the increasing wealth and living standards of the national population and to socio-cultural traditions. It is not uncommon for single households to hire several domestic employees to undertake different types of tasks (cleaning, cooking, driving, guarding and gardening).

This explains the very high concentration of migrant women (above 60 per cent) and a relatively high presence of migrant men, in the domestic work sector.

Male migrant domestic workers are heavily represented in Southern Asia as well where they claim a higher proportion overall than women (6.7 per cent of all migrant men are in domestic work versus 2.8 per cent of all migrant women).

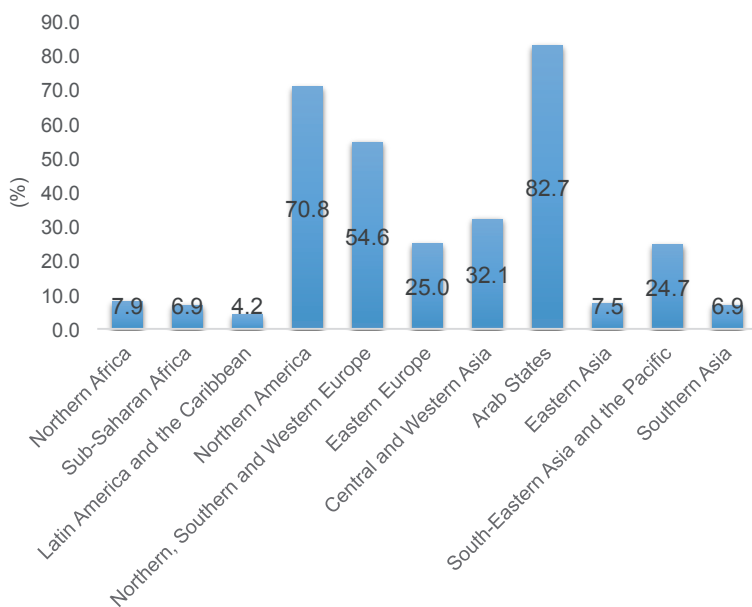
**Figures 6 and 7. Migrant domestic workers as a share of all migrant workers, by sex and broad subregion**



## In some regions, most domestic workers are migrants

When analysed as a share of all domestic workers, the prevalence of migrants is particularly striking in some parts of the world. Migrants represent the overwhelming majority of domestic workers not only in the Arab States (83 per cent), but also in North America and northern, southern and Western Europe (71 and 55 per cent of all domestic workers respectively). In these cases segregation of the labour market along nationality lines is a de facto reality.

**Figure 8. Migrant domestic workers as a share of all domestic workers, by broad subregion**

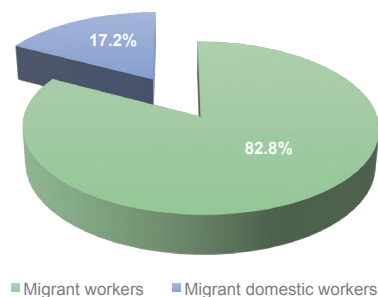


## Regional results in focus

### Domestic work as entry point to destination country labour markets in Latin America and the Caribbean

Domestic work is a significant source of employment in Latin America, accounting for almost 18 million individuals, or 6 per cent of all workers. Of these, 88 per cent are women. Migrants represent 17.2 per cent of all domestic workers in the region, which suggests that this is an important entry point to destination countries' labour markets, especially for women, who represent 92 per cent of all migrant domestic workers. Separate research suggests that an important share of migration for the purpose of domestic work takes place between neighbouring countries with different levels of income (for example, from Bolivia and Paraguay to Argentina, and from Nicaragua and El Salvador to Costa Rica).

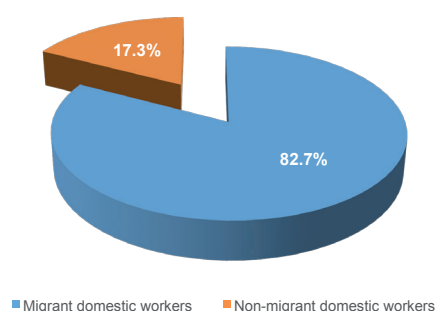
**Figure 9. Latin America - Migrant domestic workers as a share of all migrant workers**



## Labour Migration and domestic work are intimately linked in the Arab states

The **Arab States** is the smallest broad subregion, accounting for 1.5 per cent of the global labour force. Nevertheless, it hosts 17.6 million migrant workers, representing 35.6 per cent of all workers in the region and 1.7 per cent of the global migrant worker population. Domestic work is a significant sector of employment in the Arab states, constituting 7.7 per cent of the whole workforce, and the concentration of migrants in the sector is particularly high.

**Figure 10. Arab States - Migrant domestic workers as a share of all domestic workers**



**Domestic workers constitute 18 per cent of all migrant workers in the sub-region.** While migrants (mostly women) represent the vast majority (82 per cent) of domestic workers overall. This is the highest percentage amongst all the broad subregions, showing a direct link between female migration and domestic work in this region. One in ten men and 6 in 10 women are employed as migrant domestic workers. This labour market segregation is due to a variety of factors including the low value attributed to this type of work and the consequent exclusion of domestic work from labour law coverage in most countries in the region.

## In North America, northern southern and Western Europe domestic workers mostly have a migrant's face

In **North America** as in the Arab States the vast majority of domestic workers are migrants (70.8 per cent). However in comparison to the Arab States, the domestic work share of total employment is relatively low, accounting for only 0.5 per cent of the total workforce.

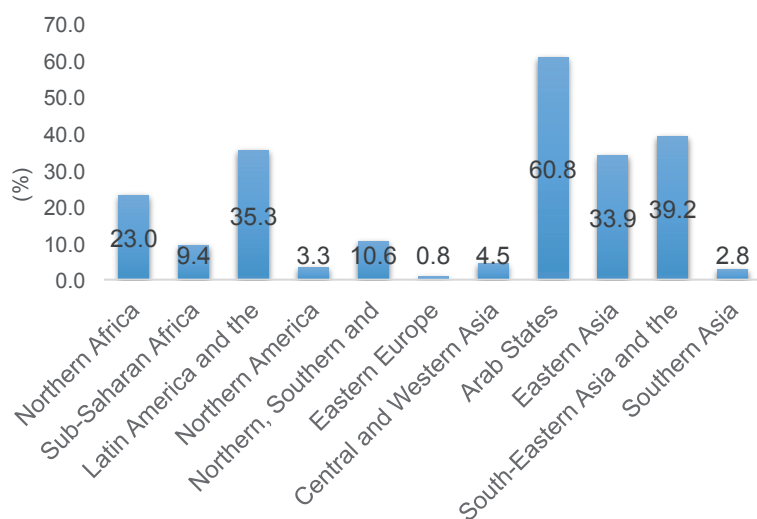
The factors behind the relatively small size of the sector may be attributable to different socio-economic factors, including the relatively high costs of hiring domestic workers as compared to the standard of living and the rather widespread, though shrinking availability, of public care services.

At the same time, the progressive entry of national women into the labour market, demographic and family structure changes, as well as the reduction of public welfare spending, are reported as factors contributing to the growing insertion of migrant women into an occupation that is becoming less attractive for nationals.

As in North America, **demand for domestic and care services has increased over the last three decades in northern, southern and Western Europe**, as has the presence of migrants in these services. This represents a significant sector of migrant employment especially for women. With more than 2 of the 4 million domestic workers in the region being migrant workers, the region has the highest percentage of migrants in the sector after the Arab States and North America.



**Figure 11. Northern, Southern and Western Europe - Migrant domestic workers as a proportion of all migrant workers**



## In South-East Asia and the Pacific and in southern Asia domestic workers are mostly nationals

With 9.1 million domestic workers, **South-East Asia and the Pacific** hosts a significant share (almost 14 per cent) of the global number of workers employed in this sector.

As in other parts of the world the sector is female-dominated (about 83 per cent of all workers in the sector).

Nevertheless, the domestic work sector employs less than 3 per cent of all the workers in the region. In **southern Asia**, only 1 per cent of the workforce is employed in domestic work, and among them, less than 7 per cent are migrants<sup>3</sup>. At the same time it is worth noting that this region host some of the major sending countries of domestic workers, mostly women, seeking employment beyond their national borders.

Available data show that the share of women labour migrants from countries in the southern Asia and South-East Asia and the Pacific regions, has increased in recent years and that this is often linked to an increased demand for domestic workers in the Middle East, Europe and the newly industrialized countries in Asia. In all the subregions mentioned, women migrants are significantly more likely to perform domestic work in comparison to men, however the variance is different from region to region.



## Domestic workers

Article 1 of the ILO **Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189)**, defines domestic work and domestic workers:

- (a) the term “domestic work” means work performed in or for a household or households;
- (b) the term “domestic worker” means any person engaged in domestic work within an employment relationship;
- (c) a person who performs domestic work only occasionally or sporadically and not on an occupational basis is not a domestic worker.

For the statistical purpose of these estimates, domestic workers are identified on the basis of their branch of economic activity according to the International Standard Industrial Classification of All Economic Activities, Revision 4, Division 97 (ISIC Rev4, Division 97).

## Migrant domestic workers

Migrant domestic workers are international migrants<sup>4</sup> who are engaged in their main job as domestic workers in households. They also include migrant domestic workers who are currently unemployed, as well as those who may be engaged in more than one household as an employee or own-account worker. They exclude, however, cross-border domestic workers who are not resident in the country in which they work.

Given that the activity of migrant domestic workers takes place inside private homes, it is more likely to be undocumented in many countries. This is reflected in an underestimation of the global and regional figures presented in the report.

## End Notes

1 ILO *Global Estimates on Migrant Workers, 2015 Report* - <http://www.ilo.org/global/topics/labour>- The reference year for all estimates is 2013.

2 See Castagnone, Salis and Premazzi: *Promoting Integration for Migrant Domestic workers in Italy*, ILO 2013.

3 Data elaborated on the basis of tables 2.8, p.16 and 2.9 p.18 of the ILO *Global Estimates on Migrant Workers, 2015 Report*.

4 The definition of “migrant worker” used in the present estimates comprises all international migrants who are currently employed or seeking employment in their country of current usual residence. The term “migrant worker” thus includes unemployed migrant workers as well as migrant workers whose status in employment is employer or own-account worker or contributing family worker. For more detailed descriptions of definitions please refer to: *ILO global estimates on migrant workers. Results and methodology. Special focus on migrant*

## Project partners

The project is implemented by the ILO in collaboration with the following partners and associates:



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