



## 6 Months in Crisis: The Impact of COVID-19 on Domestic Workers

REPORT SUMMARY - October 2020

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The coronavirus pandemic has demonstrated how essential domestic workers are to our economy and society, yet they continue to be underrepresented in official economic data. This invisibility further marginalizes this essential workforce and reinforces their exclusion from relief.

In March of 2020, NDWA Labs began using a chatbot to survey more than 20,000 Spanish-speaking domestic workers every week to learn how the pandemic was affecting their lives and livelihoods. These weekly check-ins with domestic workers gave us a unique view into how the rapidly changing conditions of the COVID-19 crisis were affecting our country's most vulnerable essential workers.

**Spanish-speaking domestic workers who responded to our surveys experienced a rapid and sustained loss of jobs and income.** This resulted in housing and food insecurity, which were still prevalent in September. The overwhelming majority of our respondents are mothers, and most of them are the primary breadwinners in their household.

In this report we share findings from six months of research -- 25 weekly surveys -- covering everything from employment and income to parenting challenges and access to government benefits and relief. Domestic workers from at least 48 U.S states, D.C., and Puerto Rico responded to surveys. In addition to sharing insights from a unique dataset, the full report discusses our methodology and describes how we've adapted a popular chat technology into a rigorous research tool.

### Summary of Findings

#### Who we surveyed

- The majority of respondents work as house cleaners
- More than 3 in 4 workers said their income is the main income in their household
- Nearly 9 out of 10 respondents are mothers of young children, or of school-age children.
- Nearly two thirds of workers have worked as domestic workers for 5 years or more
- More than 8 out of 10 respondents rent their homes

## **The impact of the coronavirus pandemic on the employment and earnings of surveyed workers**

- By late March, more than 90% of workers lost jobs due to COVID-19
- The percentage of workers without any jobs is still four times the percentage before COVID-19
- Between two and three percent of respondents worked 31 to 40 hours per week during the pandemic, compared to 33% before COVID-19
- Both part-time and full-time workers saw their hours fall during the pandemic compared with before COVID-19
- Nearly three-quarters of workers did not receive any compensation when their jobs were canceled
- Nearly half of workers who lost work were not contacted by their employers at all after the cancellation
- Prior to the pandemic, 25% of workers earned between \$0-300 in their best week. During the pandemic that number has jumped to 78%.
- Workers are earning lower average hourly wages than before COVID-19

### **Access to Pandemic Relief**

- The vast majority of domestic workers did not apply for unemployment insurance, mostly because they did not believe they qualified
- Less than a third of workers received the CARES Act \$1200 stimulus check
- More than half of workers do not know if they have a food bank nearby
- More than a quarter of workers lack a device for their children's remote learning
- Half of workers do not have access to medical care

### **Housing/Food Insecurity**

- For six consecutive months, more than half of workers were unable to pay their rent or mortgage
- A growing share of workers are unsure about their ability to afford food in the next two weeks

## **Next Steps**

We hope this report helps bring to light the urgency of making domestic work jobs into good jobs. Domestic workers need economic security and safety at work. That means providing access to pandemic relief to this essential workforce and winning policies to ensure that domestic workers are paid higher wages, have access to benefits like paid sick days, paid family and medical leave, health insurance, and are offered a path to legalization and citizenship.

This report is also a demonstration that it is possible and urgently necessary to develop tools to bring more of our country's essential workers into our month-to-month, and week-to-week, understanding of the economy. Our experience has shown that the tools that can expand that knowledge most effectively are ones that not only adapt technology in creative ways, but that begin with listening and caring.