



**WHO CARES FOR THE
CAREGIVERS IN LATIN
AMERICA?
A CASE STUDY OF BRAZILIAN
DOMESTIC WORKERS**

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Jana Silverman, School of Labor & Employment Relations, Penn State University

THE PANDEMIC AND ENDEMIC CARE CRISES IN BRAZIL

- Measured both proportionately and in terms of gross numbers, more domestic workers are employed in Brazil than in any other country in the Americas. This is a result of the impact of 380 years of slavery & a profoundly exclusionary and late transition to industrial capitalism based on “free” labor, which created enormous social, economic and racial inequalities that continue to shape the labor market, the gendered (and class) division of labor, and cultural norms today.
- At the same time, Brazil is also impacted by the larger trends impacting care and care work around the globe – changes in family configurations, the end of the “demographic boom” in many high- and middle-income countries in the Americas, and increased labor migration, together with the persistence of significant gender inequalities in the spheres of both paid and unpaid labor
- These inequalities became even more exacerbated during the COVID-19 pandemic, as women caregivers were forced to assume additional roles during lockdown – as homeschool educators, full-time child care providers, and home health care aides for sick and at-risk family members, on top of their already-existing paid and unpaid workloads.
- For Brazilian domestic workers, layoffs during the pandemic, combined with the impacts of a severe economic and political crisis that predated the pandemic, have created very unfavorable labor market conditions that have negatively impacted on employment indicators, salaries, and the formalization of labor in the sector.

DOMESTIC WORK IN BRAZIL, BEFORE AND AFTER THE PANDEMIC

	2019	2021
Number of employed workers in the sector	6.2 million	5.7 million
Number of informal domestic workers (<i>sem carteira assinada</i>)	4.2 million (73%)	4 million (76%)
Number of domestic workers with social security coverage	2.1 million	1.8 million
Average monthly salary, domestic workers with a formal work contract	R\$ 1442 (US\$285)	R\$ 1338 (US\$ 264)
Average monthly salary, informal domestic workers	R\$ 860 (US\$170)	R\$ 802 (US\$ 152)
Average monthly salary, Black informal domestic workers	R\$ 815 (US\$ 161)	R\$ 743 (US\$147)
Average monthly salary, non-Black informal domestic workers	R\$ 955 (US\$ 188)	R\$ 920 (US\$ 182)

Source: DIEESE, 2022

DOMESTIC WORKER UNION STRATEGIES DURING THE PANDEMIC

- Domestic workers in Brazil are represented by the *Federacao Nacional das Trabalhadoras Domesticas* (FENATRAD), with 22 affiliated unions in 13 Brazilian states
- During the pandemic, FENATRAD mobilized supporters to collect and distribute over 7000 (just in 2020) food baskets and basic hygiene kits to its members as well as vulnerable non-members
- FENATRAD launched the “*Cuida de quem se cuida*” campaign to push for paid leave for domestic workers during lockdowns
- FENATRAD and its affiliate unions created new channels of communication with their membership (principally through WhatsApp and Instagram) to help them with legal and political issues, handling over 24,000 virtual queries in 2020
- FENATRAD leaders tried to raise the profile of the struggle of Brazilian domestic workers during the pandemic, through participating in Facebook lives, webinars, TV and print media interviews, etc
- FENATRAD prepared a report documenting the lack of compliance with ILO C189 by Brazilian employers and the government

OBSTACLES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR BRAZILIAN DOMESTIC WORKERS IN THE POST-PANDEMIC

- Generalized improvement in labor market indicators in 2022 - unemployment at 9.3%, compared to 13.2% in 2021, and an increase in the average level of wages (up 8.3% in the last trimester of 2022, as compared to the last trimester of 2021), but with persistent high levels of labor informality (38.9% for the final trimester of 2022).
- Brazilian domestic worker unions gained public visibility during the pandemic, and some have been able to use that experience to grow, quantitatively and qualitatively
- The return to power of Lula and the PT in the Federal government has already produced some concrete gains for Brazilian workers (3% real increase in the Federal minimum wage, negotiated wage increases for Federal civil servants) as well as the creation/re-creation of social dialogue spaces involving the labor movement and FENATRAD in particular (CONATRAE and CNDM)
- The Ministry of Social Development just launched an inter-ministerial process to construct a National Care Policy
- Gains for Brazilian care workers and domestic workers will not be automatic though, in a political and economic situation marked by a highly mobilized institutional and extra-institutional far-right, extreme economic and social inequalities, and difficulties in constructing an effective cross-class governing coalition in the Legislative branch to support the initiatives of the Executive branch



A LUTA DAS DOMESTICAS CONTINUA!

