



▶ Impact of the COVID-19 crisis on loss of jobs and hours among domestic workers

▶ **Date:** 15 / June /2020

▶ 55 million domestic workers significantly impacted by COVID-19

The ILO estimates that, in the early stages of the pandemic, on 15 March, 49.3 per cent of domestic workers were significantly impacted. This figure peaked at 73.7 per cent on 15 May, before reducing to 72.3 per cent on 4 June.

The pandemic has had a particularly dire impact on domestic workers around the world. At the beginning of June 2020, the number of COVID-19 infections had exceeded 7.3 million cases affecting most countries and territories.¹ As the number of cases and fear of contagion has spread, so too have confinement measures. To facilitate physical distancing, most countries adopted either full or partial lockdown measures to prevent transmission.

While domestic workers have suffered many kinds of impacts resulting from the pandemic, one of the main consequences of COVID-19 has been a reduction of working hours and, in some cases, a loss of jobs, resulting from fear and restricted mobility associated with confinement measures. This fact sheet provides a global and regional view of the proportion of domestic workers who either lost their job or saw their hours reduced during the lockdown period. The estimates look at the impact on both male and female domestic workers, as well as those in formal and informal employment.

It also looked at four different moments: March 15, April 15, May 15, and June 4.

These estimates capture specifically the impact in terms of loss of jobs or working hours and remuneration, taking into account their prior access to social security. In other words, for the purposes of these estimates, domestic workers who were in lockdown and who were not previously registered to social security, were considered to be at higher risk of losing their jobs and income, and therefore significantly impacted. Conversely, domestic workers who were in lockdown, but who were registered to social security, faced a lower risk of losing their jobs or income during the pandemic. As such, not all of them were considered to be significantly impacted. The estimates do not take into account whether or not they received income replacement or support as a part of emergency measures taken.

Percent of domestic workers significantly impacted by COVID-19:

▶ **49,3%**

15 March 2020

▶ **73,7%**

15 May 2020

▶ **72,3%**

4 June 2020

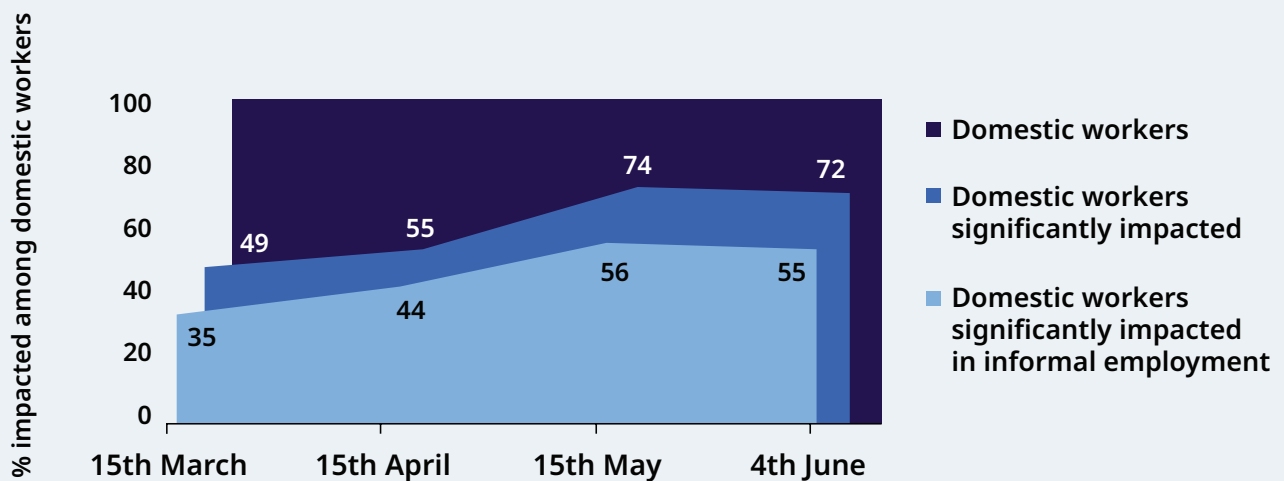
1 Data compiled by Johns Hopkins University: <https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/> (accessed on 11 June 2020)

The proportion of domestic workers who were significantly impacted varied across regions and time, depending on the timing and extent of lockdown measures. Thus, in Africa, only 34.6 per cent of domestic workers were significantly impacted on 15 March, but this number rose to 78.7 per cent by 15 April. In the Americas, where the number of new cases per day remains high, around 74 per cent of domestic workers were still significantly impacted by 4 June. In Asia and the Pacific, 79.4 per cent of domestic workers were significantly impacted by 15 May, but a much higher proportion (87.5

per cent) were impacted in the South Asia subregion. Finally, in Northern, Southern and Western Europe, the impact fluctuated from 36.6 per cent on 15 March, before peaking at 50.1 per cent on 15 April. These numbers are significantly lower than in other regions, in part because more domestic workers are in formal employment as measured by registration to social security. While registration to social security helps reduce the impact on domestic workers, as we will see, formal employment alone has not fully protected domestic workers from the impacts of lockdown measures.

► **Figure 1. Percentage of domestic workers significantly impacted by lockdown measures adopted to prevent the propagation of COVID-19 (% , 2020)**

World



Notes: ILO calculation based on national labour force or similar household surveys from 137 countries representing 91 per cent of global employment. Absolute numbers expressed in thousands extrapolated for 2020. ‘Significantly impacted’ refers to a reduction in the number of hours of work, reduction in earnings and job losses.

76 per cent of domestic workers who were significantly impacted were in informal employment. This means that the vast majority of domestic workers who lost their jobs or saw a reduction in their working hours were not registered to social security, and thus were not eligible for unemployment insurance. While a few countries extended income support to informal workers during the pandemic, these very rarely were accessible to domestic workers. The loss of income, lack of access to social security, and lack of income support has pushed many domestic workers and their families further into poverty, making it difficult even to put food on the table.

Those in formal employment also suffered job losses and reduction in hours worked. While formality is normally associated with better protection, it did not

necessarily soften the blow for domestic workers. Fear of COVID-19, paired with restrictions on mobility prevented domestic workers in both formal and informal employment from getting to work. In countries with high levels of lockdown, domestic workers were simply unable to go to work. In most cases, lack of information and low employer awareness of their responsibilities is likely to have led households not to cover the domestic workers’ salary if they were not going to work. While formal employment is normally associated with being registered to social security, unemployment coverage is not necessarily among the benefits to which domestic workers have a right. As a result, even formal domestic workers have suffered from the impact of COVID-19.

Live-in domestic workers may not have lost their jobs, but they are suffering important impacts nonetheless.

The data presented here show the impact of lockdown measures that prevented domestic workers from going to work. As a result, the research found no relevant results for countries or regions where domestic workers are predominantly living with their employers, such as in Arab States. Although live-in domestic workers have mostly continued to work, in confinement with their employers, reports from the field indicate they too have suffered important impacts. Many worked longer hours, due to school closures, and more demanding cleaning tasks. In other cases, employers have stopped paying their live-in domestic workers, due to their own financial circumstances, or a belief that domestic workers did

not need their salaries anyway, since they could not go out. In many countries, live-in domestic workers are predominantly migrants who rely on their pay to support their families in their countries of origin. Non-payment of wages and the closure of remittance services have therefore also left the families of migrant domestic workers at risk of poverty and hunger. Some domestic workers have also been found in the streets, after their employers dismissed them for fear of catching the virus, putting them at risk of trafficking. These practices are demonstrative of the discrimination faced by many domestic workers. Restrictions on international mobility prevented these domestic workers from returning home to their families.

► ANNEX 1: METHODOLOGY

These estimates are based on national labour force or similar household surveys from 137 countries representing 91 per cent of global employment. The results for the Arab States are not presented in Annex 2 below given the low level of representation, which equals to 50 per cent. Absolute numbers are expressed in thousands and extrapolated for 2020. ‘Significantly impacted’ refers to a reduction in the number of hours of work, reduction in earnings, and job losses.

Level of lockdown in countries

Based on the Oxford COVID-19 Government Response Tracker, the level of lockdown in a country is defined on the basis of 3 criteria that have a direct effect on the ability to get to the workplace and earn an income for domestic workers, namely: i) stay at home requirements, ii) closure of public transportation; and iii) restrictions on internal mobility. These criteria affect primarily domestic workers who do not live with their employers. As such, impacts on live-in domestic workers were not systematically taken into account.

- **Full lockdown:** These are countries that have taken at least “Stay at home requirements” and “Restrictions on internal movement” on a mandatory basis and “Close of public transport” either on a mandatory or voluntary basis.
- **Partial lockdown:** for countries not considered in full lockdown, at least one of the three measures is taken on a mandatory basis.
- **Weak lockdown:** not any of the three selected measures are taken on a mandatory basis. Regional differences within countries are not taken into account.

Four different points in time are considered to assess the impact of lockdown measures: 15th of March, 15th of April, 15th of May and 4th of June. Only the immediate effects of lockdown at a given point in time is assessed.

Main hypothesis

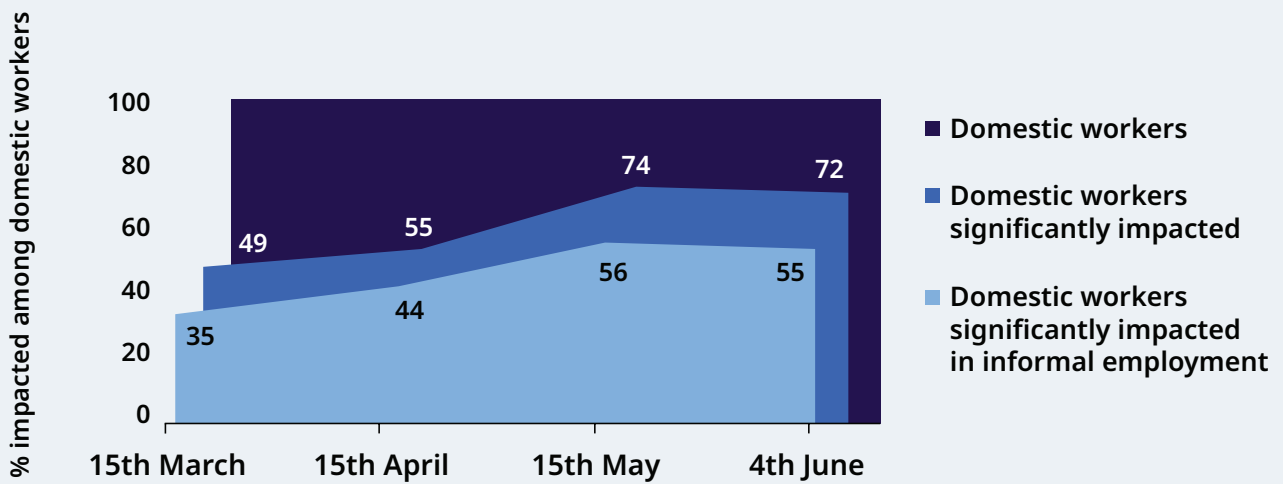
Domestic workers are considered as significantly impacted by lockdown measures given the informal or formal nature of their job and the level of lockdown. Domestic workers in informal employment, characterized by a lack of or insufficient social and employment protection are considered as more likely to be impacted in case of reduction of hours of work or job losses, both resulting in income losses without alternative income source.

- **In situations of full lockdown:** Most domestic workers in informal employment (90 percent) and 50 per cent of those in formal employment are considered as significantly impacted in the sense that they don’t have an effective access to benefits to compensate for the reduction in hours of work or job loss. Those in informal employment do not benefit by definition from any income replacement and a significant share of domestic workers in formal employment may be covered for pension but not for unemployment benefits.
- **In countries in partial lockdown:** Most domestic workers in informal employment (90 per cent) and 25 per cent of those in formal employment are considered as significantly impacted.
- **In countries in weak lockdown,** 33 per cent of domestic workers in informal employment are considered as significantly impacted and 10 per cent of domestic workers in formal employment.

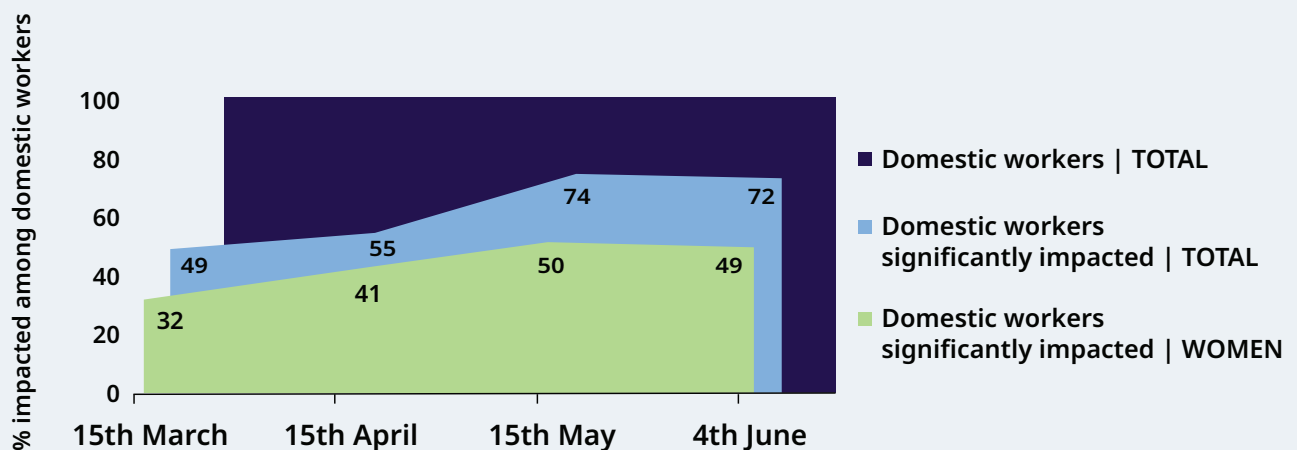
► ANNEX 2: DATA

Percentage of domestic workers significantly impacted: total, informal and women in the world and by region (% , 2020)

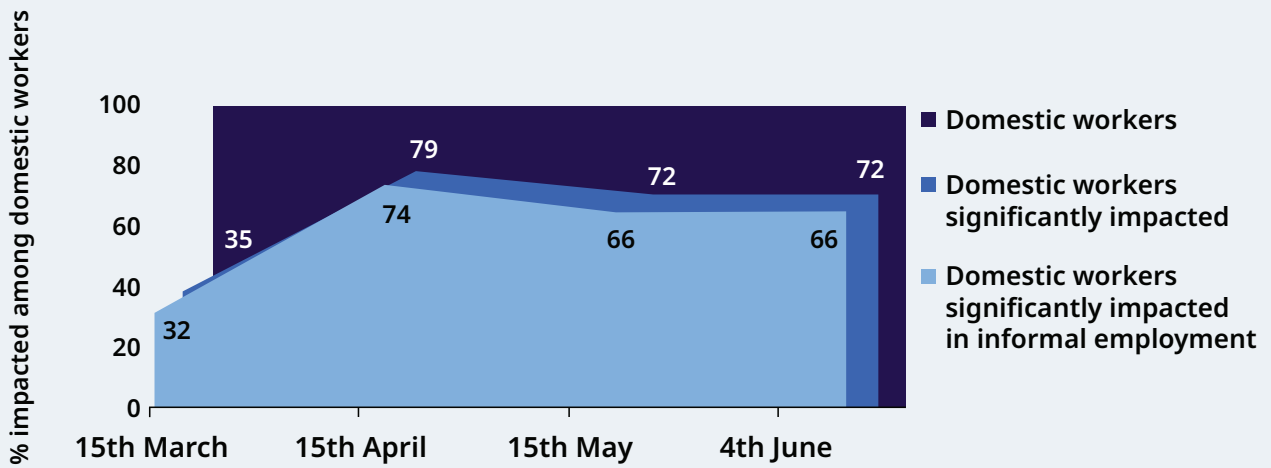
World



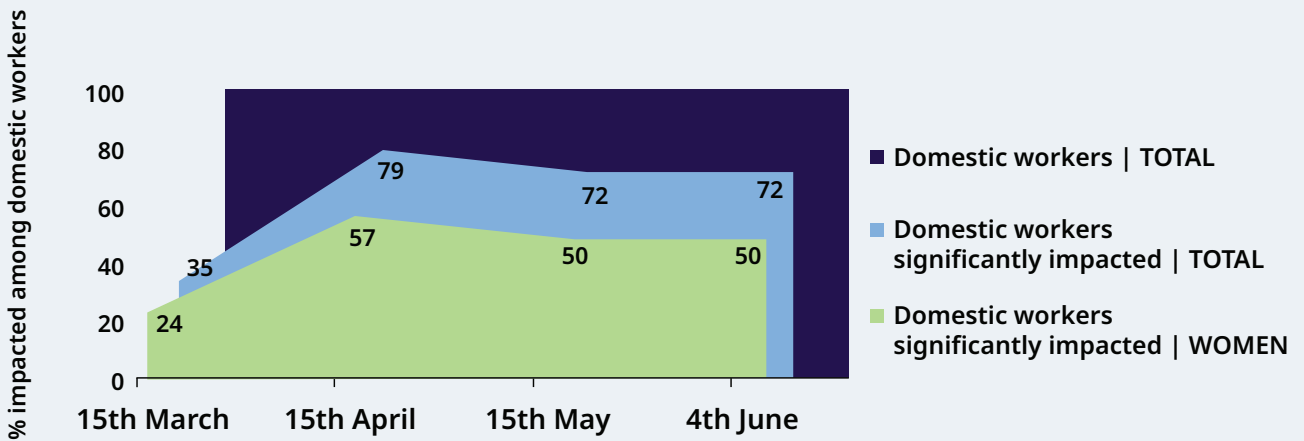
World: total and women



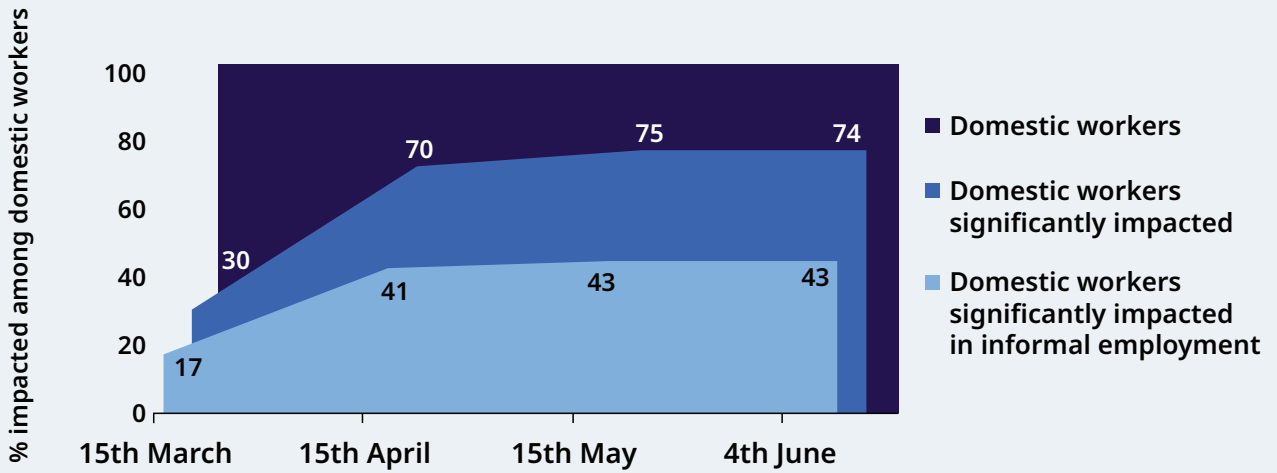
Africa



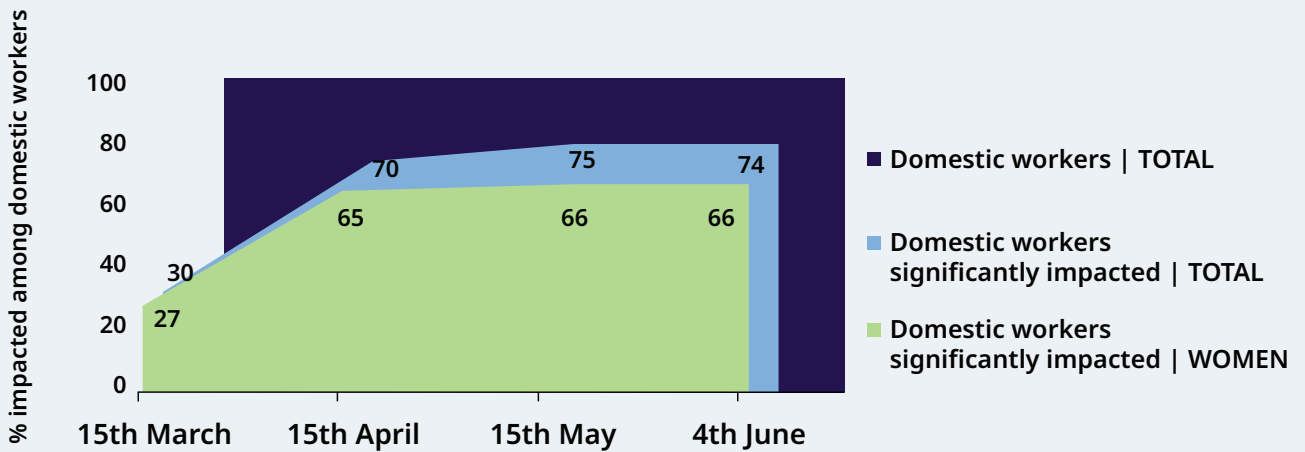
Africa: total and women



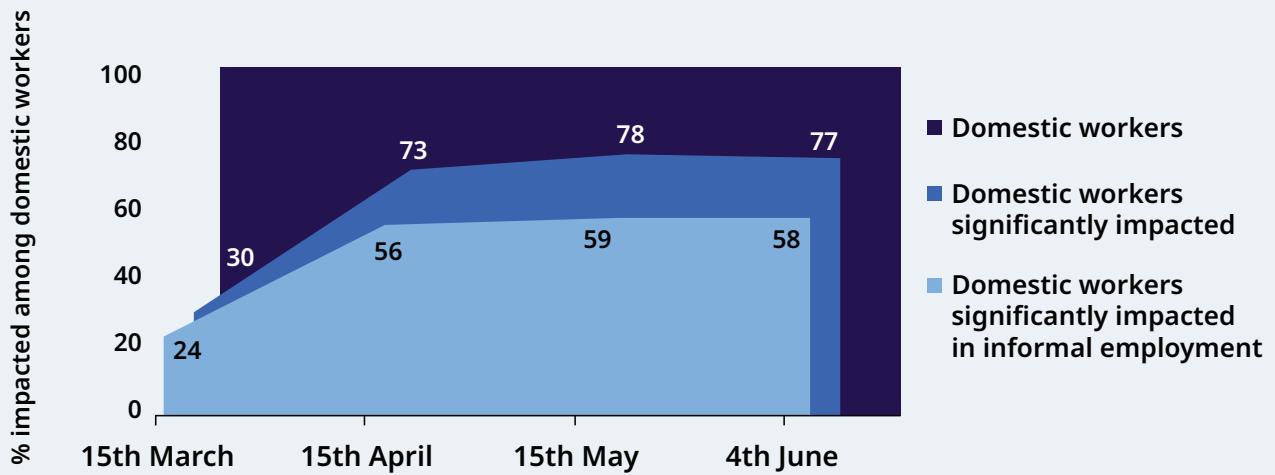
Americas



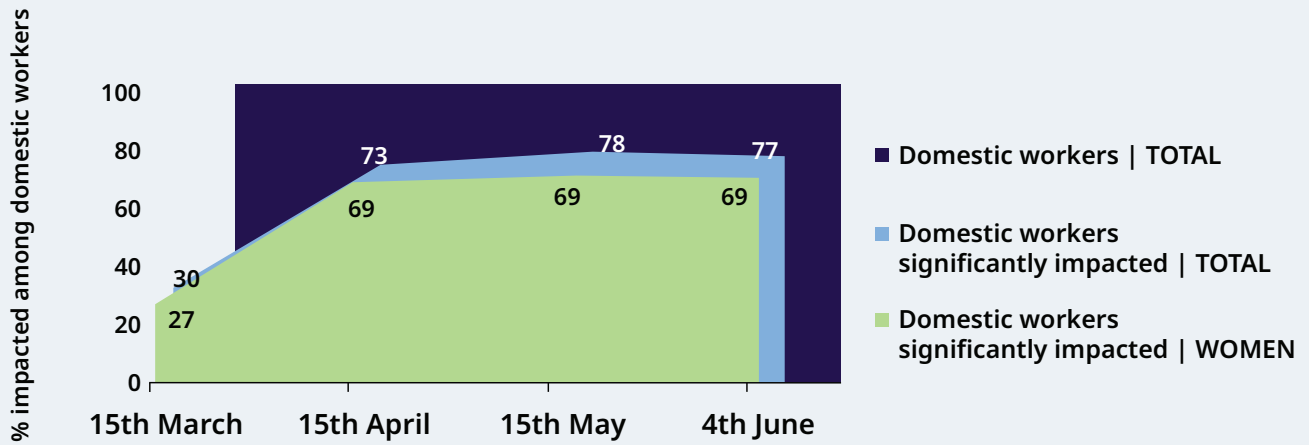
Americas: total and women



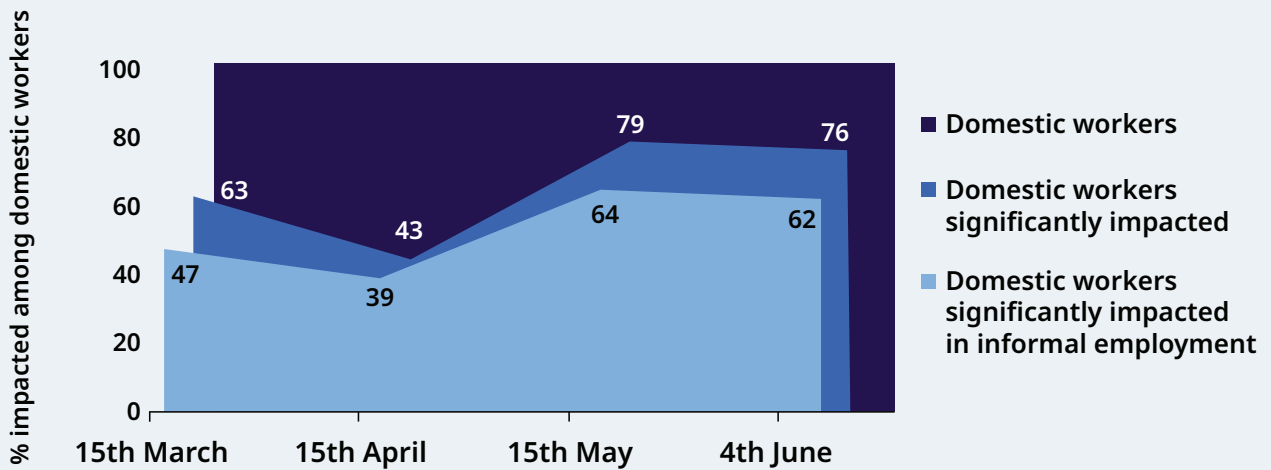
Latin America and the Caribbean



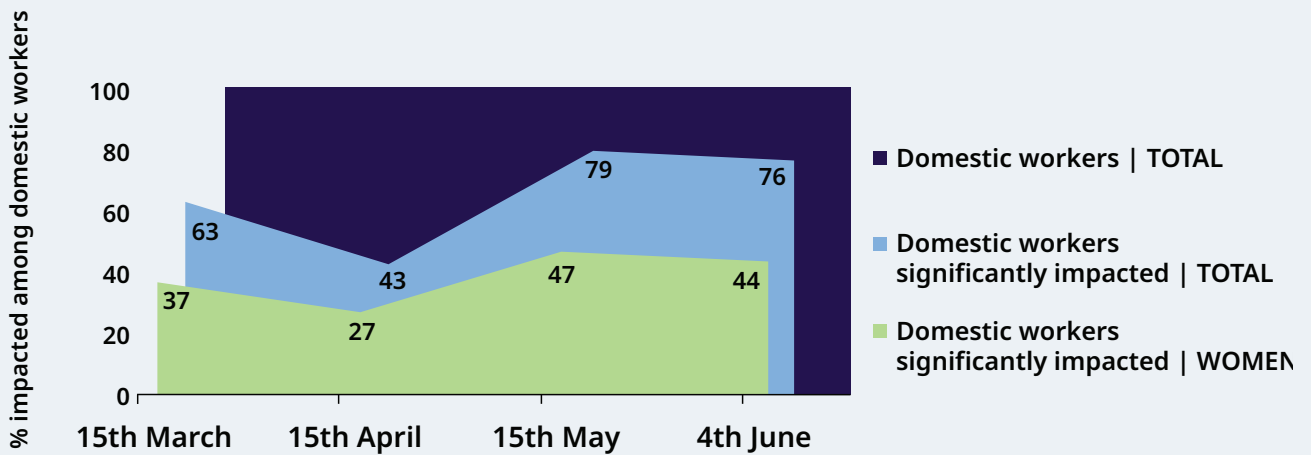
Latin America and the Caribbean: total and women



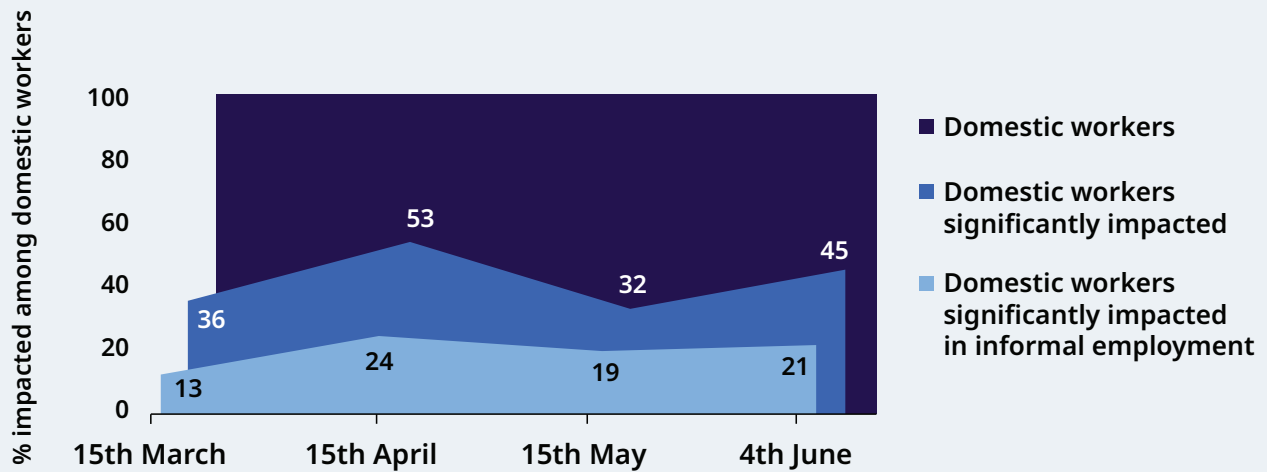
Asia and the Pacific



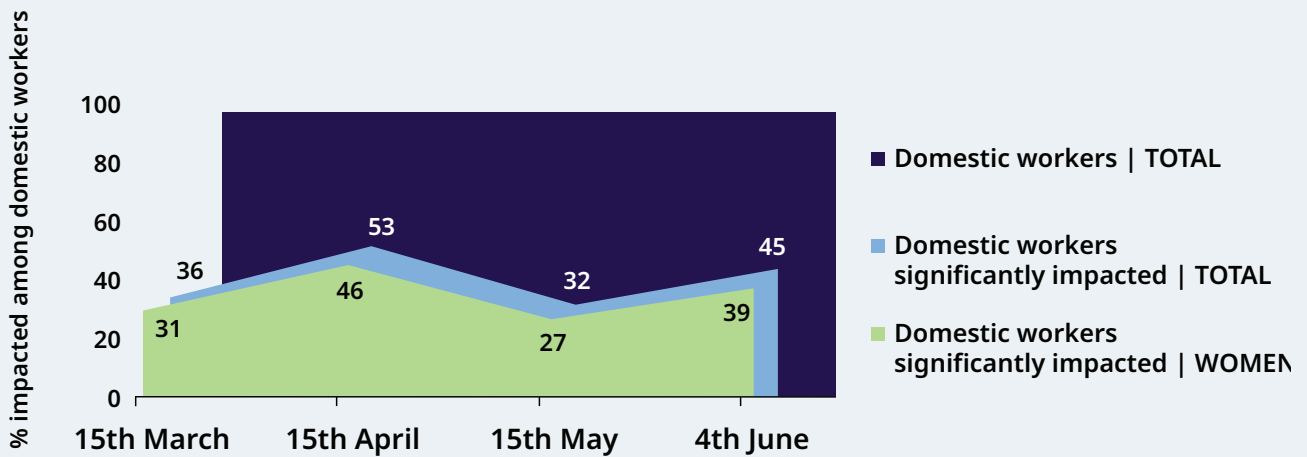
Asia and the Pacific: total and women



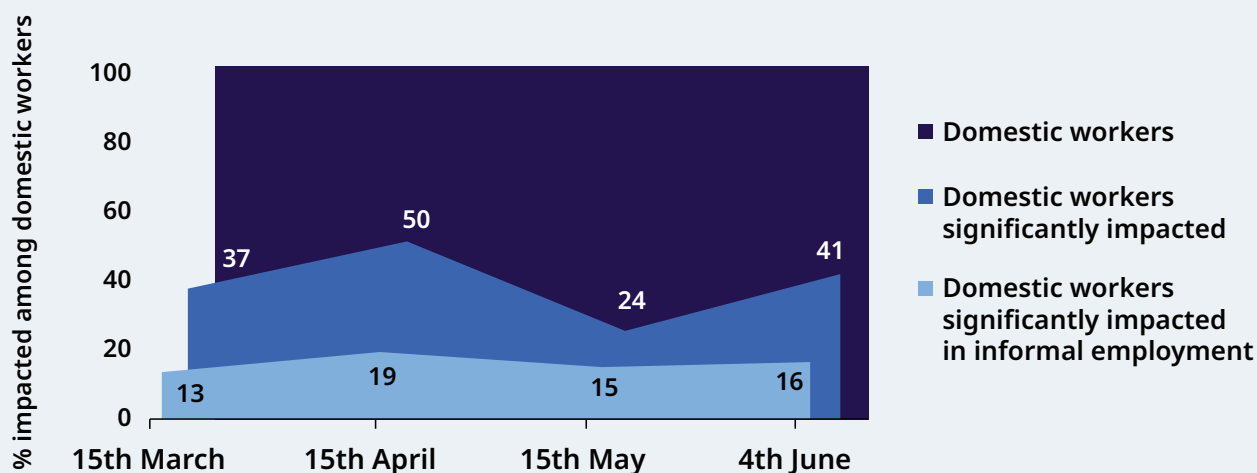
Europe and Central Asia



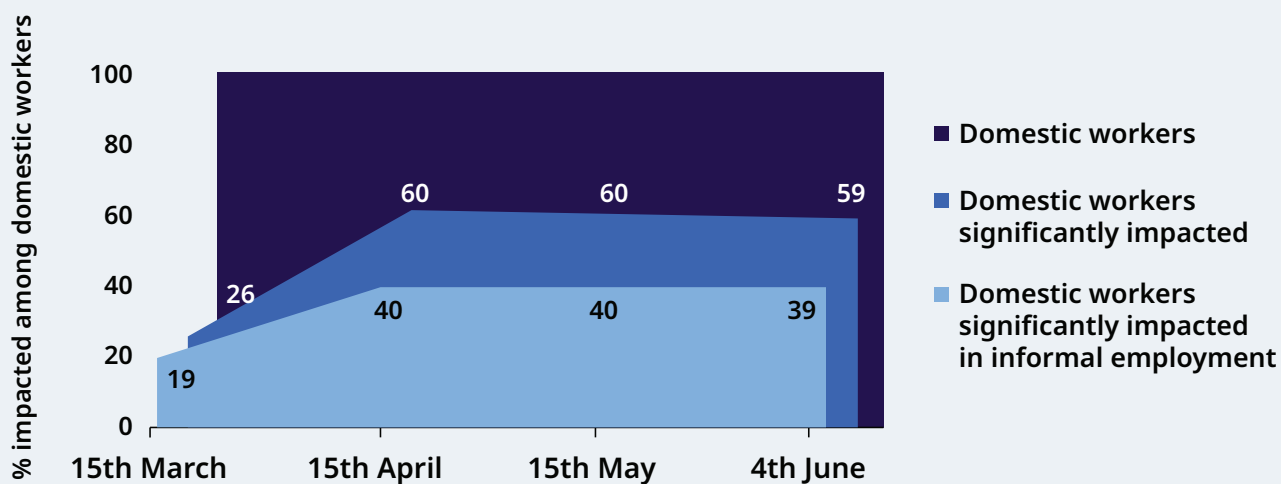
Europe and Central Asia: total and women



Northern, Southern and Western Europe



Central and Western Asia



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