

# COVID-19 Crisis and the Informal Economy: Informal Workers in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania



Ashura Abdallah is a 40 year old domestic worker with dependent children. Photo credit: Fanuel Halelwa.

## Key Findings

- 1 Before the pandemic hit Tanzania, domestic workers worked, on average, 6.1 days per week.
- 2 Due to the absence of an official or generalized lockdown, 84 per cent of domestic workers in Dar es Salaam were able to keep working during April.
- 3 Among those who lost their work due to the pandemic, only 11 per cent were paid by their employer for the time they could not work.
- 4 Even when all live-in domestic workers kept their jobs, 27 per cent reported working more hours than before.
- 5 12 per cent of domestic workers reported incidents of hunger in their households (affecting either children or adults), but this rate increases to 47 per cent among workers who stopped working in April.
- 6 To offset the impacts of the crisis, 54 per cent of all domestic workers resorted to strategies such as borrowing money, drawing down savings or seeking help from family, friends or neighbours.

## Background

COVID-19 Crisis and the Informal Economy is a WIEGO-led 12-city longitudinal study that assesses the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on specific groups of informal workers and their households. Using a survey questionnaire and in-depth interviews, Round 1 assessed the impact of the crisis in April 2020 (the period of peak restrictions in most cities) and in July 2020 (when the survey was conducted and restrictions had been eased in most cities)<sup>1</sup> in comparison to February 2021 (pre-COVID-19). Round 2 will assess continuing impacts versus signs of recovery in the first half of 2021, compared to the pre-COVID-19 period and Round 1. This report presents the summary findings of Round 1 of the study in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. Researchers in Dar es Salaam surveyed 283 domestic workers who are members of the Conservation, Hotels, Domestic, Social Services and Consultancy Workers Union (CHODAWU), the local partner organization of informal workers. They also interviewed two informal worker leaders and two key informants from membership-based organizations.

The research provides a demographic profile of this workforce, and documents their working conditions and the impacts of COVID-19. While Tanzania did not enforce a generalized or strict lockdown, research suggests that domestic workers' conditions—already precarious—deteriorated.



<sup>1</sup> The reference period for June/July when the survey was conducted was the “last seven days” before survey interviews.

## Informal economy in Dar es Salaam

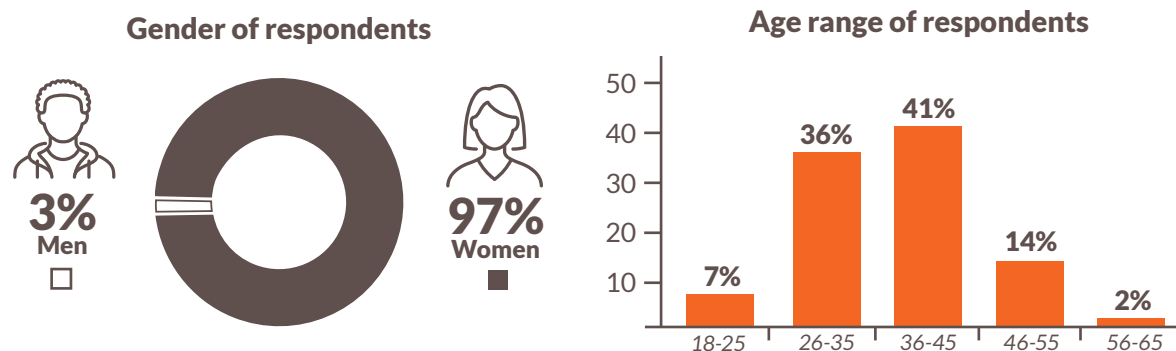
Just over three-quarters (76 per cent) of Tanzania’s non-agricultural workforce is informally employed. In Dar es Salaam, the rate of informality reaches 58 per cent (ILFS, 2014. ILO, 2014).<sup>2</sup>

Of the total working-age population, 5 per cent are employed as domestic workers, according to the ILO. Yet, this figure is likely underestimated and closer to 7 per cent due to, among other factors, the employment of children under the age of 15, the prevalence of informal arrangements, and the reluctance of domestic workers to self-identify as such given the prevalence of social stigmatization (ILO, 2016).

Tanzania has not yet ratified the ILO’s Convention C189, which offers specific protection to domestic workers and, while there are domestic labour regulations that set a minimum wage and other terms of employment, enforcement remains limited.

## Sample Size and Composition<sup>3</sup>

**Total Number of participants:** 283 domestic workers



\*One respondent did not report gender.

### Migration status:

10 per cent of the domestic workers surveyed come from another city in Tanzania.

### Category of employment:

27 per cent of domestic workers surveyed lived in their employer’s home.

### Average days of work:

Before the crisis, domestic workers worked, on average, 6.1 days per week. Although national legislation sets a maximum of 6 working days per week, 25 per cent of surveyed workers worked 7 days.

### Income:

Domestic workers’ salaries are regulated by national legislation and vary according to the employer’s occupation. In theory, monthly pay may range between TZS40,000 and TZS250,000, but our survey shows that 2 per cent of respondents were below this legal range and 1 per cent were above.

	Mean	Median
Average daily earnings of respondents in February (pre COVID-19)	TZS4,837	TZS4,792

- Surveys were conducted in July 2020.
- Semi-structured interviews were conducted in August and September 2020.

<sup>2</sup> Informal sector excludes all types of agricultural activities, which account for 66 per cent of the employed workforce in Tanzania.

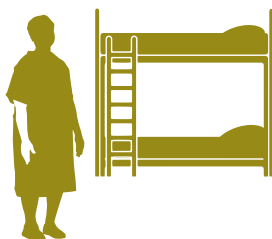
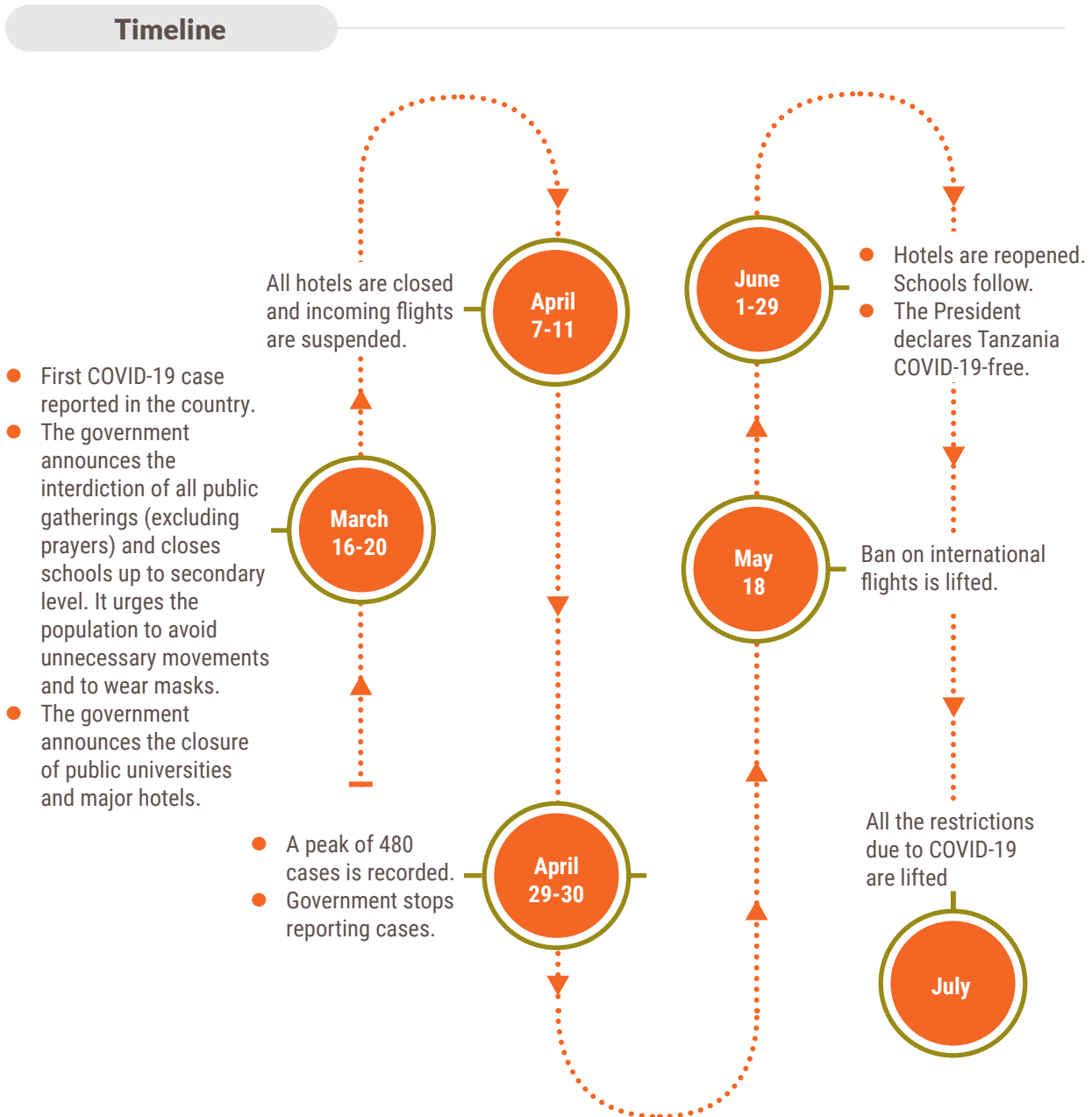
<sup>3</sup> The survey sample reflects CHODAWU’s membership rather than the domestic worker population in Tanzania. According to a diagnostic by the ILO in 2016, 75 per cent of people performing domestic tasks in Tanzania are women; 68 per cent work in districts outside their place of origin; and 78 per cent of female domestic workers are between 15 and 24 years old. Our survey shows an older sample, with a smaller representation of men and migrant workers (both internal and international).



*Digna Nicholaus is a 32 year old domestic worker with dependent parents and siblings. Photo credit: Fanuel Halelwa.*

## COVID-19 Timeline and Context

The COVID-19 pandemic reached Tanzania in mid-March. The government focused on keeping the economy running and avoided a generalized lockdown. It initially introduced certain restrictive measures, but by June the country was declared COVID-19-free and all restrictions were lifted.



*“At this point, some of them will probably lose their jobs and some of them have been forced to leave the city, and others face the difficulty of low salaries. This is something that you have to live with. Some of them were mentally disturbed because of so much tension and thinking. It will take time for them to recover.”*

**– Domestic Worker Leader**

## Impacts of and Responses to Crisis

The main impacts of the pandemic were diminished days of work, income and food; increased health and safety concerns; and increased household responsibilities for those domestic workers living with their employers.

### Work, Income and Food

Despite the government's efforts to keep the economy running, the closure of hotels at the end of March and through April and May, and the overall contraction of foreign-linked sectors (tourism, transportation, horticulture) had a negative multiplier effect in the economy, affecting related industries and, eventually, lowering domestic demand. In this chain of events, domestic workers experienced layoffs, salary delays and irregular working cycles. Although much less pervasive than in other cities, unemployment in Dar es Salaam led to reductions in salaries and food insecurity in some households.

### Impact on Work

Containment measures in Tanzania were significantly less strict than in the neighbouring region. Given the absence of a generalized lockdown, most domestic workers in Dar es Salaam were able to keep working throughout the first few months of the pandemic. In April, when the last peak of cases was reported, 84 per cent of domestic workers surveyed were still working.

Among those who stopped working (16 per cent or 45 domestic workers), the main reason was their employers suspending their work due to concerns for their own health or because they could not afford their salaries, according to interviews. By July, 87 per cent (or 244) of domestic workers were working.

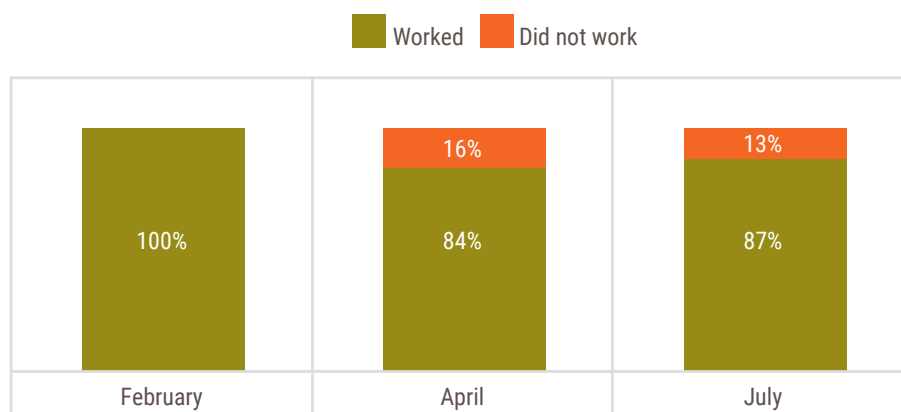
The impacts on work can also be seen in the reduction of working days. In February, prior to the crisis, domestic workers in Dar es Salaam worked, on average, 6.1 days per week.

While the pandemic did not affect the ability to work of the majority, many of the workers who stopped working in April did not fully resume work afterwards. By July, these workers were working, on average, one-third of the time that they were working prior to the crisis. Further, only 11 per cent were paid by their employer for the time they could not work.

Work conditions also deteriorated for those who kept working and vary between domestic workers who live with their employers and the live-outs. All live-ins (27 per cent of all domestic workers surveyed) were able to keep their jobs throughout this period, but their working conditions deteriorated (see the section on household stress).

Domestic live-outs were more prone to lose their jobs during this period, and several mentioned issues with transportation (increased costs and difficult access) as a main obstacle. Further, some live-outs had to move in with their employers and stay away from their families for prolonged periods.

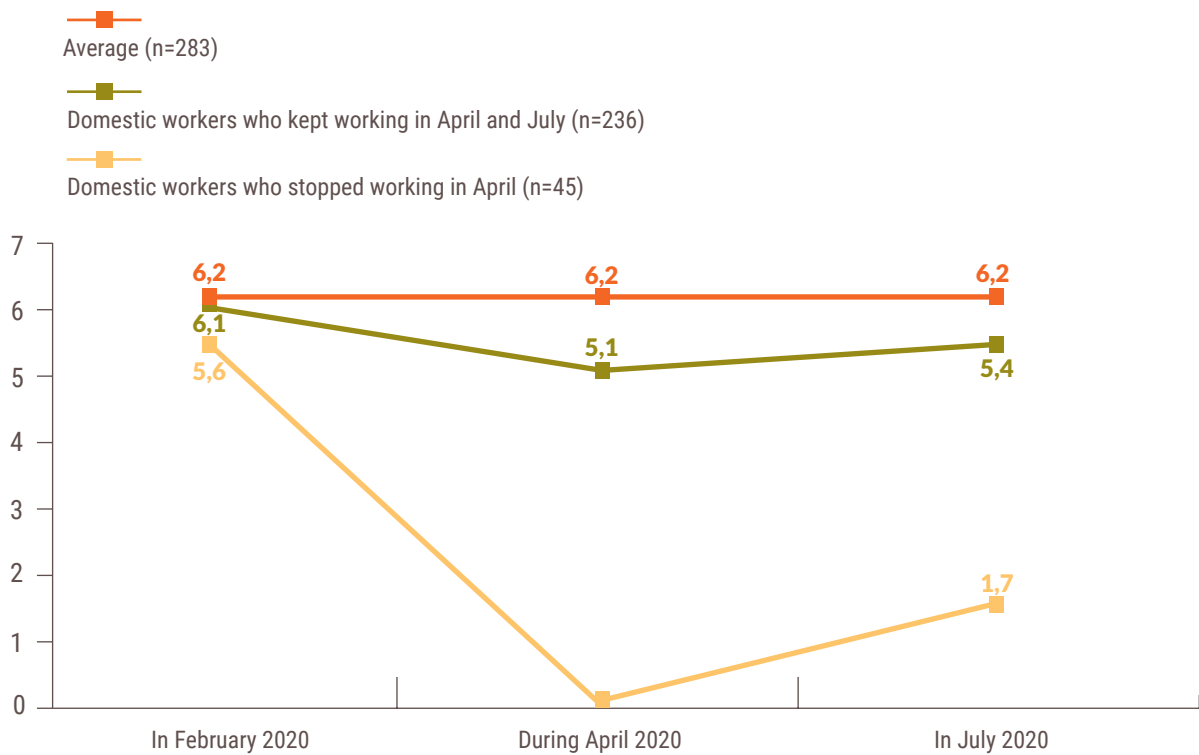
**% of respondents who continued to work**





Mwanahamisi Hassan is a 22 year old domestic worker with dependent parents. Photo credit: Fanuel Halelwa.

### Average days worked per week



*“For this period, boss tells you he has no money, so you have to wait to be paid your salary.”*

**– Woman Domestic Worker**

*“It was a long time away from the children because I had to move in with my employer and leave the family at home. All my goals at that moment stopped.”*

**– Woman Domestic Worker**

## Impact on earnings

The reduction in days worked clearly had an impact on earnings, especially among those who lost their capacity to work. In April, respondents had lost, on average, one-quarter (26 per cent) of their February daily earnings, and by July their earnings had not fully recovered to pre-pandemic levels.

This income shock is mostly explained by the 61 and 51 respondents who reported zero income in April and July, respectively.

### Average daily earnings



*“Only in this scenario does the boss find it difficult to pay you; he says the economy has collapsed”.*

**– Woman Domestic Worker**

*“Domestic workers are poor, but with COVID-19 it was an added taboo. She is poor, the salary is very small, and then they are terminated or getting half salary. It was difficult”.*

**–Vicky Kanyoka, International Domestic Workers Federation (IDWF) Africa Regional coordinator**

## Impact on food

In addition to reporting decreased earnings, 12 per cent of total households reported incidents of hunger either among adults or children during May.<sup>4</sup> According to interviews, these trends might be explained by the increase in food costs and by the fact that children were now staying home due to school closures. Incidence of hunger was higher among those who lost their jobs during April: 47 per cent of them (out of 43) reported incidents of hunger, compared to 5 per cent (out of 217) among those who kept working.<sup>5</sup>

**47%**

**Reported incidents of hunger** (respondents who STOPPED working in April)



**5%**

**Reported incidents of hunger** (respondents who KEPT working in April)



*“The single most important impact of COVID-19 was going to bed hungry.”*

**– Woman Domestic Worker**

<sup>4</sup> “Incidence of hunger” groups all respondents who reported that either adults (16 years and above) or children in the household had gone hungry irrespective of the frequency (always, often, sometimes, seldom).

<sup>5</sup> 23 respondents were excluded from this total because they either did not report their working status during April (2) or responded “Not applicable” to the question on hunger (21). The total number of respondents was 260.

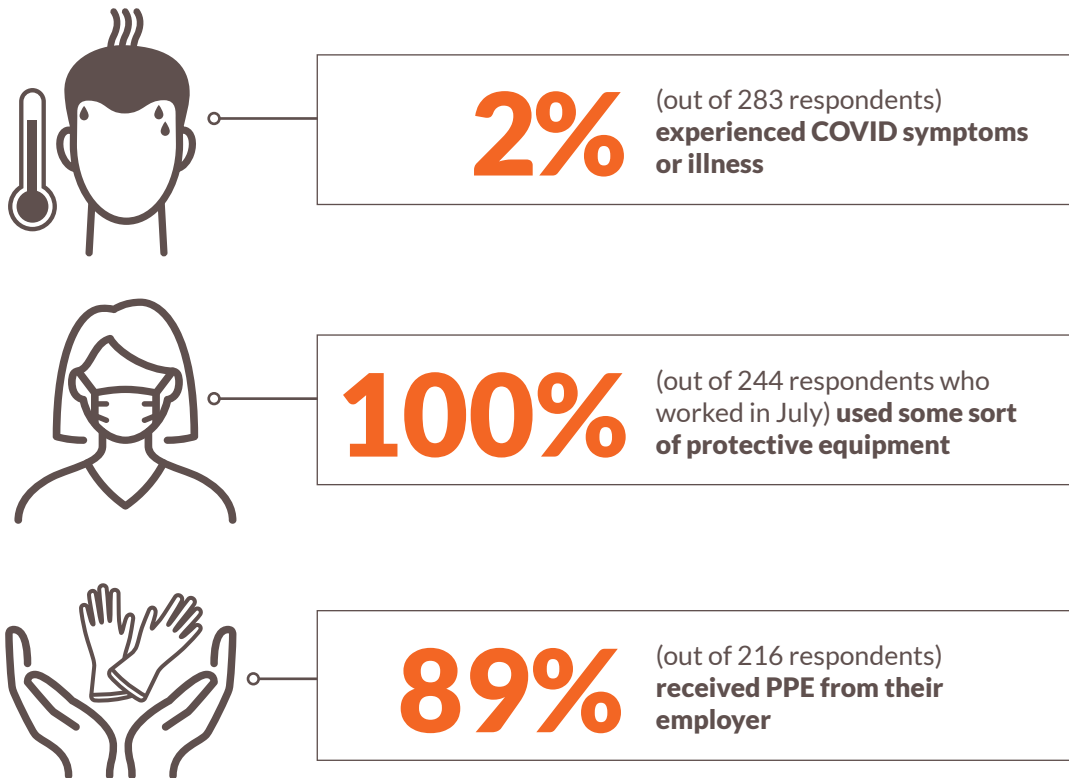


## Health and Safety Concerns

Although domestic workers, and informal workers in general, may access health insurance through one of the several voluntary pre-payment schemes (most notably, the Community Health Fund and Tiba Kwa Kadi), coverage remains very low. Among informal workers, less than 5 per cent currently have health insurance (Verbrugge et al, 2018).

Some respondents expressed fear of getting sick, and live-ins, in particular, expressed fear of dying away from their families and not getting a proper burial. The fear of falling ill is also evident in the use of protective equipment: all domestic workers who kept working in July used some sort of protective equipment, among which masks (100%), hand sanitizer (73%) and soap (74%) were the most common.

Among the six households that experienced COVID-19 symptoms or illness, three lost family members and four did not seek health-care providers. The main reasons were concerns about being infected or quarantined in medical facilities and a lack of trust in the quality of health providers.



*“A live-out, she is treated like someone who might be a carrier of the virus. They’re forced to change their clothes, wear masks, use sanitizers, wash their hands. There are all these restrictions introduced to them during this COVID period. For the live-ins, they are not supposed to go out to reduce the chances of getting sick. They are supposed to stay in the house all the time.”*

**– Domestic Worker Leader**



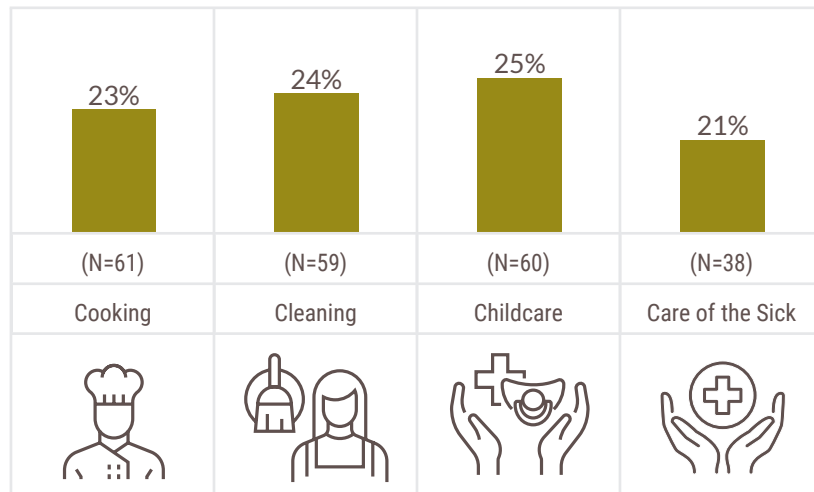
Zanini Athuman is a 40 year old domestic worker with dependent children and parents.  
Photo credit: Fanuel Halelwa.

## Household stress

### Care and other household responsibilities

Domestic workers who live with their employers reported significant changes in household and care responsibilities during the pandemic. Approximately one-quarter of them reported increased activities related to cooking, cleaning or care of the children and the sick. Furthermore, 27 per cent of all live-ins worked longer hours during this period (a higher percentage than among live-outs).

**% of respondents reporting increases in care and household responsibilities (Live-ins)**



**Note:** Sample sizes vary across activities because of missing data for some live-in workers. For a given activity, the share of respondents reporting an increase is calculated out of the population with non-missing data.



*“Domestic workers here, he or she does everything at the workplace. She takes care of all. She’s a laundry man or laundry woman, she’s taking care of the children; she’s taking care of the cooking like she’s a cook. She’s everything; she does every work, so I think a work that could be done by two or three people is done by one... As long as you are a domestic worker, then you have to do everything at the home of the employer”.*

**– Said Wamba, Secretary General of CHODAWU**



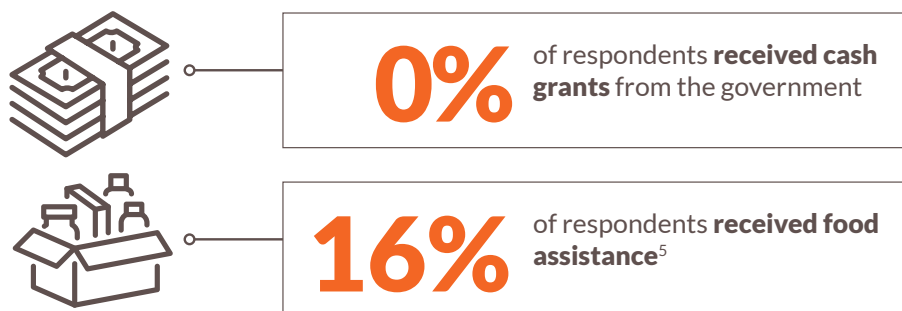
*“Another situation for the live-in is that they lack freedom because sometimes they are not even able to do worship and to at least learn how things are going outside, or attend seminars. They are so restricted, they are not free.”*

**– Domestic Worker Leader**

## Relief measures

### By Government

No COVID-19 relief measures were implemented in Tanzania. The government has, thus far, focused on providing technical support to health workers (guidelines on case management and infection prevention and control in April and May) and identifying quarantine centres; it has also announced a recovery plan for the education sector and implemented policies to safeguard the stability of the financial sector.

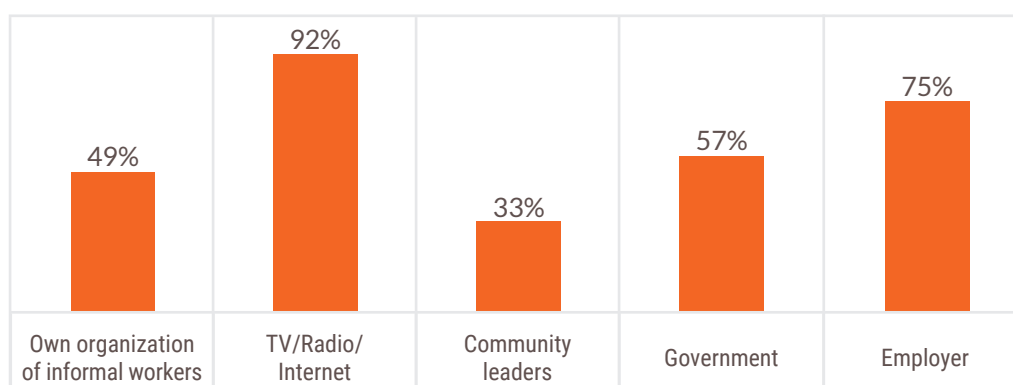


### By Local Organizations of Informal Workers

With no official support (neither monetary nor in kind) for domestic workers, membership-based organizations played an important role. In Dar es Salaam, 128 domestic workers received food support from CHODAWU. Aside from food relief, the union provided information through awareness campaigns. Targeted messages for domestic workers were transmitted through radio and TV with an emphasis on protective measures and a call to employers not to discriminate against or stigmatize domestic workers.

Among surveyed workers, 98 per cent received information on how to protect themselves from COVID-19, mostly from the radio and TV, their employers, and their membership-based organizations.

% of workers who received information on COVID-19 from....



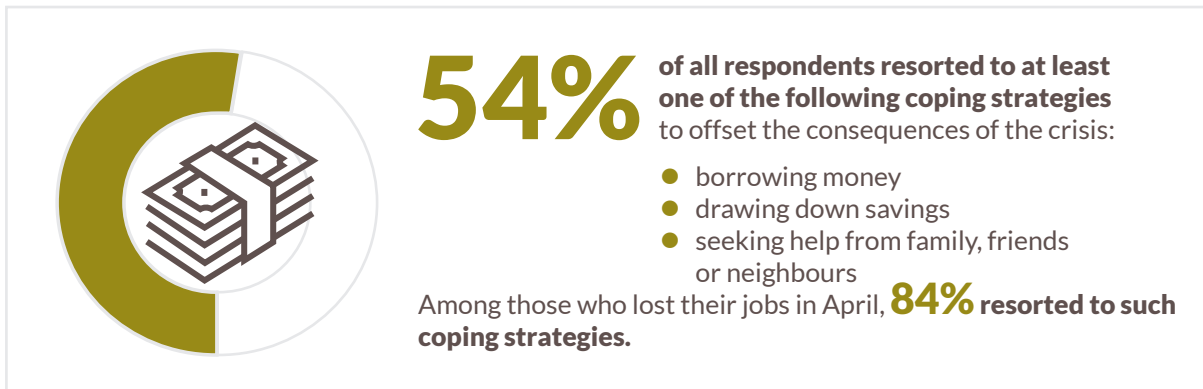
*“The government did education, awareness raising. Every municipality went around to create awareness, You could go to every house, there was a bucket of water and soap. I had never seen this in my life, to wash hands. Be it at the home, be it at the shops. Be it in the informal sector, in the markets. Every market had a bucket of water. This was a lot of awareness creation.”*

**- Vicky Kanyoka, IDWF Africa regional coordinator**

<sup>5</sup> 16 per cent (out of 283) of domestic workers reported receiving food relief from the government. However, no official policy was implemented. It is possible that respondents referred to food support provided by other organizations.

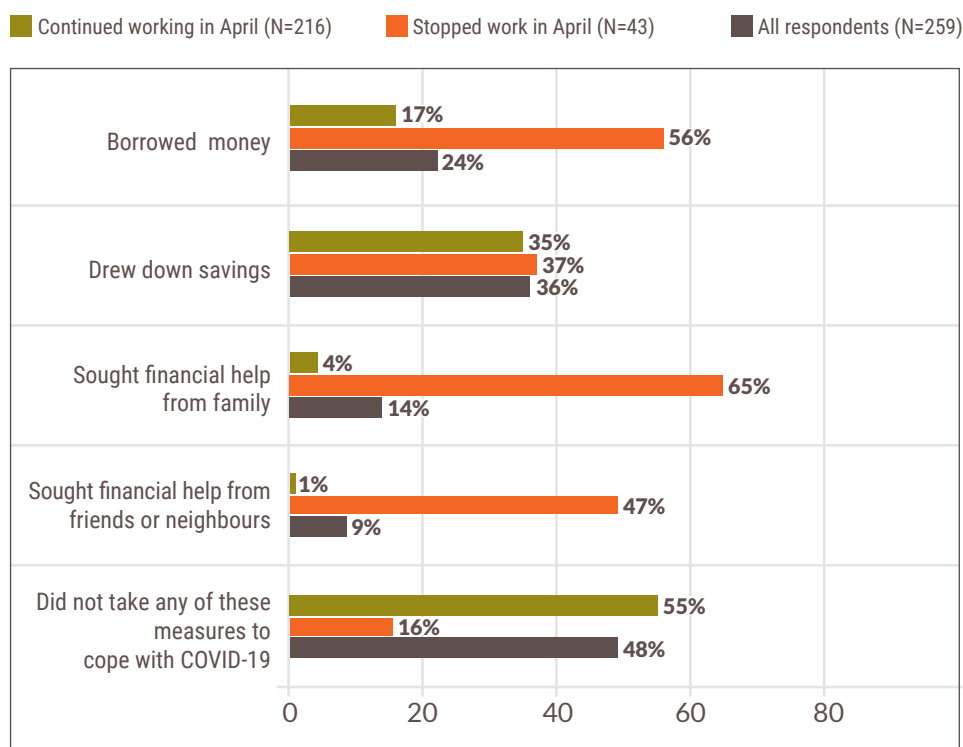
## Coping Strategies and Adaptation

Without support from the government, domestic workers are turning to other coping strategies. Some have turned to other types of work, such as doing laundry, cooking and selling things (e.g. fruit, second-hand clothes, sweets). Among those who lost their work in April, two-thirds have sought financial help from family members.



Alarmingly, 36 per cent of all respondents reported drawing down their savings, either due to a loss of income or to the increased costs of living, particularly of food. While important for short-term survival, these actions will have a negative impact on workers’ resilience and ability to recover.

Coping strategies



*“Life was too difficult, I made the decision to go back to the village”.*

**- Woman Domestic Worker**

## Prospects for Recovery

### Domestic Workers' Needs and Demands

Many of the domestic workers who participated in the study stressed the need for better salaries and contracts, including health insurance, annual leave and social security. A reflection of their low salaries and the increased costs associated with the pandemic, many workers also talked about the need to receive assistance to cover transport and meals.

Sector leaders described a situation in which domestic workers are not treated like other workers, especially like government employees, and the need to build a bridge between these two categories.

### A Better Deal for Informal Workers

Key areas of support at the national level would include:

- Ratification of ILO Convention C189 for domestic workers and better enforcement mechanisms for the existing national legislation regulating their working conditions.
- Formalization of the employment relationships, including through written contracts with clear terms and conditions.
- Specific protection mechanisms for live-ins and migrant workers.

## References

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Mariam Sadiki is a 25 year old domestic worker with dependent parents. Photo credit: Fanuel Halewa.

**COVID-19 Crisis and the Informal Economy** is a collaboration between Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO) and partner organizations representing informal workers in 12 cities: Accra, Ghana; Ahmedabad, India; Bangkok, Thailand; Dakar, Senegal; Dar es Salaam, Tanzania; Delhi, India; Durban, South Africa; Lima, Peru; Mexico City, Mexico; New York City, USA; Pleven, Bulgaria; and Tiruppur, India. The mixed methods, longitudinal study encompasses phone questionnaires of informal workers and semi-structured interviews conducted with informal worker leaders and other key informants. Round 2 will be conducted in the first half of 2021. For more information, visit [wiego.org/COVID-19-Global-Impact-Study](http://wiego.org/COVID-19-Global-Impact-Study).

**Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO)** is a global network focused on empowering the working poor, especially women, in the informal economy to secure their livelihoods. We believe all workers should have equal economic opportunities, rights, protection and voice. WIEGO promotes change by improving statistics and expanding knowledge on the informal economy, building networks and capacity among informal worker organizations and, jointly with the networks and organizations, influencing local, national and international policies. Visit [www.wiego.org](http://www.wiego.org).

**CHODAWU**, the Tanzanian Conservation, Hotels, Domestic, Social Services and Consultancy Workers Union, has been working in the defense of domestic workers and other sectors since 1996. The union provides training and counselling and offers legal assistance to settle disputes with employers; it also works to raise awareness among domestic workers and employers about their rights. CHODAWU is currently advocating for Tanzania's adoption/ratification of Domestic Workers Convention C189.



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