



## New York City Domestic Work Factsheet

### Domestic Work is an engine of New York City's economy

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#### Introduction

Every year, paid care work adds more jobs to New York City's economy than the next 7 top occupations combined—more than nurses, fast food workers, building cleaners, accountants, and software developers combined. This growth is most dramatic among home care aides, who play a central role in supporting the city's aging population.

Yet as the need for paid care jobs is growing, the quality of these jobs remain stagnant. Domestic workers in NYC continue to be underpaid, lack benefits such as paid time off, healthcare and retirement, and remain excluded from NYC's human rights laws that protect workers from discrimination. The vast majority of domestic workers are women and people of color, so poor conditions exacerbate racial and economic inequality in our city.

- Over 200,000 domestic workers work in New York City.<sup>1</sup>
- Approximately 2.7 million households employ domestic workers in New York State.<sup>2</sup>

#### DOMESTIC WORKERS ARE STRUGGLING ECONOMICALLY

##### Low wages and economic hardship

- Median annual income among New York City domestic workers is only \$21,320. The median among all other workers is \$51,250.
- With such low wages, 54% rely on public assistance programs, including Medicaid and SNAP.
- 34% support children under the age of 18, including 15% who are single parents.<sup>3</sup>

##### Lack of benefits

###### *Paid Time Off*

Among domestic workers surveyed in a City University of New York study:

- 21% usually work 7 days a week, without a day of rest.
- In the past year, 50% did not receive any paid time off, whether for vacation, personal time, or sick days.
- 58% are aware of the city's Paid Safe and Sick Leave Law, but only 21% have used it.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> NYC Department of Consumer Affairs, "[Lifting Up Paid Care Work](#)," 2018.

<sup>2</sup> Hand in Hand: The Domestic Employers Network, Worker Institute at Cornell University, and Fordham University School of Social Service, [My Home Is Someone's Workplace](#), 2017.

<sup>3</sup> Authors' analysis of the 2019 American Community Survey one-year file, accessed through IPUMS-USA, [University of Minnesota](#).

<sup>4</sup> Isaac Jabola-Carolus, "Regulating the Care Boom: Labor Standards and In-Home Care Work in Three U.S. Cities," City University of New York, Graduate Center, forthcoming.



### *Healthcare*

- Over 50% of New York City domestic workers have health coverage through Medicaid or other public programs, and another 39% have coverage through other sources. But this leaves at least 22,000 domestic workers without health coverage.

### *Retirement*

- Among home care aides, only 1 in 5 receive employer-provided retirement benefits.<sup>5</sup> Nannies and house cleaners rarely receive such benefits. The need for greater retirement security is crucial because domestic workers tend to be older than workers in other low-wage industries. The median age is 49. By contrast, the median age is 35 in the retail industry and 33 in the restaurant and food services industry.

## **EXACERBATING ALREADY EXISTING INJUSTICES**

### **The quality of care jobs is an issue of gender justice, racial justice, and immigrant justice.**

- The vast majority of domestic workers are immigrant women of color. Based on U.S. Census Bureau data:<sup>6</sup>
  - 94% of New York City domestic workers are women.
  - 78% were born outside the U.S.
  - 38% are Hispanic/Latinx, 27% Black (non-Hispanic), and 18% Asian.
- The demographic composition of this workforce means that low wages and poor job quality exacerbate broader racial and gender inequality.

**The quality of care jobs is also an issue of disability justice and age justice.** Poor job quality makes it harder to recruit and retain care workers, which especially harms older adults and people with disabilities.

- In 2019, the average worker turnover rate for home care agencies was 64% nationally.<sup>7</sup> Statewide, New York State is projected to see an annual shortage of at least 23,000 home health aides by 2024.<sup>8</sup>
- A 2019 survey of New York home care agencies found that, due to worker shortages, nearly 15% of clients experienced delays in accessing care, and 24% were unable to access services at all.<sup>9</sup> The pandemic has likely exacerbated this lack of access.

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<sup>5</sup> Current Population Survey Annual Social and Economic Supplement, 2015-2020, University of Minnesota, [www.ipums.org](http://www.ipums.org).

<sup>6</sup> 2019 American Community Survey.

<sup>7</sup> Home Care Pulse, "[2020 Home Care Benchmarking Study](#)," 2020.

<sup>8</sup> Mercer, "[Examining the US Healthcare Workforce](#)," accessed January 2021.

<sup>9</sup> Home Care Association of New York, "[State of the Industry 2019](#)," February 2019.



- Lack of access to home care can force individuals into nursing homes, where the pandemic has taken a devastating toll on residents and workers. During the first wave of COVID-19 (March-August 2020), a total of 6,423 deaths were reported in nursing homes in New York,<sup>10</sup> and the actual number may be even higher.

### **The COVID crisis has compounded these injustices.**

The COVID pandemic caused severe job loss for nannies and house cleaners, while most home care aides continued to work under dangerous conditions. Across all types of domestic work, Latinx and Black immigrant workers have experienced especially harmful impacts.<sup>11</sup> Official unemployment statistics for domestic workers are unavailable at the local level. But national trends, and survey data from other cities, indicate that the pandemic has caused unprecedented levels of job loss among domestic workers.

- The percentage of domestic workers out of work rose from less than 10% in February 2020 to a peak between 40-60% by early May 2020. The rate improved somewhat by late summer but held between 15-30% from August through the end of 2020.<sup>12</sup> When accounting for partial job loss, such as a housecleaner's reduction of clients, those rates are even higher.
- The crisis underscores the urgency of fully incorporating domestic workers in fundamental labor protections and ensuring access to adequate safety net programs.
- The pandemic has made it even harder for families, older adults, and people with disabilities to access the care they need.

There is a large and growing need in our city for domestic workers. Yet as this factsheet outlines, these jobs remain underpaid, undervalued, and without benefits. It is time that New York City invest in care and domestic work. We need a robust set of policies to transform the care economy. To review the NYC Care Campaign's policy recommendations go to this site.

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The NYC Care Campaign is a coalition of Hand in Hand: The Domestic Employers Network, the National Domestic Workers Alliance, Adhikaar, and Carroll Gardens Association.

This fact sheet was prepared with assistance from Isaac Jabola-Carolus, Ph.D. Candidate in Sociology at the City University of New York Graduate Center.



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<sup>10</sup> The State of New York Attorney General, "[Nursing Home Response to Covid-19 Pandemic](#)," January 2021.

<sup>11</sup> The Institute for Policy Studies in partnership with National Domestic Workers Alliance (NDWA) We Dream In Black Program, "[Notes from the Storm: Black Immigrant Domestic Workers](#)," 2020.

<sup>12</sup> NDWA, "[6 Months in Crisis](#)," 2020; Isaac Jabola-Carolus, "[Profile of San Francisco Domestic Workers](#)," CUNY Graduate Center, 2020.