

Domestic workers pay a heavy price for employers' noncompliance with labour law Survey results | 28 April

In April 2020, Izwi Domestic Workers Alliance surveyed domestic workers to better understand how many were on unpaid leave, and how many have access to UIF relief. Results are summarized below.

As we hit month end, most domestic workers will not receive any wages, resulting in yet more hunger and evictions. Of 602 respondents,¹ only 37% can confirm they are getting full wages during the Covid-19 lockdown. Less than 10% of domestic workers are on paid leave, 27% are on unpaid leave, and another 27% are on leave but have not been told whether they will be paid for April. 4% lost their job because of Covid-19.

Other issues reported in the survey included forced separation from their families, and prevention from seeking medical care or buying groceries when needed. Of those staying in their employer's house during lockdown, most are not getting any time off for evenings, weekends or public holidays. Even in early April many were already struggling with insufficient funds for food and rent.

There are over 1 million domestic workers in South Africa, 95% of whom are women, and many of whom are primary breadwinners for families. Remarkably, 79% of those surveyed are not registered for UIF, and an additional 11% don't know if they are registered (which means they likely are not). This aligns with academic estimates that only 20% of domestic workers are registered for UIF². To date, the state has refused to include unregistered workers in the TERS wage benefit.

Most households have not registered their worker for UIF because they did not think it was worthwhile or did not want the hassle. Now domestic workers and their families are paying the price for their employers' noncompliance with labour law. Izwi is calling for the Department of Labour to compel all employers to pay domestic worker wages, regardless of their UIF registration status. Those employers who have registered can claim the funds from TERS (as is now required by law, according to 16 April Amendment to C19 TERS). Those who have not registered with UIF can be registered now or be mandated to pay regardless. Going forward, this could encourage a new standard of labour law compliance for domestic employers.

With domestic workers not scheduled to return to the economy until Level 2 restrictions are in place, many months of hunger and evictions are ahead for hundreds of thousands of women and their dependents if the Department of Labour does not act expeditiously. *For more information, contact Amy Tekie at amy@izwi.org.za | 0792779006.*

Summary of Survey Results

1. Is your employer paying you during the lockdown?

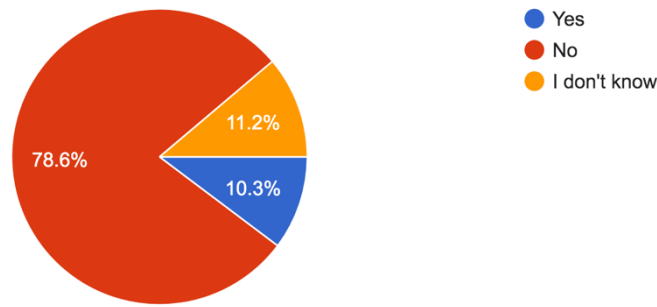
541 responses



¹ Number of responses differs per question. Survey respondents were primarily Johannesburg based, and included many foreign nationals.

² Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO) and the University of Western Cape's Social Law Project

2. Are you registered for UIF?
546 responses



3. If you are not registered for UIF, why not?
442 responses



4. Are you having any other problems at work related to Coronavirus? If so please explain.
(Selected responses below)

I'm worried I want to go to clinic for my check up they are not allow me to go outside

They told me I have to work until that 21days siting with them they refused to let me go home to take care of my kids to make sure my kids are save

we are not paid we work for Sartadays,,and we dont knock off in time no overtime payed

My employer don't paid me all money

Please help me here im working during lockdown,now on the 6th of April i have to go at clinic for an appointment to fetch my medication they dont allow me to go for a checkup and medication collection i talk to them about Monday appointment they refuse,so what must i do thank.looking forwad to here your response

Will i get my UIF when i no longer want to stay here

Too much work I have seen the other side of her during this lockdown she doesn't talk to me she talks to her children she is distance nje Am even scared to make my self something to eat cause she's counting her food

They even don't allow me to go out .but them they're always go out for shopping..

Yes being small money less that r3000 and working monday to Friday

Yes, i lost my job because of this corona, my other boss went to over seas, he not coming back again

During public holidays i am working and i am not paid for working during public holidays. And i am underpaid.

Apart from that m not working not getting paid , it a problem sinse I have no money for food and electricity

I got paid on monthend, and it was my off day as usual, later that day my madam boss called and said I must go and send groceries to home for my kids. She said I am not concerned about health of her kids. That's how I was dismissed,

Assistance in anyway very hungry

I work for four different people. 2 promised to pay me during lockdown I don't know about the 2nd and I feel scared that they might not pay me and I feel like I can't ask them if they'll pay me or not.

Life is becoming hard

The employer sends me out to crowded town without a permit and any protection.

No food life is becoming hard

I am working every day no off day non stop no holidays no overtime

Due to this Corona virus, I have to work Sleep in and get paid half of the salary, I'm used to get.

White people always think blacks are the onces who bring them diseases in their home and that we all don't know hygiene

Yes coz they wanted me to work while there were not going to pay me

I am not paid for off days and holidays, i am working every day

Unfair treatment

Yes am staying at work so my family is running out of food and I cant help them yes .no food no money to pay rent .m now struggling very badly.

Unable to pay my rent, Buying food for me and my children. I am a single mum

My boss didn't pay me she said she won't be able to pay me cz she don't have an income n l'm not sure if i will get back to work after this coronavirus

I was stopped from coming to work because of corona virus until further notice. Was told to rent a place close to work so that I won't take public transport or else I look for another job.

since iam not working i don't have any other source of income to buy food.

Full results are available upon request.

Our appreciation to ZEP Domestic Worker groups, Makhox Women's League, and various other domestic worker groups who assisted with the research.

Izwi is distributing food assistance to domestic workers in need. Those who want to contribute can do so through <https://www.backabuddy.co.za/champion/project/domestic-workers-solidarity-fund>.