

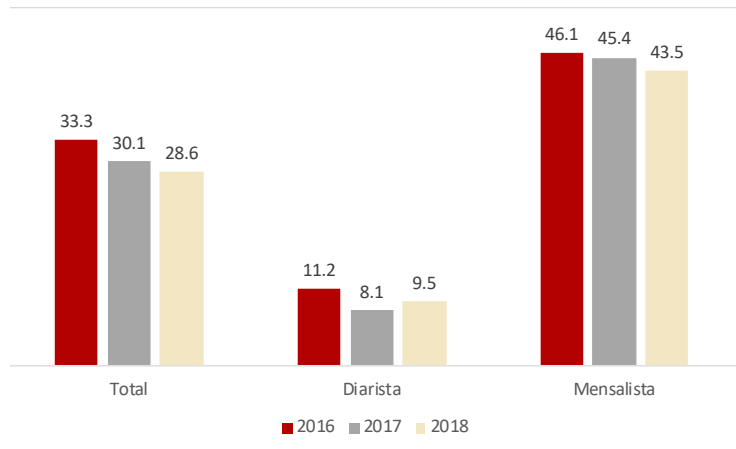
WORSENING TRENDS IN DOMESTIC WORK IN CONTEMPORARY BRAZIL (*)

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Domestic work has been one of the main entrance doors for women who join the labor market in Brazil. Despite significant socioeconomic changes in the last decades, in 2018 almost 15% of working women were domestic workers, totaling more than 5.7 million people. Most of these women are black and poor. While 10% of white women in the labor market do domestic work, 18.6% of working black women are domestic workers. The importance of domestic and care work in Brazil is the result of the intersection of three factors: i) the remnants of slavery in the country's recent past; ii) a traditional patriarchal society; and iii) a considerable income gap that allows the middle classes to hire domestic workers. As long as these three factors continue to characterize Brazilian society, paid domestic work remains a significant economic feature. It also remains a source of precarious jobs, with low wages, few benefits and a presence of violent discrimination and harassment.

In the mid-2000s, paid domestic work started to lose ground as a source of female occupation. For a while some even talked about "the end of domestic work". However, this occupation tends to remain for as long as domestic care is not shared equally between men and women, as well as between families, market, and state institutions. Accordingly, the trend of reduction in paid domestic work ended in 2016 and since then – amidst a period of acute economic crisis – the number of domestic workers regained an upward trend. With high unemployment and a precarious labor market, domestic work becomes once again an important alternative for women, especially those with the lower levels of education and fewer opportunities in specific job niches.

Besides the sheer number of paid domestic workers, some important changes have affected the profile of the profession. On average they have become older: in 1995 47% of them were between 16 and 29 years old; in 2018, only 13% of them fit into this age category. New educational opportunities allowed younger women other paths: domestic workers' daughters did not have to follow in their mothers' footsteps, fleeing the job's stigma, the exploitation, and the precariousness.



Percentage of Diaristas and Mensalistas over sixteen years old who have been formally hired (2016 – 2018). Data source: PNAD/IBGE(***)

The aging of the category meant a future reduction in the supply in the job market, but it also meant that in a few years these workers will reach the age of retirement while being excluded from social security. Such exclusion derives from the persistent high level of informality that characterizes domestic work in Brazil, despite an increase in regular employment in the last decades. Informality means they do not work under a contract and therefore are not given the legal guarantees and benefits they are entitled to according to Brazilian law. In 1995, less than 20% were regularly hired. Slow improvements over the years led the rate to reach 30% in 2013. Since 2016, the trend has been reversed, and in 2018 regular employment was again below 30%. Only 28.6% of paid domestic workers have protection of their labor rights and have social security in the event of being permanently incapacitated or temporarily prevented from working, such as in the case of maternal leave or sick leave.

The percentage of domestic workers who earn a living as *diaristas*¹ has increased. There is no need to establish a formal employment relationship with them and guaranteed social security protection is low. In 2018, *diaristas* represented 44% of domestic workers, and only 9.5% of them had employment records (the amount reaches 43.5% among *mensalistas*², who are regularly employed domestic workers). On the one



hand, the increase in the number of *diaristas* represents their attempt to improve income and working conditions. On the other hand, in an economic crisis, employers tend to push *mensalistas* into becoming *diaristas*, so as to reduce labor costs with benefit payments and social security costs, therefore increasing informal employment.

Better wages seem to be an illusion in this case: on average *diaristas* make 20% less per month than *mensalistas*: R\$773³ and R\$956 a month, respectively. Low wages in this case are even lower than the federal minimum wage, which was R\$954 in 2018. Although *diaristas*' hourly wages are much higher (R\$8.4 against R\$5.9 for *mensalistas*), these professionals cannot work as much, especially in a recession. In 2018, while a third of the *diaristas* stated they would have preferred to work more than they actually do; only 12.5% of the *mensalistas* had the same complaint.

In spite of important advances in domestic labor legislation, the profession is still marked by precarious working conditions and dismal wages. Moreover, the last three years have seen an encroachment in these two aspects, with an increase in informal employment and new working relations that offer even lower social protections and labor rights. There is still a long way to go until one can say that domestic work has become a job on a par with any other in Brazil in the 21-century.

Notes

(*) Original submission in Portuguese, translation by Leticia Galizzi.

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(***) PNAD is Brazil's National Household Survey. It is carried out by IBGE, the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics.

(1) *Diaristas*: they generally work in various households but in none of them may they work more than two days a week.

(2) *Mensalista*: Any domestic worker who works for more than two days a week in a single household and is entitled to labor protections and benefits.

(3) R\$ is the symbol of the Brazilian real currency. In October 2019, R\$1 was worth US\$0.25.