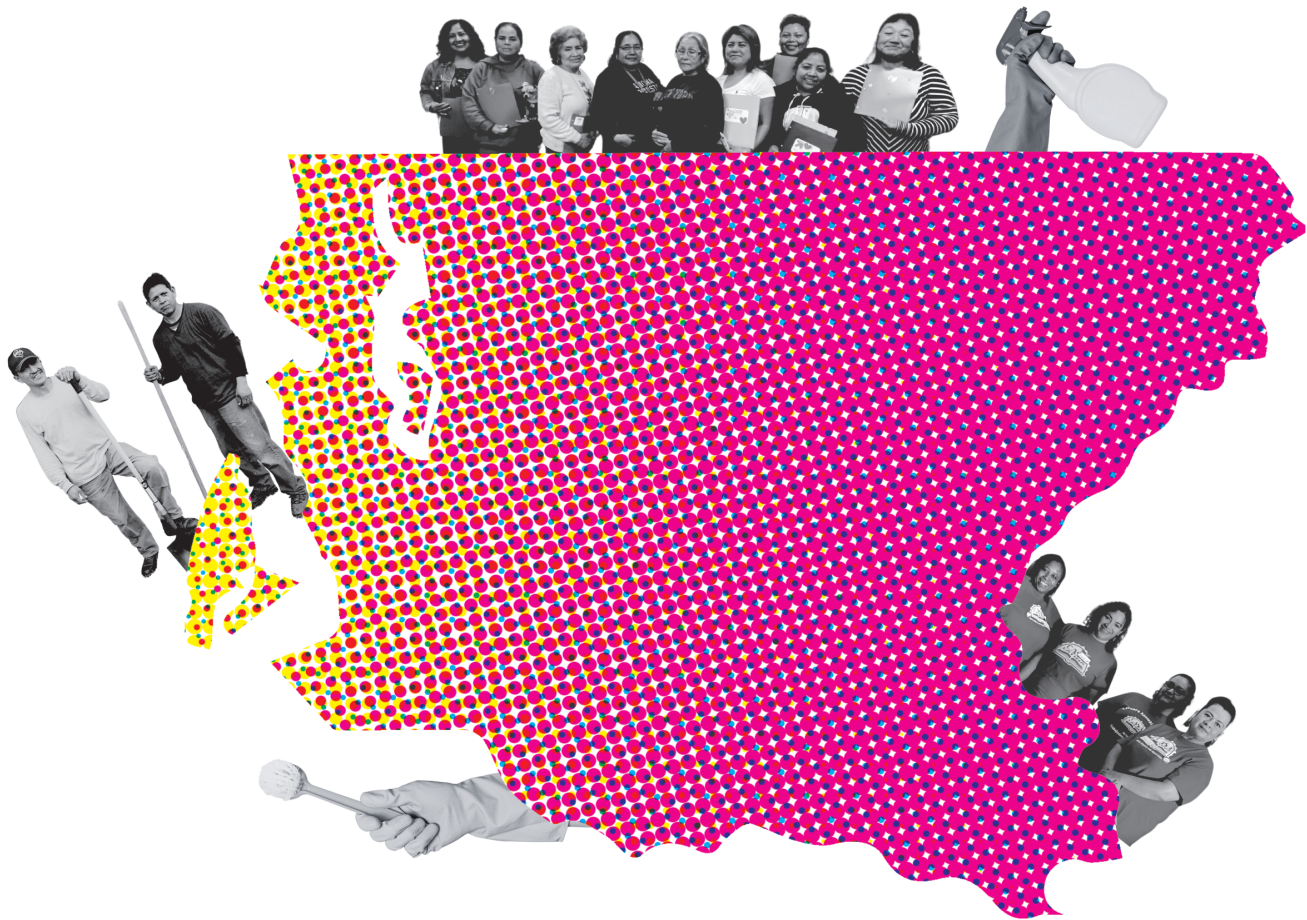

PROFILE OF DOMESTIC WORKERS

In King County, Washington

2015-17



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—

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DOMESTIC WORKERS LIVING IN KING COUNTY, WASHINGTON STATE

Background

In 2018, Seattle became the first city in the US to have a Domestic Workers Bill of Rights. When the Domestic Workers Ordinance (DWO) went into effect on July 1, 2019, domestic workers employed in the city of Seattle gained basic labor protections, which applied regardless of their status as employees or independent contractors. In Seattle, the following occupations are covered by the DWO: house cleaners, nannies, home care workers, and gardeners, cooks, and/or household managers. The protections include the minimum wage, uninterrupted rest breaks, and meal periods. It also prohibits hiring entities from keeping any of a domestic worker's original documents or other personal effects (such as a passport). The Seattle Office of Labor Standards (established in 2015) oversees the Domestic Workers Ordinance and other labor standards ordinances¹.

Domestic workers have long been excluded from many of the employment and labor protections enjoyed by other workers. This includes the 1935 National Labor Relations Act and the 1938 Fair Labor Standards Act when most Black domestic workers and farmworkers were excluded from such landmark federal labor laws. Those federal exclusions are repeated in numerous state labor laws in Washington state and nationwide. However, since 2010, several jurisdictions across the US have addressed domestic workers' legal protections, benefits, and working conditions. As of September 2023, ten states, two major cities, and the District of Columbia have passed the Domestic Workers Bills of Rights, and other jurisdictions have added other labor protections for domestic workers.

The work that domestic workers do in homes across the country is all too often invisible. One way to make their work visible is by using statistics. However, reliable statistics on the numbers of domestic workers in the US are elusive. Domestic workers and their allies have produced their own data, often through surveys. An important example is the 2012 National Domestic Workers Alliance's survey of domestic workers in 14 cities nationwide (including Seattle). More recently (2022), the Seattle Domestic Workers Coalition produced a report on their survey of domestic workers in Seattle, specifically asking about portable benefits, such as paid time off. In addition to these surveys, several studies have used 'official' statistics, such as the US Census, to build demographic profiles of domestic workers. These include the 2012 NDWA report, the 2022 Economic Policy Institute report, and a 2020 study released by UCLA.

These studies provide statistical profiles of domestic workers' living and working conditions. This enables domestic workers to show with 'hard numbers' that even today, domestic workers' jobs continue to reproduce historically raced and gendered patterns. The studies also help make domestic workers and their work visible and enable domestic workers and their advocates to make claims for legislative rights.

As is the case elsewhere in the country, domestic workers in King County are in a precarious position². As this report shows, domestic workers endure contingent work schedules and lower pay than other workers in King County. In particular their demographic characteristics (race and ethnicity, sex, citizenship, and parental status), and work characteristics (work schedules, wages, and income) are included in this report. Domestic workers' economic precarity is further reflected in the fourth part of the report, which focuses on domestic workers' housing cost burden, limited health care coverage, and use of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).



Workers and organizers alongside council member Teresa Mosqueda for the signing of the Domestic Workers Bill of Rights, 2018.

¹ A further ordinance was passed in September 2018 amending the City's municipal code regarding Human Rights and broadened coverage of fair employment practices to include domestic workers and hiring entities.

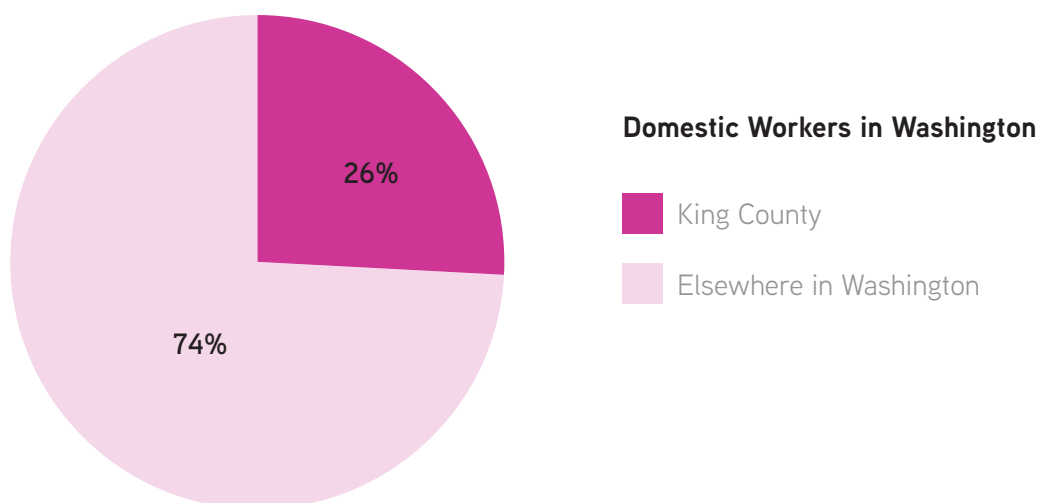
² Anecdotal evidence indicates that many domestic workers who work in Seattle do not live there, but instead live in other parts of King County, especially to the south of Seattle.

CLASSIFYING DOMESTIC WORKERS

This report uses the American Community Survey (ACS) 5-year estimates for 2015-2019. Domestic workers are measured using a combination of Census industry and occupation categories in the ACS. The key workers in this report are gardeners, home care workers, nannies, and house cleaners. Our report follows past scholarly work on domestic workers by classifying particular occupations working within private householdsⁱ.

The report focuses on **King County**ⁱⁱ. The ACS measures demographics based on where people live (i.e., not where they work). Therefore, this geography aims to capture the workers who work in Seattle and live in King County. This is an undercount of the total domestic workers working in Seattle, as some may also live in adjacent counties. Counts of domestic workers, in general, is likely an undercount of the total number of people working as gardeners, childcare workers, and house cleaners³. The American Community Survey that provides the data for this report often struggles to get survey responses due to questions of citizenship, pay, and rent from people who work in precarious jobs like those in the domestic work industry. Statistical strategies are in place to help deal with this undercount, so this is the most accurate data available today. However, the figures should be reviewed here with this undercount in mind.

The demographic characteristics of the domestic workers in King County are compared throughout this report to the total workers who are also residents of King County. Words like “all” or “total” refer to King County’s employed persons. About 24,000 domestic workers are living in King County^{iv}. This number of workers makes up about one-quarter of the domestic workers in Washington^v.



³The undercount of domestic workers is likely because a significant share of domestic workers are foreign-born (higher than for King County’s overall labor force) and several studies suggest that immigrants are underrepresented in the Census (EOI, 2022).



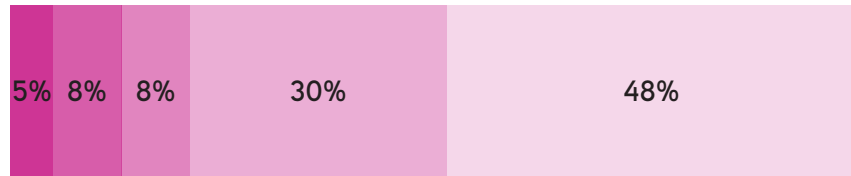
*Top: Casa Latina member speaking to Rep. Rebecca Saldana at the Casa Latina Domestic Worker Asamblea.
Bottom: Domestic Worker Asamblea attendees at a Sexual Violence workshop.*

A. DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF KING COUNTY'S DOMESTIC WORKERS

This section describes the demographics of domestic workers living in King County. These statistics show that domestic workers are more likely to be BIPOC, women, and non-citizens relative to working-aged people living in King County. The demographics of domestic workers play an important part in understanding who carries out the valuable work they do.

Demographics: Race and Ethnicity

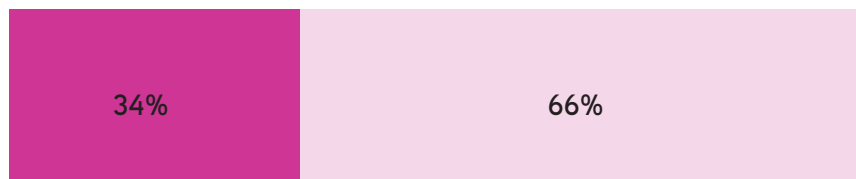
- Black, non-Latino
- Asian or Pacific Islander
- Other Categories
- Latino
- White, non-Latino



Race and ethnicity^{vi} Most domestic workers in King County are BIPOC. 48% of domestic workers residing in King County are White, non-Latino/a. By comparison, 60% of all King County workers identify as White, non-Latino/a. Latino/as make up 30% of domestic workers in King County. This is much higher than the percentage of Latino/a workers residing in King County (10%).

Demographics: Sex

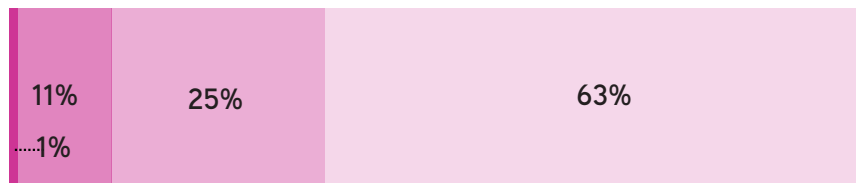
- Male
- Female



The data for the workers' **sex** show that 66% of domestic workers in King County are women. This is significantly higher than the share of the King County labor force, where 54% of working people are women^{vii}.

Demographics: Citizenship

- Born aboard of American Parents
- Naturalized Citizen
- Not a Citizen
- Born in the U.S.



⁴ As many other studies have pointed out, the ACS tends to underreport non-citizens. The reported statistics for the citizenship question and the related findings below should be interpreted with this issue in mind.

In terms of **citizenship**, 63% of domestic workers living in King County were born in the U.S. This is a smaller ratio than the King County labor force, where 71% of workers were born in the U.S.⁴ At least 1 in 4 domestic workers in King county are not citizens of the U.S. This is an overrepresentation relative to the rate for all workers living in King County (14%).

**Demographics:
Parental Status**

- No Children
- Has Children



The rate of **parenthood**^{viii} among domestic workers is approximately the same as workers in King County (both are about 37%).

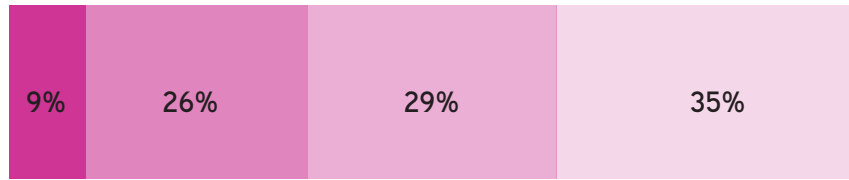


Community members participating in a Casa Latina gardening skills workshop, 2022.

B. PAID WORK CHARACTERISTICS OF KING COUNTY'S DOMESTIC WORKERS

Occupations of Domestic Workers

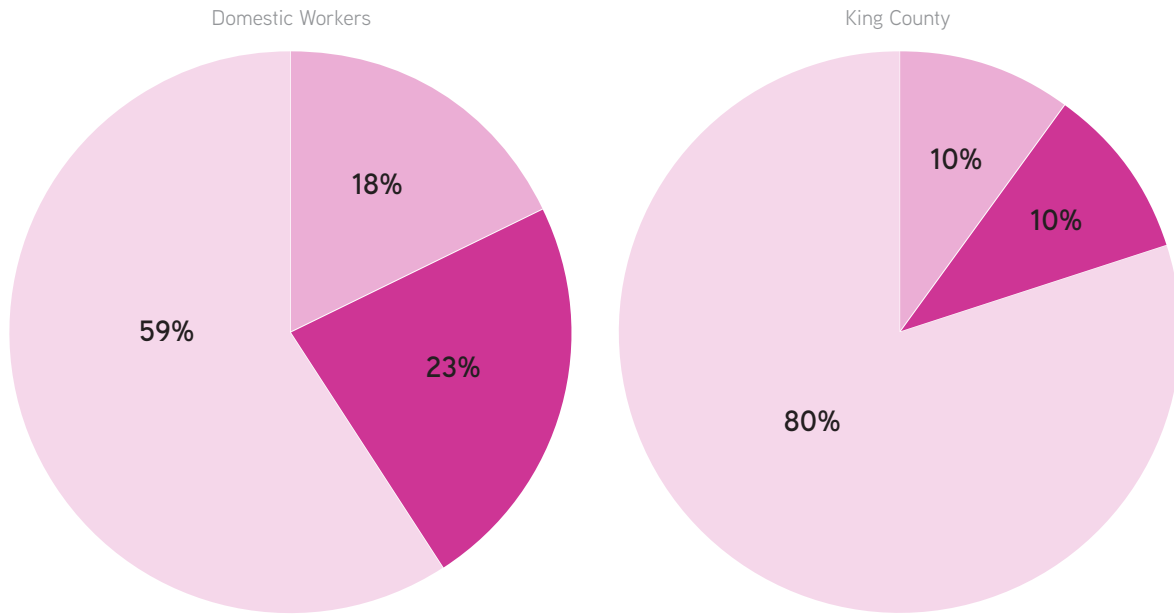
- House Cleaner
- Gardener
- Homecare
- Nanny



The **occupations** of domestic workers in King County mostly work as nannies and home care aides. House cleaners are less common by comparison.

Usual Hours worked in a Week

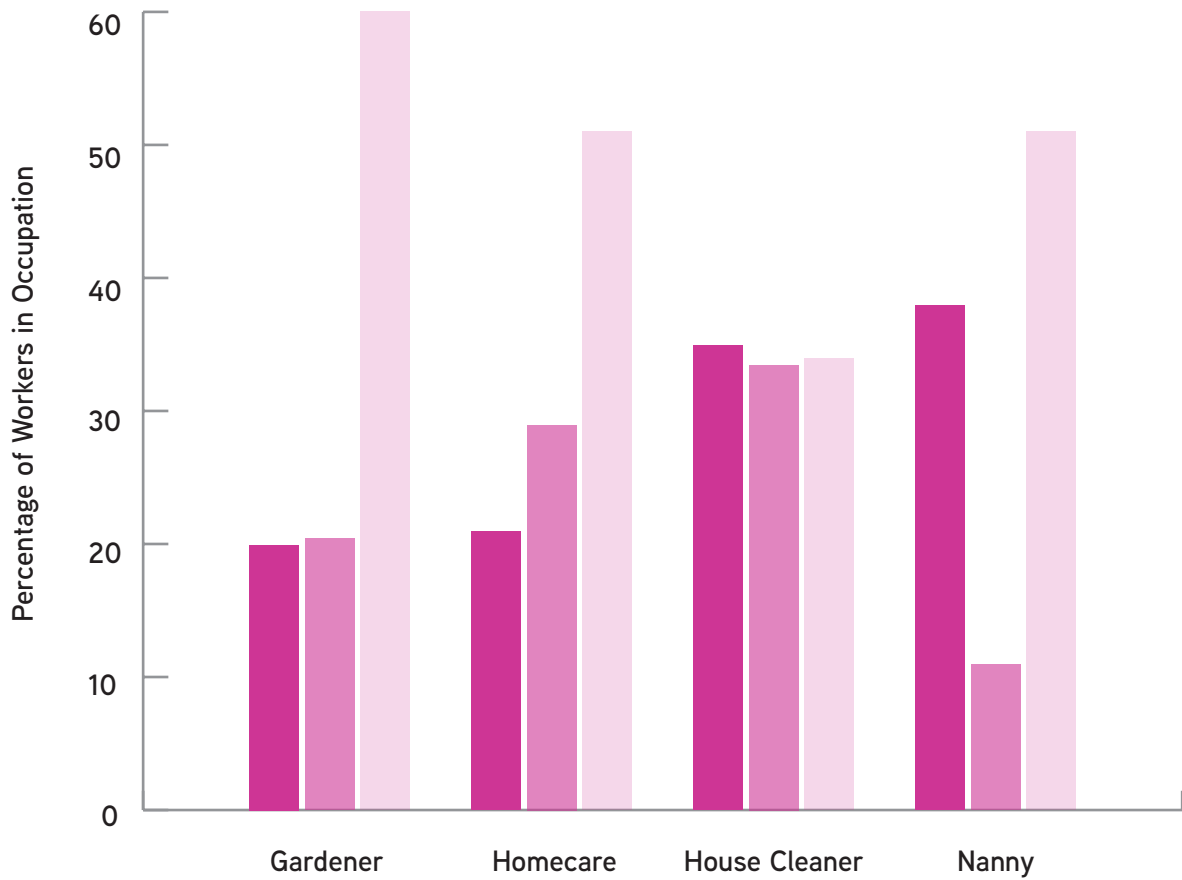
- 20 or Less
- 20-35
- 35 or More



The percentage of domestic workers on a full-time schedule, defined as working 35 hours or more weekly, is 59%. King County workers typically work full-time (80%). Domestic workers are also far more likely to work part-time (less than 20 hours) than their King County worker counterparts. Regarding part-time work (20 hours or less a week): 23% of the county's domestic workers are part-time workers, compared with just 10% of all workers in King County.

Usual Hours worked in a Week by Occupation

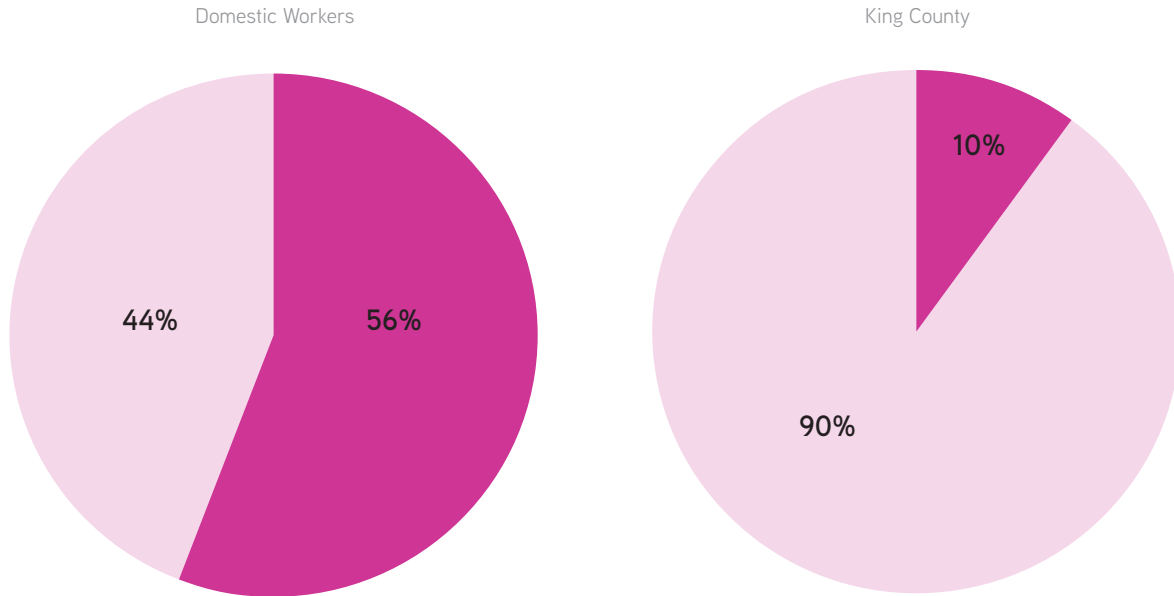
■ 20 or Less ■ 20-35 ■ 35 or More



Gardeners overwhelmingly work on regular full-time schedules. The majority of home care aides work at least 20 hours a week. Nannies have large shares of workers on both full-time and part-time schedules. House cleaners, by comparison, are much less likely to work full-time.

Employment Type

■ Self-employed ■ Works for wages



In terms of the **employment** type, domestic workers as a group are mostly **self-employed**. This work arrangement distinguishes their work conditions from the general pattern for workers living in King County, where just 10% of workers are self-employed.



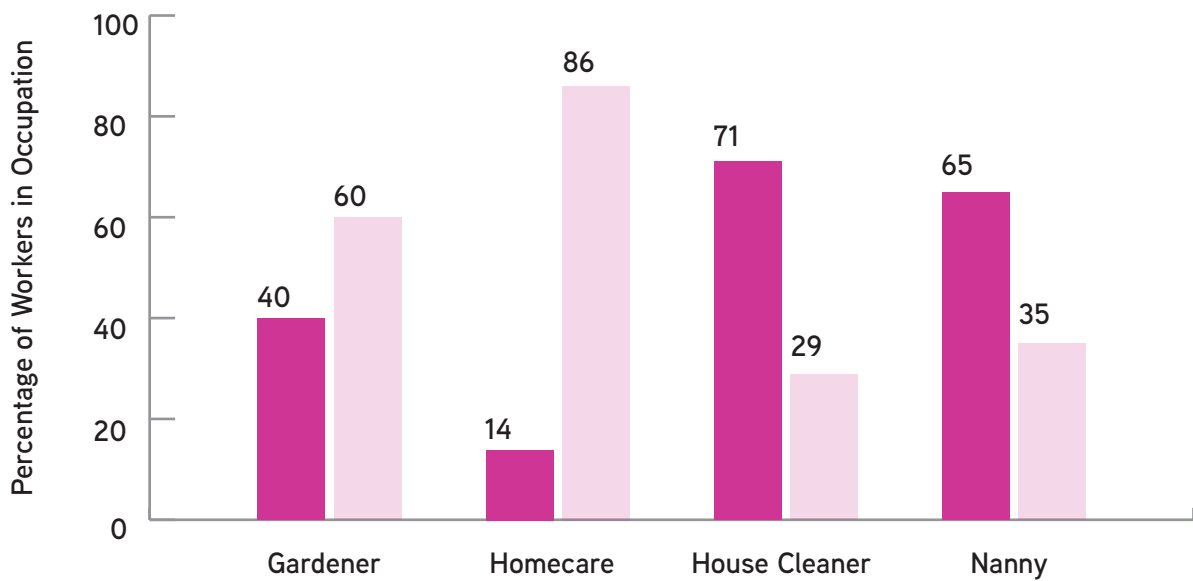
Community members participating in a Casa Latina green cleaning skills workshop, 2023.



Casa Latina member upkeeping hedges, 2017.

Employment Type by Occupation

■ Self-employed ■ Works for wages



Home care aides and gardeners are more likely to work for wages (i.e. be employees) compared to the other domestic worker occupations. However, 40% of gardeners being self-employed is much higher than the King County rate of 10%. Nannies and house cleaners are reported as mostly self-employed. About two out of three nannies are self-employed, and house cleaners have higher rates of self-employment.

C. WAGES EARNED BY KING COUNTY'S DOMESTIC WORKERS

The median **individual income** in King County is about \$52,000 a year, while the median **household income** is about \$112,000 annually. Domestic workers in King County make about \$21,700 annually, and their households make about \$79,900 a year. In other words, domestic workers make substantially less than King County's average for individuals and for households. This income inequality comes into focus when separated by occupation.

Table 1: Individual Income	Median Individual Income	Percentage of King County Individual Median
Home Care Aides	\$26,470	50.8%
Gardener	\$26,395	50.6%
Nanny	\$19,220	36.9%
House Cleaner	\$18,260	35.0%
King County Average	\$52,000	-

Table 1 shows the breakdown of individual annual income by occupation. Domestic workers overall are making much less than the median income in Seattle. Home care aides have the highest annual income among domestic workers, but they still only make about half the median income in King County. The differences in income across occupations are likely driven, in part, by the usual hours worked in a week within each occupation, for instance gardeners are the most likely occupation of domestic workers to have regular full-time work schedules in this sample.



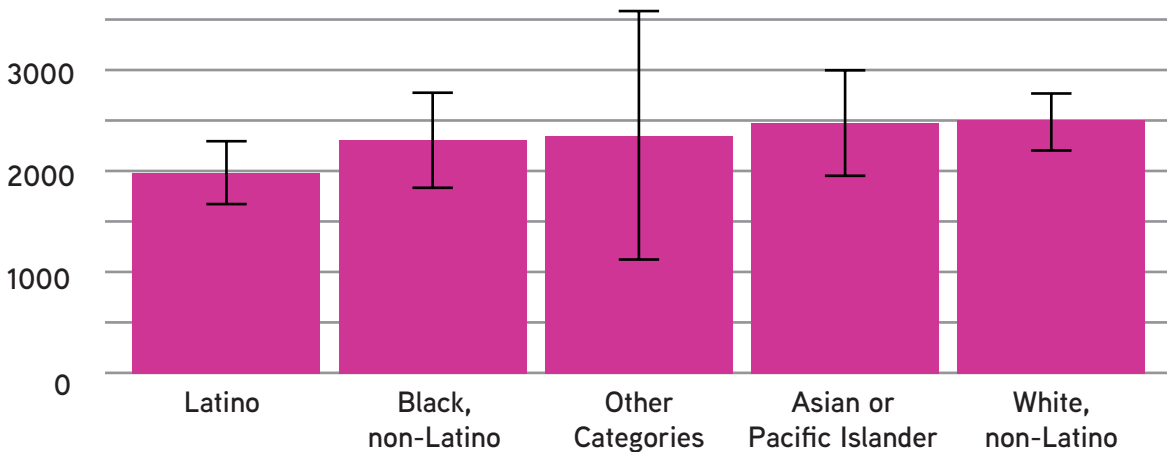
Casa Latina members and staff in the Day Worker Center awaiting dispatch, 2023.

Table 2: Household Income	Median Household Income	Percentage of King County Household Median
Nanny	\$96,997	86.4%
Home care aides	\$64,673	57.6%
Gardener	\$64,176	57.2%
House Cleaner	\$45,780	40.8%
King County Average	\$112,000	-

Table 2 shows the breakdown of household annual income by occupation. A “household” refers to everyone who occupies a housing unit regardless of familial relationships. If any household member is a domestic worker, their household is included in the Table 2 numbers. The differences with King County are not as stark as they are for individual income, but the income gap for domestic workers compared with all workers living in the county persists.

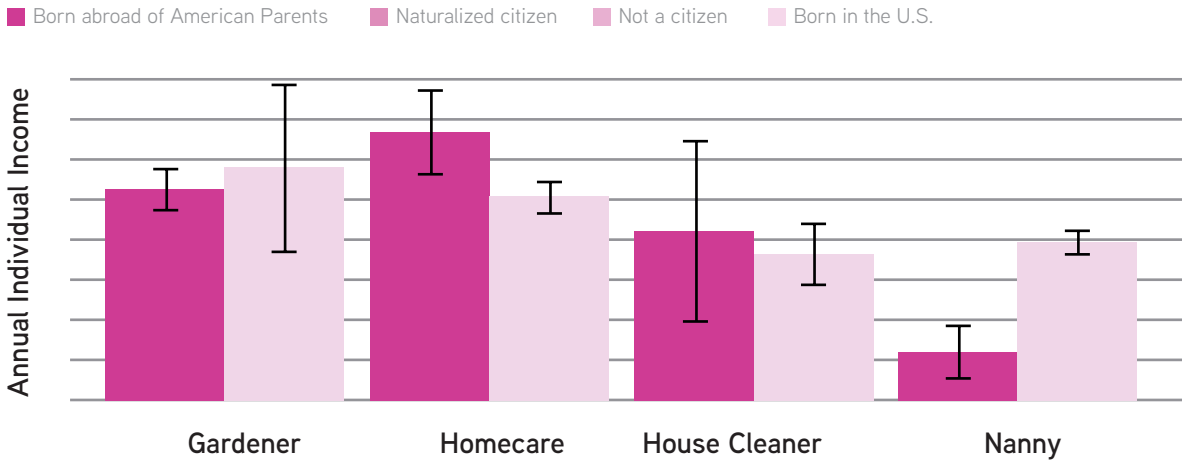
The next set of graphs covers the annual **individual income** of domestic workers across different demographics and employment characteristics. The income is represented by the height of the bar in each graph. In addition to the bars, a small band is included to show the statistical confidence level of each income level^x.

Annual Individual Income by Race and Ethnicity



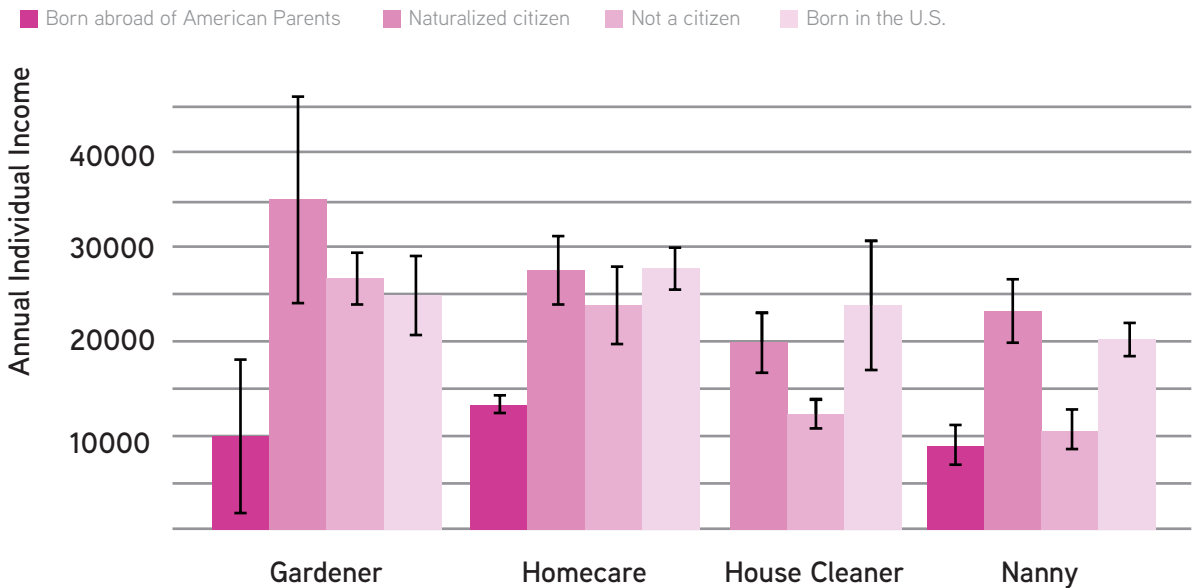
The income distribution is generally similar across racial and ethnic groups. Since the confidence bands overlap between groups, we can interpret the incomes as about the same for each group. Additionally, running a statistical test^x of the differences between the incomes of domestic workers in each group shows no statistically significant difference between the incomes of each group.

Income by Citizenship



Naturalized citizens tend to make more money than domestic workers with other citizenship statuses. The within-occupation differences are more complex. Workers born abroad to American parents fall behind in income. However, this trend is unclear for house cleaners⁵. Domestic workers who are not citizens generally make less than other groups except for gardeners. Lastly, domestic workers born in the U.S. are the majority of our sample and, therefore, have incomes that closely match the Table 1 results^{xii}.

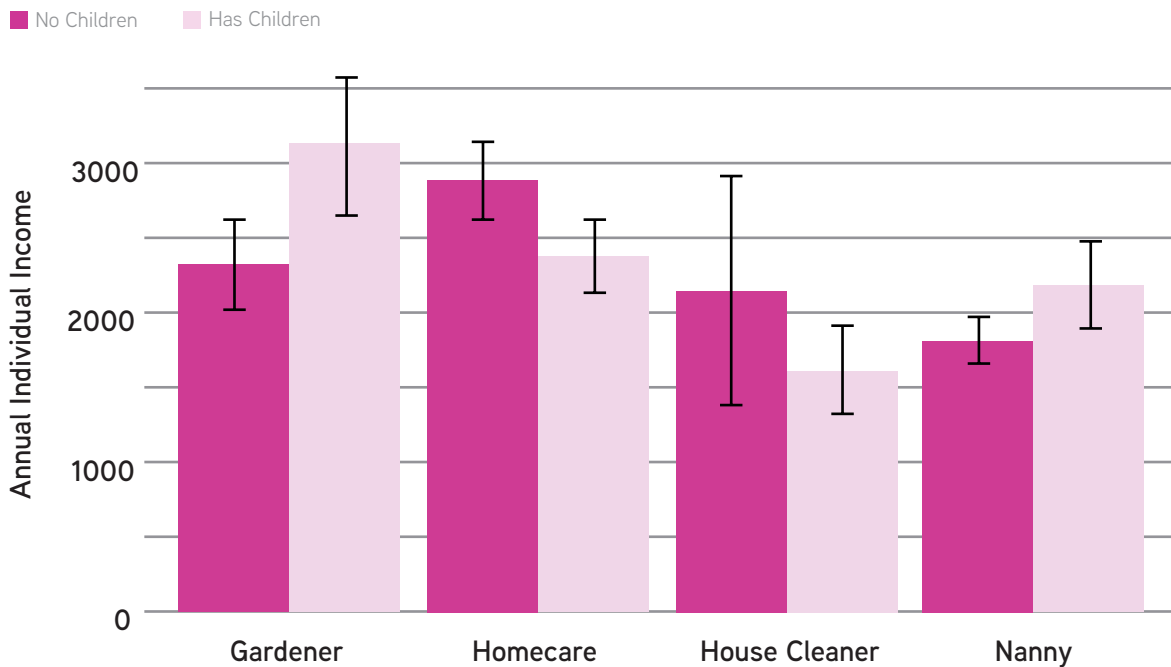
Income by Citizenship



⁵The ACS data used for this report estimates that just 22 people are house cleaners and born abroad to American parents in the entire state of Washington. Of these 22 people, none of them reside in King County.

Naturalized citizens tend to make more money than domestic workers with other citizenship statuses. The within-occupation differences are more complex. Workers born abroad to American parents fall behind in income. However, this trend is unclear for house cleaners⁵. Domestic workers who are not citizens generally make less than other groups except for gardeners. Lastly, domestic workers born in the U.S. are the majority of our sample and, therefore, have incomes that closely match the Table 1 results^{xii}.

Income by Parenthood



Parenthood's relationship with wages varies across occupations. These variations tell different stories. On the one hand, parents seem to make more as nannies and gardeners. And on the other hand, parents seem to make less as house cleaners and home care aides. The statistical test shows statistically significant differences in incomes among these groups^{xiii}.

D. ADDITIONAL DIMENSIONS OF PRECARIETY FACED BY DOMESTIC WORKERS

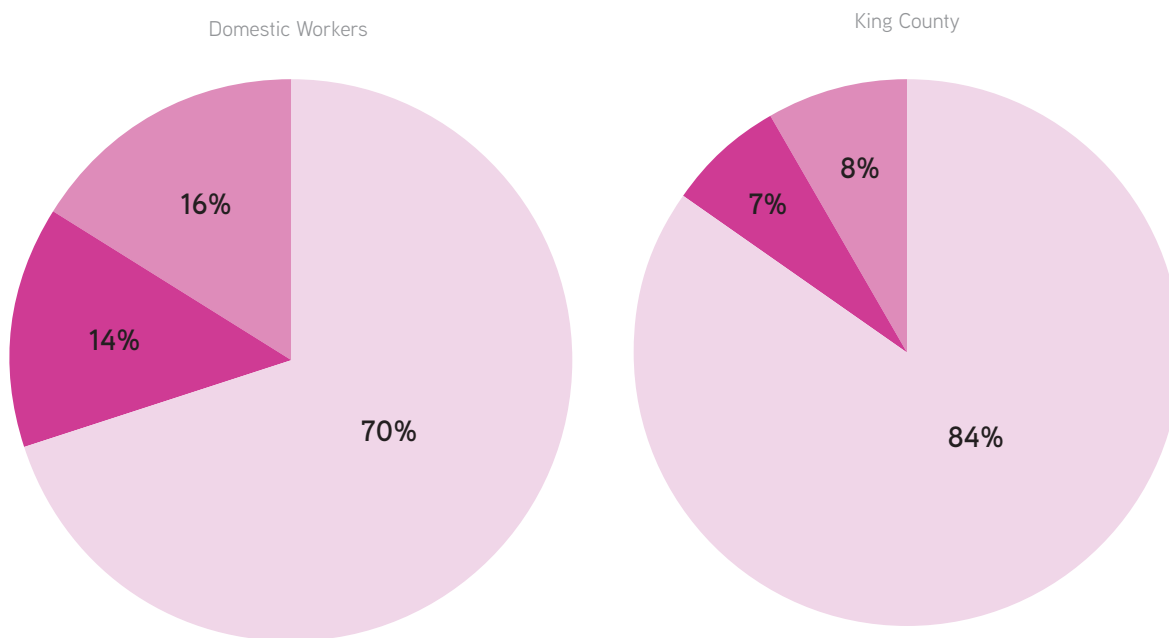
Employment is a pivotal dimension of precarity, but precarity also includes other forms of insecurity that also impact the overall well-being of domestic workers. In this section we explore housing costs, health insurance and public assistance (using SNAP as a measure) as additional dimensions that can intensify the inequalities and socio-economic insecurities faced by domestic workers.

Housing Cost Burden Facing King County's Domestic Workers

Housing affordability in the Seattle area is currently at such a low level that it is being described as a crisis. A key consequence of this is that people, especially those earning lower wages have fewer options when it comes to finding and keeping suitable housing.

Housing Cost Burden

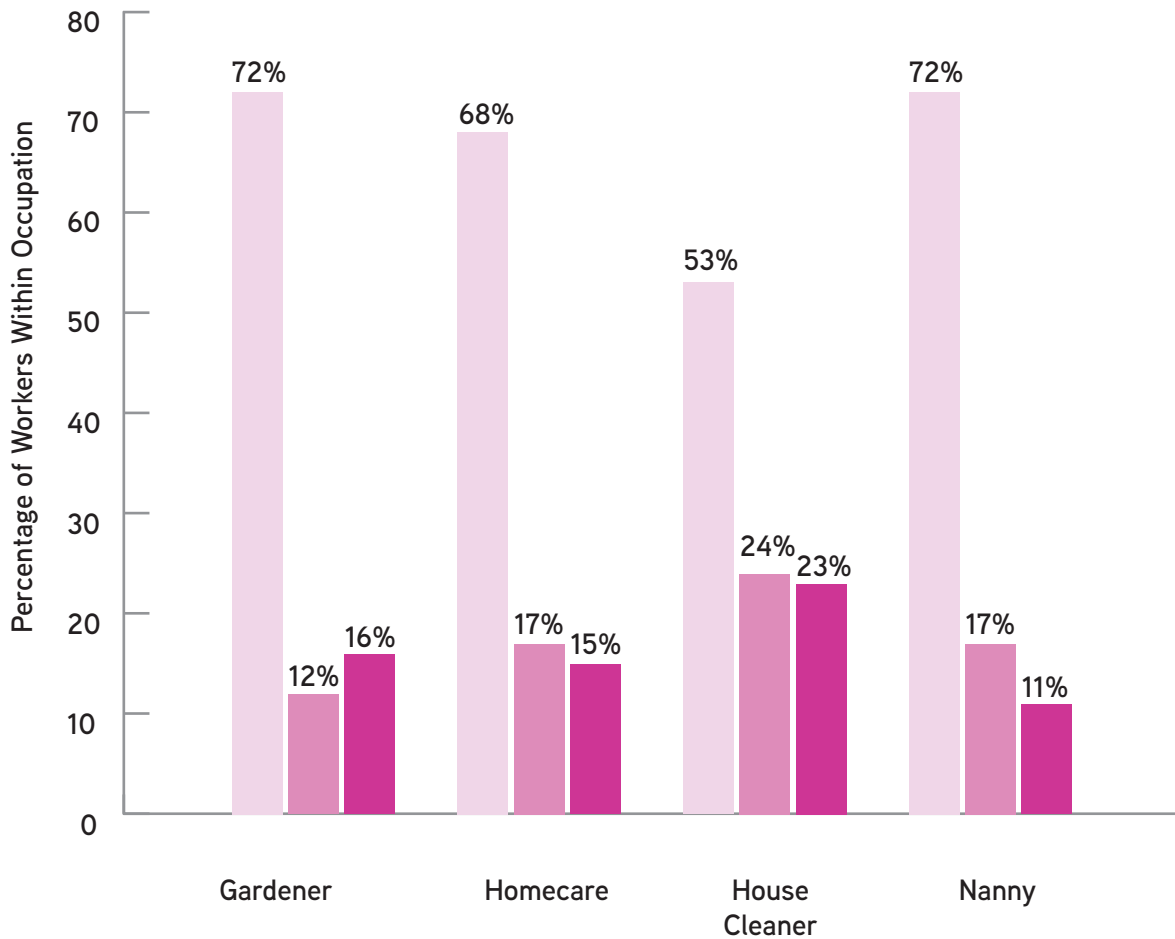
■ Severely Cost Burdened (Greater than 50%) ■ Cost Burdened (30% - 50% of Income) ■ Not Housing Cost Burdened



Housing cost burden is measured as the percentage of monthly household income spent on the necessary household expenses of rent (or mortgage) and utilities. Households are considered “burdened” if the percentage exceeds 30% of the monthly household income. Households are considered to be “severely burdened” if the cost is greater than 50% of household income. These pie charts illustrate that domestic workers are more likely to be burdened or severely burdened than all households in King County.

Housing Cost Burden by Occupation

■ Severely Cost Burdened (Greater than 50%) ■ Cost Burdened (30% - 50% of income) ■ Not Housing Cost Burdened



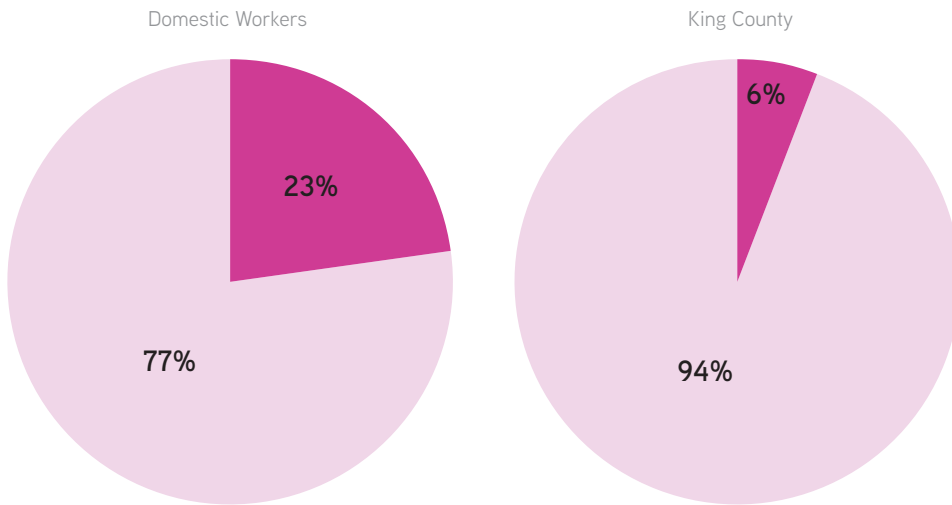
House cleaners are most likely to be burdened by housing costs compared to other domestic workers. This finding aligns with the average incomes of each occupation outlined in Table 1. However, nannies, home care aides, and gardeners are still impacted as at least 1 in 4 households with someone in those occupations are cost-burdened.

Health Care Coverage of Domestic Workers in King County

Domestic workers are less likely to have health insurance than other workers in King County. This makes it difficult to deal with an illness or medical emergency, including injuries that occur in the workplace.

Healthcare Coverage

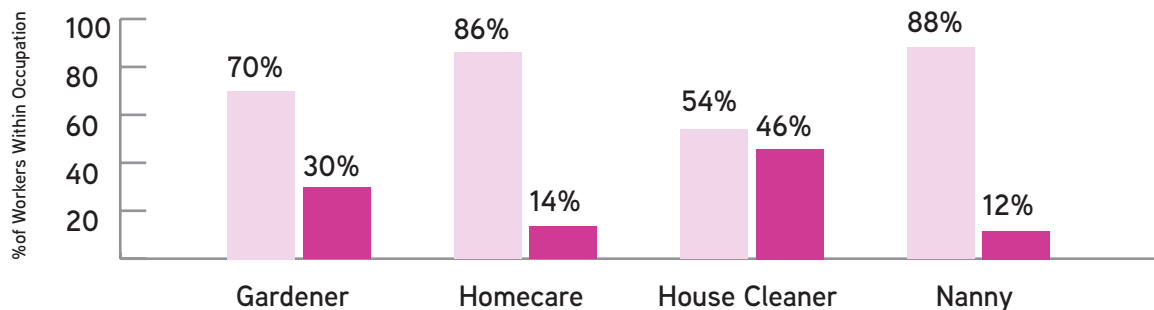
■ No health insurance coverage ■ Has health insurance coverage



About a quarter of domestic workers living in King County do not have any health insurance coverage. This is in stark contrast to all workers living in King County: just 6% of the total labor force has no health insurance.

Healthcare Coverage by Occupation

■ No health insurance coverage ■ Has health insurance coverage



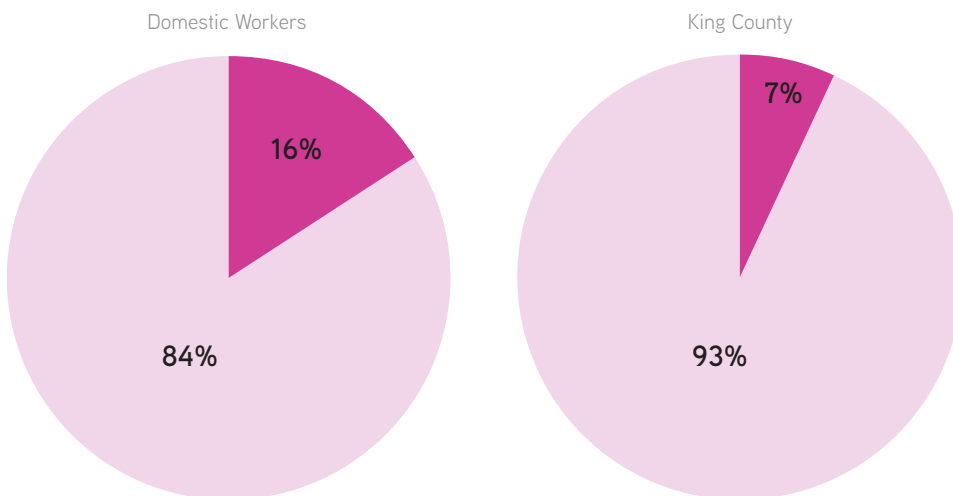
Access to health insurance is particularly difficult for house cleaners and gardeners, where about a third to half of workers do not have any health insurance coverage.

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)

The federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is aimed at curtailing food insecurity and hunger. It provides food support for low-income people, it is a means-tested program, and citizens and non-citizens might be eligible if they meet the requirements.

SNAP Recipiency

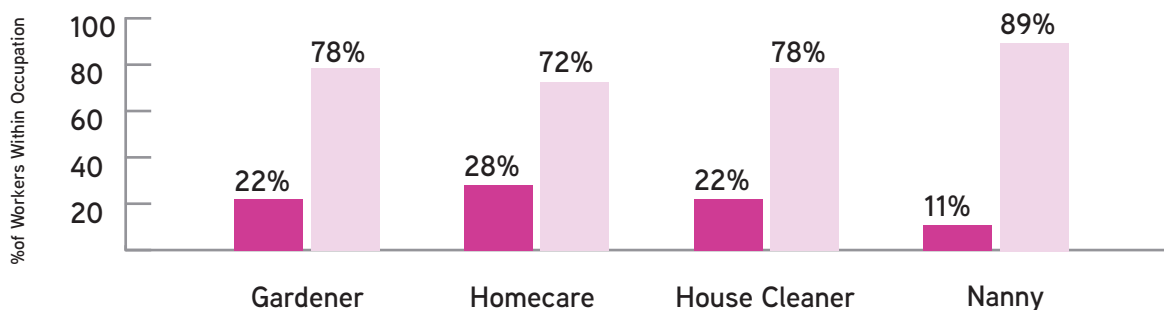
■ Receives SNAP Benefits ■ Does not receive SNAP Benefits



The rate of SNAP recipiency for domestic workers is about double the rate for the King County labor force.

SNAP Recipiency by Occupation

■ Receives SNAP Benefits ■ Does not receive SNAP Benefits



Homecare aides have the highest rate of SNAP recipiency among the domestic workers group, with house cleaners and gardeners close behind - over 1 in 5 in these occupations use SNAP. Nannies are the least likely to receive SNAP; this is not surprising given that as shown in TABLE 2, nanny’s households made the most income annually

CONCLUSION

King County domestic workers are in a precarious position. Relative to other workers in King County, they are more likely to be self-employed and to make lower wages. As a group, domestic workers are experiencing hardships: less health care coverage, higher housing cost burden, and more SNAP usage. This report shows that domestic workers are dealing with increased difficulties around employment relative to King County workers overall regardless of their demographics or occupation. While we show important variation across demographics and occupations, the key takeaway is that domestic workers are lagging behind in key livelihood metrics in King County.



Community members and community at a worker rights May Day rally, 2023.

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- Steven Ruggles, Sarah Flood, Ronald Goeken, Josiah Grover, Erin Meyer, Jose Pacas and Matthew Sobek. IPUMS USA: Version 12.0 [dataset]. Minneapolis, MN: IPUMS, 2022. <https://doi.org/10.18128/D010.V12.0>

ⁱ The American Community Survey (ACS) pools the data from the previous five years to make a statistically accurate estimate of characteristics of the whole U.S. population. The surveys conducted in 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, and 2019 are pooled and used to produce the estimates for this report. The COVID-19 Pandemic hindered the 2020 and 2021 surveys and are not included. This is a typical strategy research in current demographic scholarship

ⁱⁱ Domestic workers are identified for this report using NAICS 2017 industry and occupation codes. Gardeners are in the occupations of “landscaping and groundskeeping workers” (OCC 4251), “tree trimmers and pruners” (OCC 4252), and “other grounds maintenance keepers” (OCC 4255) in the private household industry (IND 9290). Home care aides are either “home health aides” (OCC 3601 or “personal care aides” (OCC 3602) in home healthcare (IND 8170), individual and family healthcare services industries (IND 8370), and private household industry (IND 9290). Nannies are the occupation of “childcare workers” (OCC 4600) in the private household industry (IND 9290). House cleaners are in the occupation of “maids and housekeeping cleaners” (OCC 4230) and in the private household industry (IND 9290).

ⁱⁱⁱ The ACS uses FIPS codes for geography. King County, Washington is county FIPS 033.

^{iv} The population of domestic workers living in King County makes up about 1.11% of all workers.

^v In the Census defined Seattle-Tacoma-Bellevue Statistical Metropolitan Area (which covers King, Pierce and Snohomish counties) there are about 45,000 domestic workers, which is 48% of the state’s domestic workers.

^{vi} Race and ethnicity are combined in the report in line with past work on race/ethnicity among domestic workers (e.g. UCLA 2020). The ACS asks separate questions for race and ethnicity. In this report, these responses are condensed for ease of interpretation. Asian or Pacific Islander classification in the chart includes only those Asian or Pacific Islanders who are non-Latino. People who report as Black and Latino are classified as Latino in this instance. The “Other Categories” classification includes American Indian and Alaska Native, people who report themselves as Other, and people who identify as coming from two or more racial groups under the Census categories.

^{vii} The ACS only includes one question for sex, rather than gender. Respondents self-report to the question asking whether they are male or female.

^{viii} Parenthood is measured by the ACS as having at least one child who resides at the same address as a parent. This figure will undercount parents generally if a child shares time between different addresses or is an adult with their own housing.

^{ix} The American Community Survey samples the entire United States and administers a yearly survey to about 3.5 million households. This sampling aims to capture a representative picture of the whole United States. However, since the sample does not survey everyone (unlike the decennial Census which at least aims to include all), there are some data issues to keep in mind: (i) generally the ACS has about a 90% response rate, (ii) the sample is based on stable addresses, and (iii) the sample will not exactly capture the full rates of vital information. To adjust for these inaccuracies, the ACS suggests that researchers report the “confidence level” of that the value (income in this case) from the sampled survey response is the correct value (shown by the vertical lines or bands). The confidence levels (also known as confidence intervals) about the values presented in the tables tend to be a function of how common this attribute is among the sample. For instance, few domestic workers in King County are in the “Other Categories” group of Race and Ethnicity, so there is lower confidence about the exact value of their income. This adjustment for accuracy is reflected in the taller confidence band (a taller bar). In contrast, there are many more Latinx domestic workers, so the sample is more confident, thus the value of their income is within the shorter band. Also note the taller confidence bands for women gardeners and male house cleaners - there are relatively few workers in those two groups.

^x An ANOVA (ANalysis Of VAriance) test was run to find if there is a difference between the incomes of each group. The test considers the differences in the size of each group and compares each income at the group level. Further analysis using Tukey’s HSD (Honest Size Difference) was conducted to make sure that certain pairs of incomes that may seem different visually, like the incomes for Latinx and White, non-Latinx workers was different and no statistically significant difference was found in any set of pairs of incomes broken down by race and ethnicity.

^{xi} The pairing that have statistically distinct incomes are: female nannies and female home care aides ($p = 0.01$) and male home care aides and female nannies ($p = 0.005$). The stark visual differences of incomes like those of male nannies, are not shown to be statistically different from other incomes. ANOVA considers the size of each group in its testing, and since there are very few male nannies (about 150 workers in King County), the test cannot make a strong distinction between their income and others.

^{xii} Another ANOVA test finds statistically significant differences between incomes across citizenship status. The pairs of groups that are distinct according to the Tukey HSD are: Naturalized Home care and US Born Nannies ($p = 0.001$); Non-Citizen Nannies and Naturalized Home care ($p = 0.002$); and Naturalized home care and US Born House Cleaners ($p = 0.01$).

^{xiii} The Tukey HSD shows the specific group differences: nannies with no children and home care aides with no children ($p = 0.00001$); and gardeners with at least one child and nannies with no children ($p = 0.004$).