International Labour Organization

Shedding light on gendered patterns in international labour migration: Unequal participation and data gaps

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ILO global estimates on International Migrant Workers

- Reference global source based on official national data
- Advance the knowledge base on international labour migration
- Inform on the magnitude and characteristics of international labour migration at the global, regional and sub-regional levels
- Covers 189 countries
- Four editions published (ref. year: 2013, 2017, 2019 and 2022)
- **Latest edition (4th) released: December 2024** based on a new model-based methodology and expanded set of estimates

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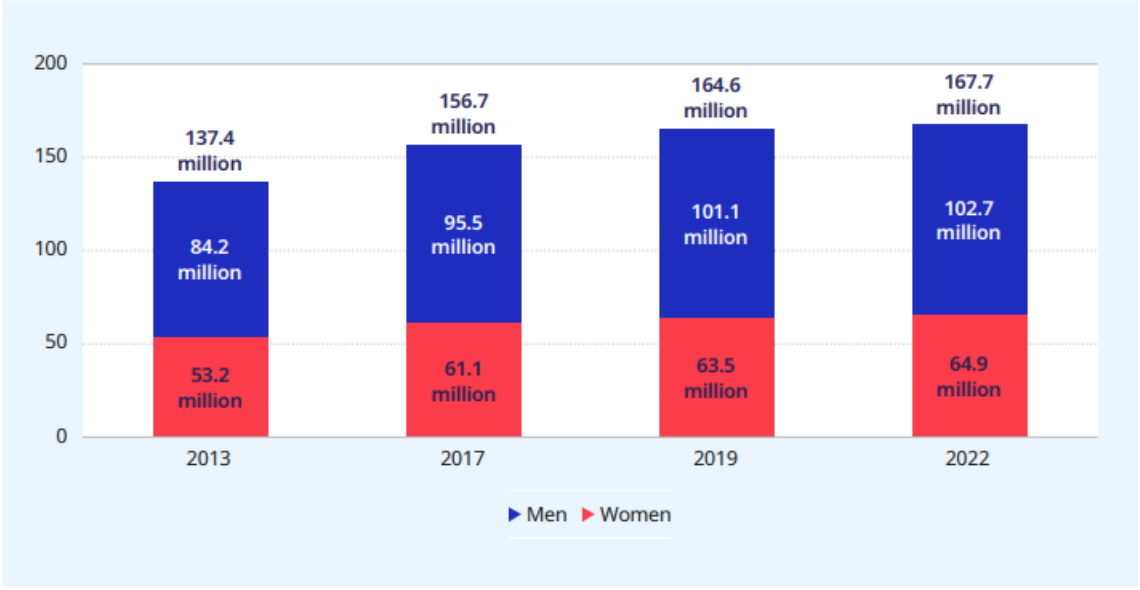
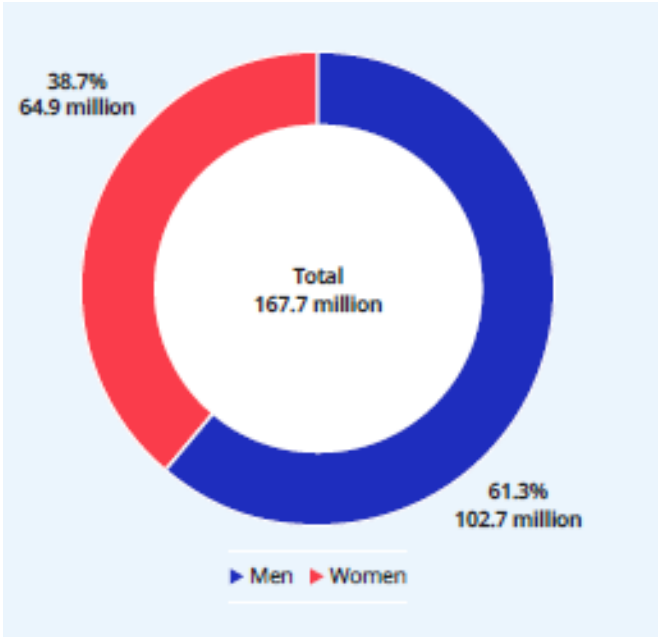
The global number of international migrant women in the labour force reached 64.9 million in 2022, but their share has remained stable since 2013

Figure 6. Global estimates of the stock of international migrants in the labour force by sex, 2013–22 (million)

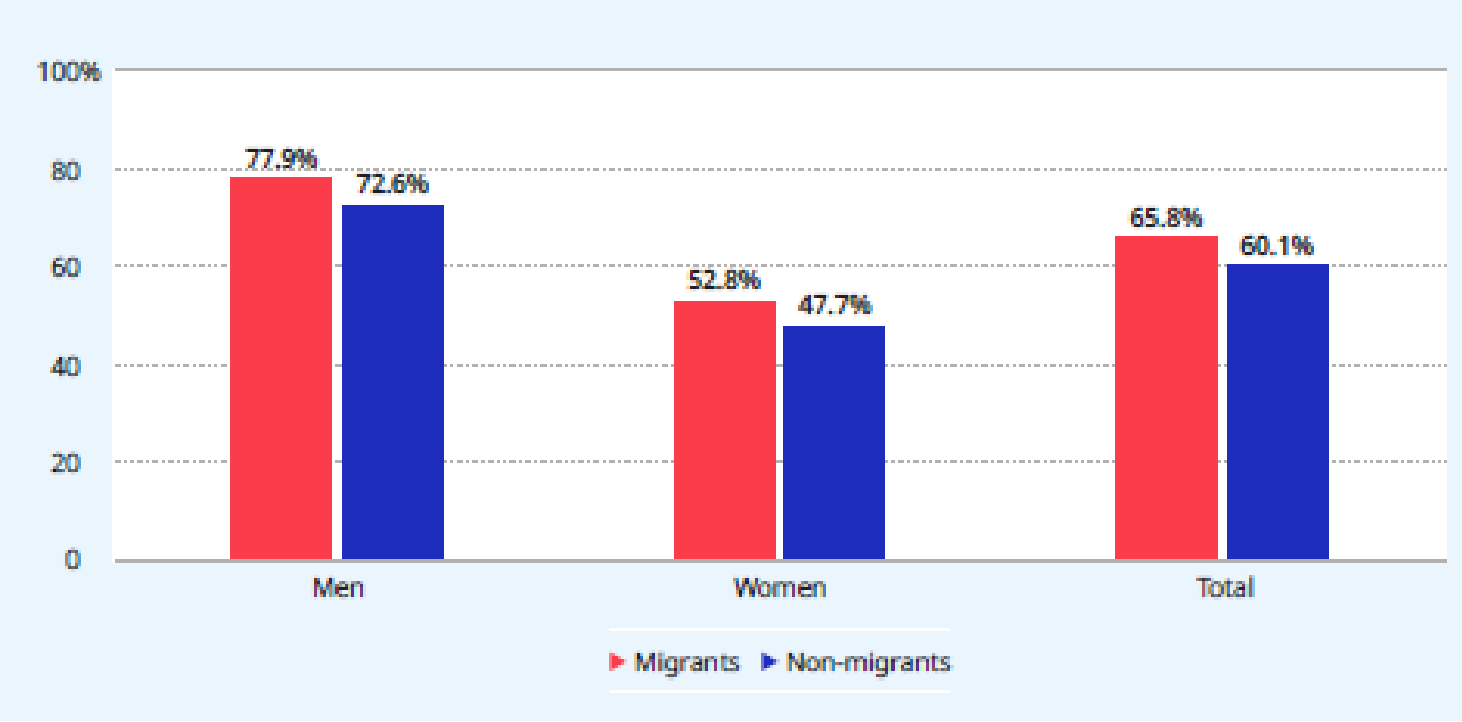


Source: ILO estimates.



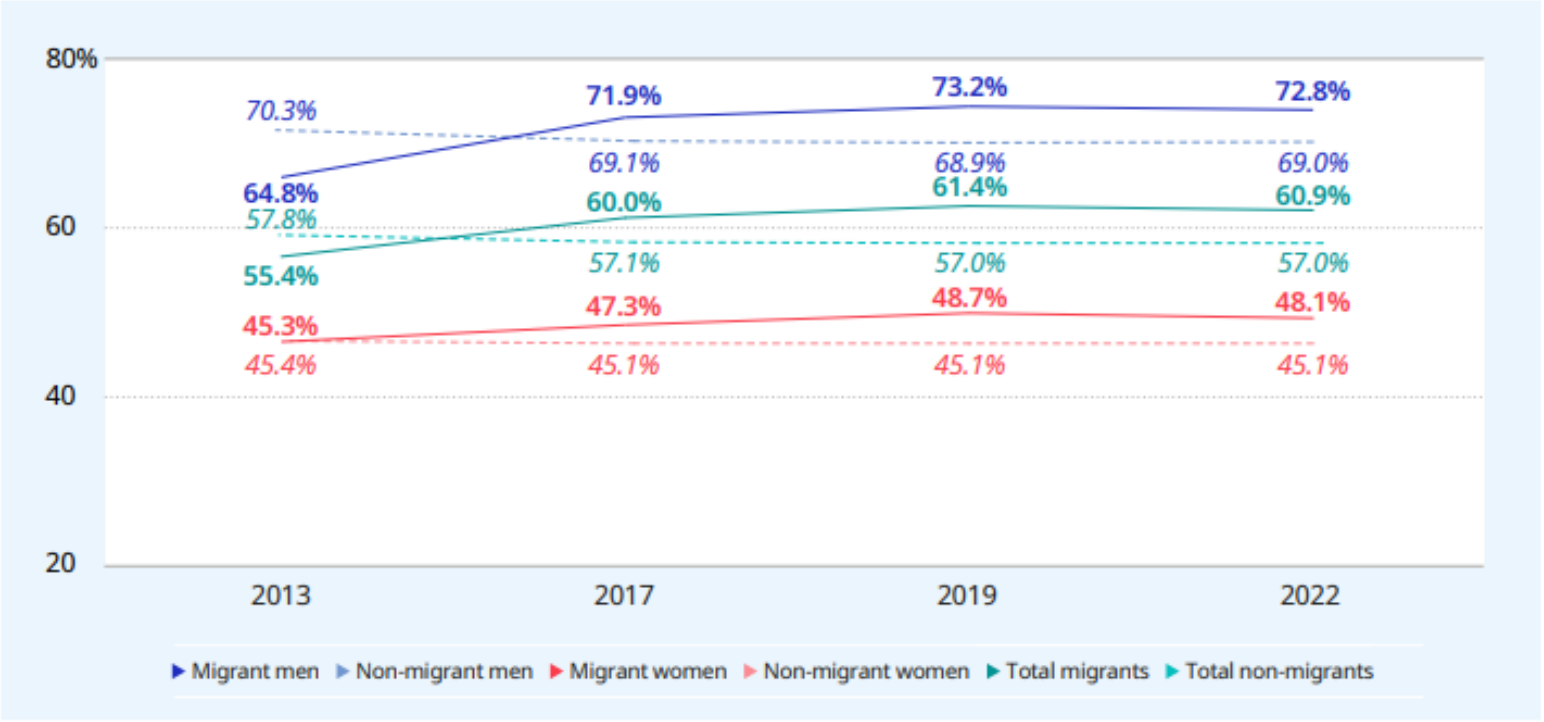
- In 2022, women accounted for 39% of international migrants in the labour force

Migrant women have higher labour force participation rates compared to non-migrant women, but lower compared to migrant men



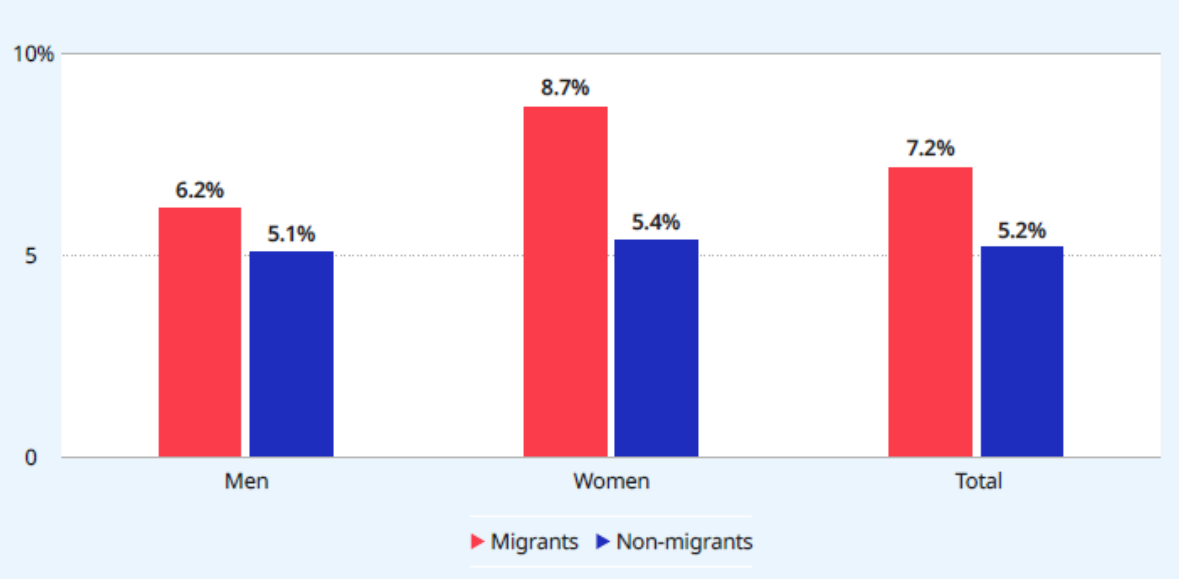
Since 2013, small gains in the employment of international migrant women compared to migrant men

Figure 11. Global employment-to-population ratio of international migrants and non-migrants by sex, 2013–22 (percentage)



- Migrant women have a slightly higher employment-to-population ratio than non-migrant women
- However, among migrants, women have a much lower employment-to-population ratio compared to men

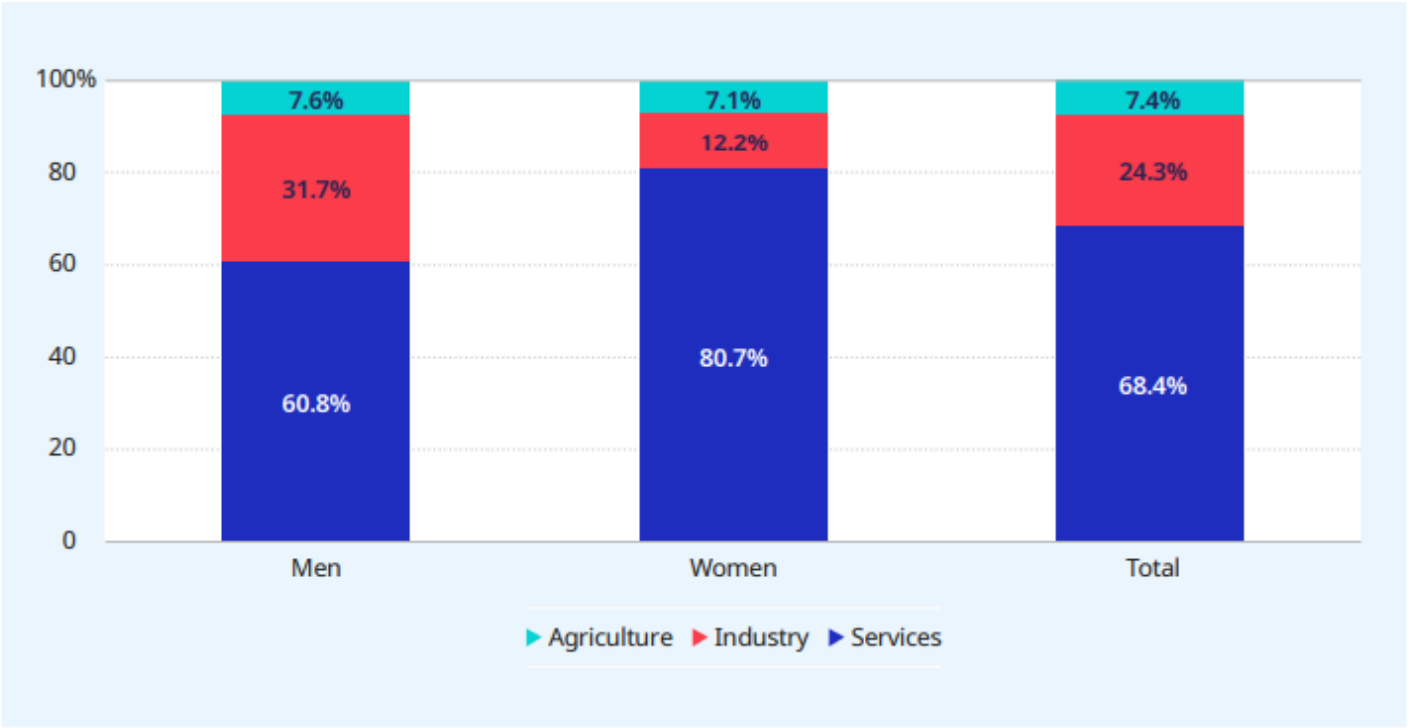
Important gender gap in unemployment among migrants



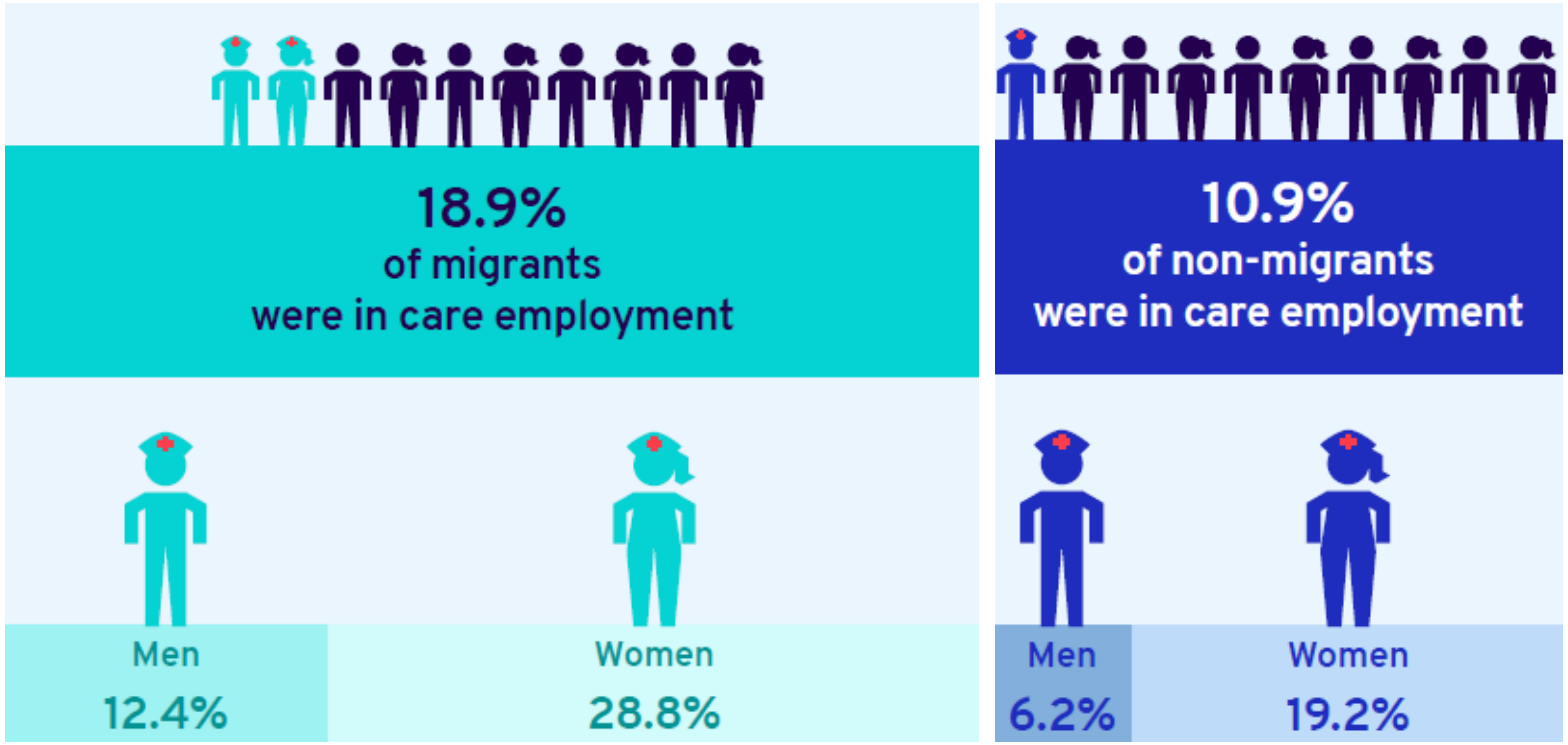
- Migrant women have much higher unemployment rates compared to non-migrant women
- Among migrants, women also experience higher unemployment compared to men

Among employed migrants, women are significantly more concentrated in the services sector

Figure 12. Global distribution of employed international migrants by sex and broad category of economic activity, 2022 (percentage)



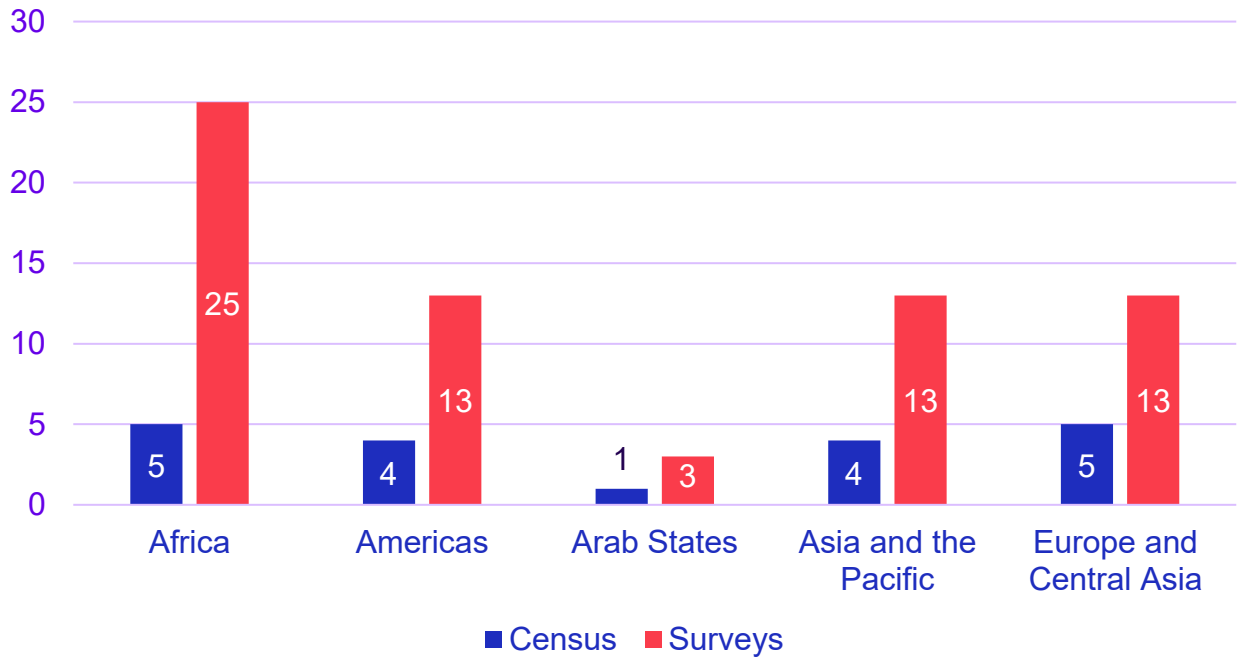
A higher proportion of both migrant women and men are employed in care jobs compared to non-migrants, but migrant women have the highest share at 28.8%



- In first ILO estimates in 2018: 11% of global employment in care employment
- Migrants are more likely to be employed in care jobs than non-migrants

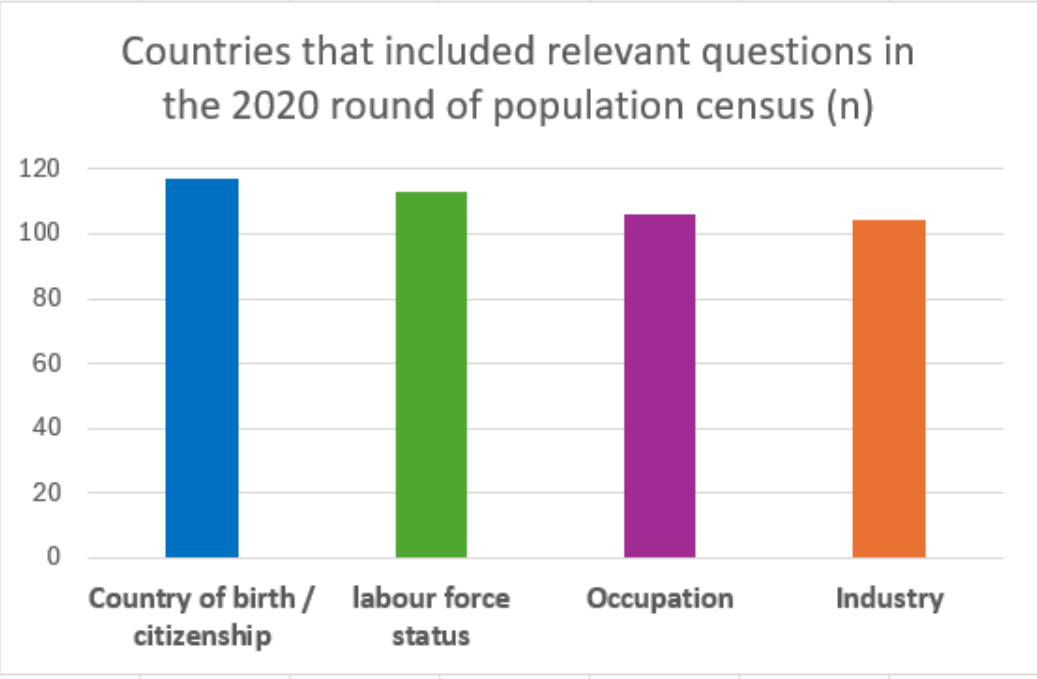
Significant data gaps on care employment by migrant status

Data available only for less than half of countries



- 86 (out of 189) countries reported data on care employment by migrant status, used for global estimation:
  - 19 reported Census data
  - 67 reported survey data
- Challenges in reporting the full scope of care employment (combination of ISCO and ISIC)
- Small sample size issues with surveys

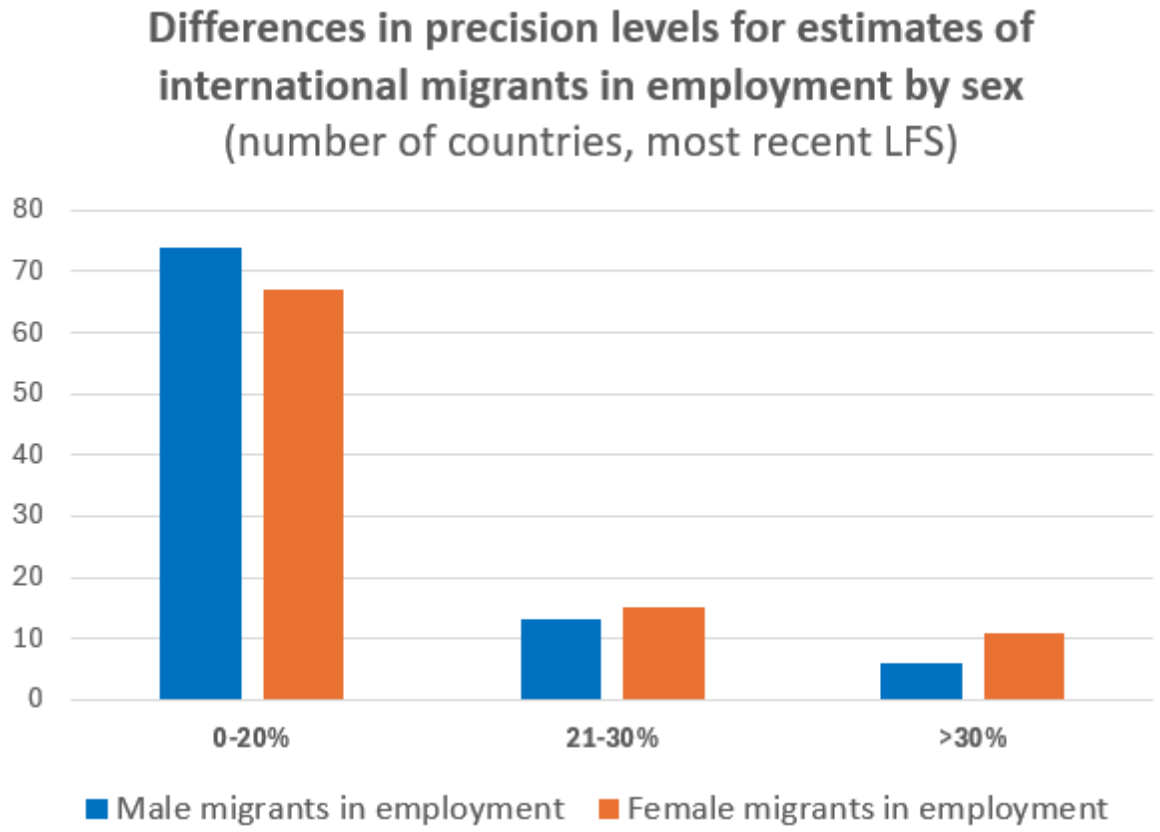
Needed data collected in the 2020 round of population censuses by a majority of countries



- **But detailed analysis, dissemination and reporting is lagging**

Data from labour force surveys much more available,

but impacted by small numbers and gender gaps in precision



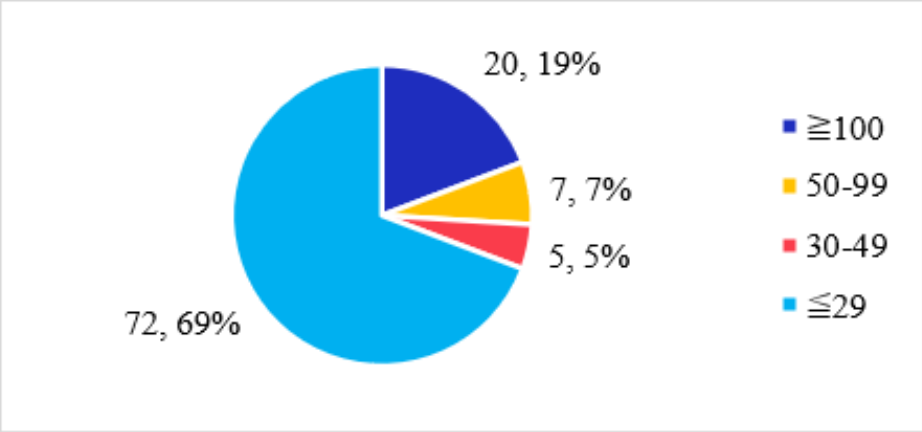
Higher loss of precision for estimates of employed migrant women

74 countries can produce estimates for employed migrant men with adequate precision (RSE < 20%) but only
67 countries can produce estimates with similar precision for employed migrant women

LFS data insufficient to shed light on priority groups:

Migrant domestic workers

Figure 1. Distribution by number of unweighted observations of domestic migrant workers (number of countries)



LFS for over 2/3 of countries cannot generate statistics on migrant domestic workers with any level of precision (achieved sample size below 30)

Table 3. Differences in precision levels for estimates of international migrants in employment (number of countries)

Region	RSE, estimate of domestic migrant workers		
	0-20%	21-30%	>30%
Africa	3	1	1
Americas	7	4	
Arab States	2		
Asia and the Pacific	3		
Europe and Central Asia	11		
Total	**26**	**5**	**1**

Out of 122 countries reviewed, **only 26 can generate estimates of migrant domestic workers with adequate precision using LFS data**

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Reflections for future work

- Significant data gaps remain to shed light on gendered patterns in international labour migration
- Continued lower levels of labour force participation among migrant women have additional implications for data quality
- Care jobs forecasted to continue to be a major source of employment for international migrants, particularly women

- Critical to strengthen integration and/ or combined use of data on international migration and labour market
- Population censuses represent a critical untapped data source to shed light on gendered aspects of international migration, particularly in employment
- Design of labour force surveys needs to take account not only of international migrant characteristics, but also of gender differences in migrant employment
- Specialized migration surveys important for more targetted and detailed anaylsis on working conditions
- Consider SAE to improve data availability particularly for priority groups, such as migrant domestic workers

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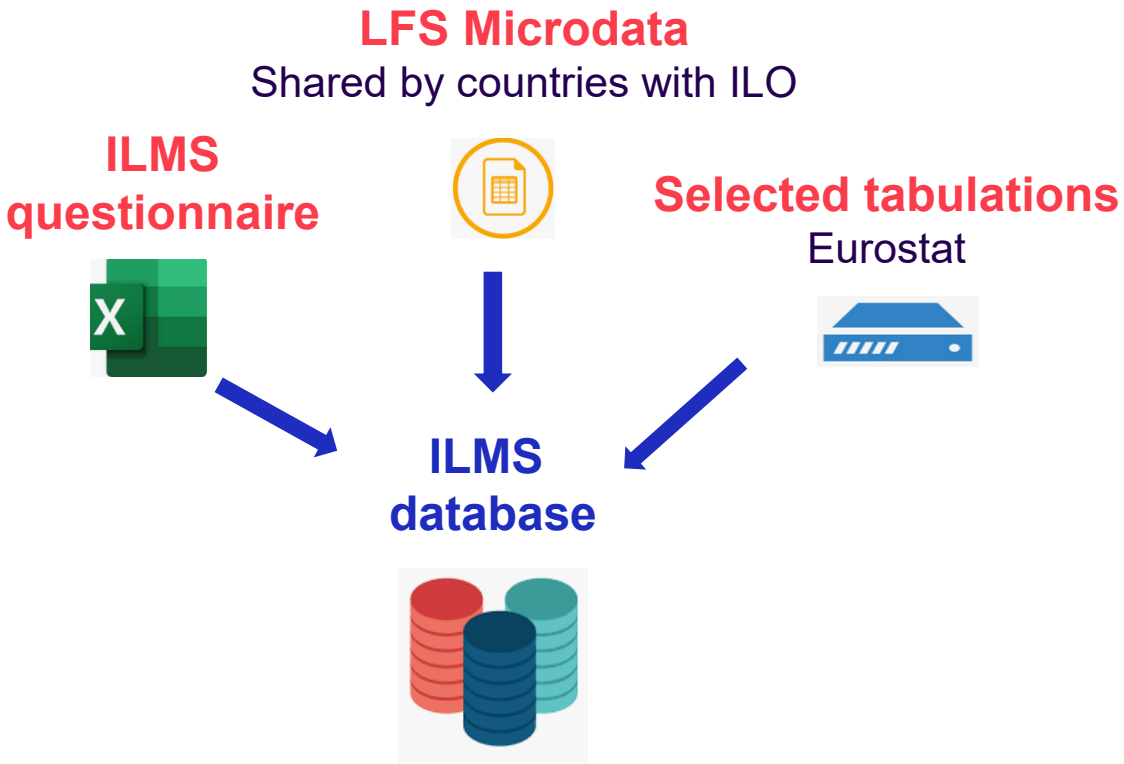
Help us improve the global data availability!



ILO ILMS questionnaire:

- Sent annually to ILMS national NSO focal points

Essential to compile:

- Minimum priority data from Census
- Minimum priority data from administrative records

- 2025 Questionnaire launch : **30 September 2025**
- Submission deadline : **30 October 2025**

Contact us at: **ILMS_QUEST@ilo.org**