How much a domestic worker should be paid is an issue of much debate. It is a question that communities and institutions struggle to answer: How much does a family need to cover their basic needs and live a decent life? The Basic Conditions of Employment Act 75 of 1997 (BCEA) and Sectoral Determination 7 set out what the minimum wage for domestic workers is. However, the minimum wage is not always enough to keep domestic workers out of poverty.

This factsheet explains what the law says about how much domestic workers should get paid. It explains what the minimum wage is for domestic workers and questions whether the minimum wage is enough to be a living wage. The information in this factsheet comes from the Socio-Economic Rights Institute of South Africa (SERI)'s Domestic Workers' Rights: A Legal and Practical Guide, which can be downloaded here.

**REMEMBER:**
It is unlawful (or illegal) for employers to pay less than the minimum wage. If an employer does this, a domestic worker can lay a complaint against them with the Department of Labour or take the issue to the CCMA.

**What is the minimum wage for domestic workers?**

Since 2002, the government set a minimum wage for domestic workers. The minimum wage set out in Sectoral Determination 7 is the lowest pay an employer is legally allowed to pay to his or her employee.

Wages can be paid daily, weekly, fortnightly or monthly on the pay day agreed to by both the employer and the domestic worker. An employer can pay in cash at the workplace during working hours in a sealed envelope (an employer must provide a pay slip if he or she pays a domestic worker in cash) or by depositing the pay in the domestic worker's bank account on the agreed upon pay day.
How is the minimum wage for domestic workers calculated?

In South Africa, there is not just one single minimum wage for domestic workers. What minimum wage a domestic worker is entitled to depends on whether they work more or less than 27 hours a week, and whether they are employed in a large municipality like Johannesburg and Pretoria (which fall under Area A) or smaller municipalities like Rustenburg (which fall under Area B), for a list of municipalities under Area A and B, see: [http://www.labour.gov.za/DOL/downloads/legislation/sectoral-determinations/basic-conditions-of-employment/domesticwages_2017.pdf](http://www.labour.gov.za/DOL/downloads/legislation/sectoral-determinations/basic-conditions-of-employment/domesticwages_2017.pdf).

The minimum wage for domestic workers is reviewed every November by the Department of Labour, and increases by about 7% each year.

**Domain Worker Minimum Wage Schedule**

(1 January 2018 to 30 November 2018)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>MORE THAN 27 ORDINARY HOURS PER WEEK</th>
<th>27 ORDINARY HOURS PER WEEK OR LESS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hourly rate</td>
<td>Weekly rate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Area A:</td>
<td>R13.05</td>
<td>R587.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Area B:</td>
<td>R11.89</td>
<td>R534.91</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**EXAMPLES**

If Nelisiwe works for her employer who lives in Johannesburg (Area A) from 7:30am until 3:30pm from Monday until Thursday each week, then:

- In total she works 32 hours each week (more than 27 hours per week).
- Therefore Nelisiwe is entitled to a minimum wage of R2545.22 from her employer each month (the monthly rate for Area A).

If Rebecca works two days a week for her employer who lives in Rustenburg (Area B), for 8 hours each day, then:

- In total she works 16 hours each week (less than 27 hours per week).
- Therefore she would be entitled to a minimum wage of R378.83 per week (if she asks to get paid weekly) or a minimum of R1641.48 per month (if she is paid monthly).

Is the minimum wage for domestic workers enough?

In South Africa most low-income earners, including people like farm workers, cleaners, gardeners, waiters and domestic workers are usually paid wages that are often not enough to afford them a decent standard of living. Even though the law requires that domestic workers be paid a minimum wage, the minimum wage is not always enough to cover the basic needs or costs of domestic workers. The experience of low-income earners has led to a debate about whether the minimum wage is enough to ensure that domestic workers are able to afford an adequate standard of living. Many people have argued that a minimum wage is not enough and that employers need to pay a **living wage**.
What is a living wage?

A living wage is defined by the International Labour Organization (ILO) as “the amount necessary to meet the reasonable needs (or basic needs) of an unskilled labourer with a family of average size”.

Basic needs include things like adequate food, shelter and clothing, as well as household equipment and furniture. This means that a living wage is a wage that is enough to cover all of the basic needs of domestic workers with an average size family.

How is a living wage for domestic workers calculated?

Research done by Open Up (a non-governmental organisation in South Africa) has found that a living wage for domestic workers can be calculated by taking into account the following factors:

- **Household size** – How many people does the domestic worker financially support?
- **Food costs** – The Pietermaritzburg Agency for Community Social Action (PACSA) estimates that the minimum nutritional food basket for a family of four costs R2616.70 a month.
- **Transport costs** – How much money does a domestic worker spend each day to get from their home to work?
- **Housing costs**
- **Healthcare costs**
- **Education costs** – In South Africa on average families pay between R100 and R200 per month for the education of each child (this doesn’t include additional costs like uniforms, stationary and transport).
- **Communication costs**
- **Recreation costs** and
- **Household costs** – This includes clothing for children, household items and emergency expenses.

Employers need to think about all these factors when setting the wage for their domestic workers. Open Up has developed a Living Wage Calculator for employers to use when determining what they will pay their domestic employees. It can be found at Open Up’s website (http://living-wage.co.za/).

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