

Hypervulnerability and Agency: The Impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic on Migrant Women Working in the Domestic Services Sector

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Background & relevance

The following aspects have not been studied yet in Switzerland :

- the effects of the pandemic according to residence and employment status on migrant domestic workers
- the impact of public health measures related to the pandemic on the rights and working conditions of migrant women domestic workers
- the capacity of these women to exercise agency in the context of the pandemic (forms of negotiation, perception, resources, strategies, etc.)

Domestic work is essential to the functioning of society, vital to the well-being of many households. However, it is undervalued, poorly paid and delegated to migrant women. The Covid-19 pandemic has had a strong impact on the living conditions and well-being of these women, particularly undocumented workers who have lost their jobs and income and were excluded from federal financial assistance programs. Our study will explore how the pandemic affected the lives of these women and how they exercised agency in their responses to the public health crisis.

Research questions

- What has been the impact of Covid-19 on female MDWs, given their state of hypervulnerability?
- How have these women experienced, reacted to, and adapted to the crisis, and how have they reimagined “stability” during and after the pandemic?
- What national and cantonal policies and measures have been put in place to support MDWs and how have they been justified by key stakeholders?
- How have the pandemic itself and the public health guidelines shaped the agency of MDWs?
- What are the differences in terms of risks and agency between MDW according to their class, ethno-race, legal status and type of employment?

Research design: 4 selected cantons BS, FR, GE, ZH



Cantonal Covid-19 policies and measures

- Documentary research and discursive analysis of policies and measures affecting directly or indirectly MDW. Data: reports, parliamentary debates, local newspapers. Exploratory, semi-structured interviews with representatives of social services agencies, community associations, and public health organisations. Total: 60 (15 per canton).

Effects of the Covid-19 pandemic

- Biographical-narrative interviews with MDWs in and out of the asylum system, undocumented or with a residence permit (B, C, F, N). Total: 128 (32 per canton)

Participatory approach

- Expert advisory committees, World Café, Workshop

year	months			
2023	4,5,6			
	7,8,9			
	10,11,12			
2024	1,2,3			
	4,5,6			
	7,8,9			
2025	1,2,3			
	4,5,6			
	7,8,9			
2026	1,2,3			



Outcome, outreach & knowledge transfer



- The project will generate practical, in-depth and contextualised knowledge about a largely invisible group. Elaboration of recommendations to support vulnerable populations and promote their well-being in times of crisis.
- Key stake-holders: a) Cantonal states institutions related to gender equality, integration of migrants and social affairs; b) associations of support of undocumented migrants and migrants threat by poverty; c) Ad hoc knowledge exchange meetings.
- Focused on a participatory approach

Expert advisory committees

