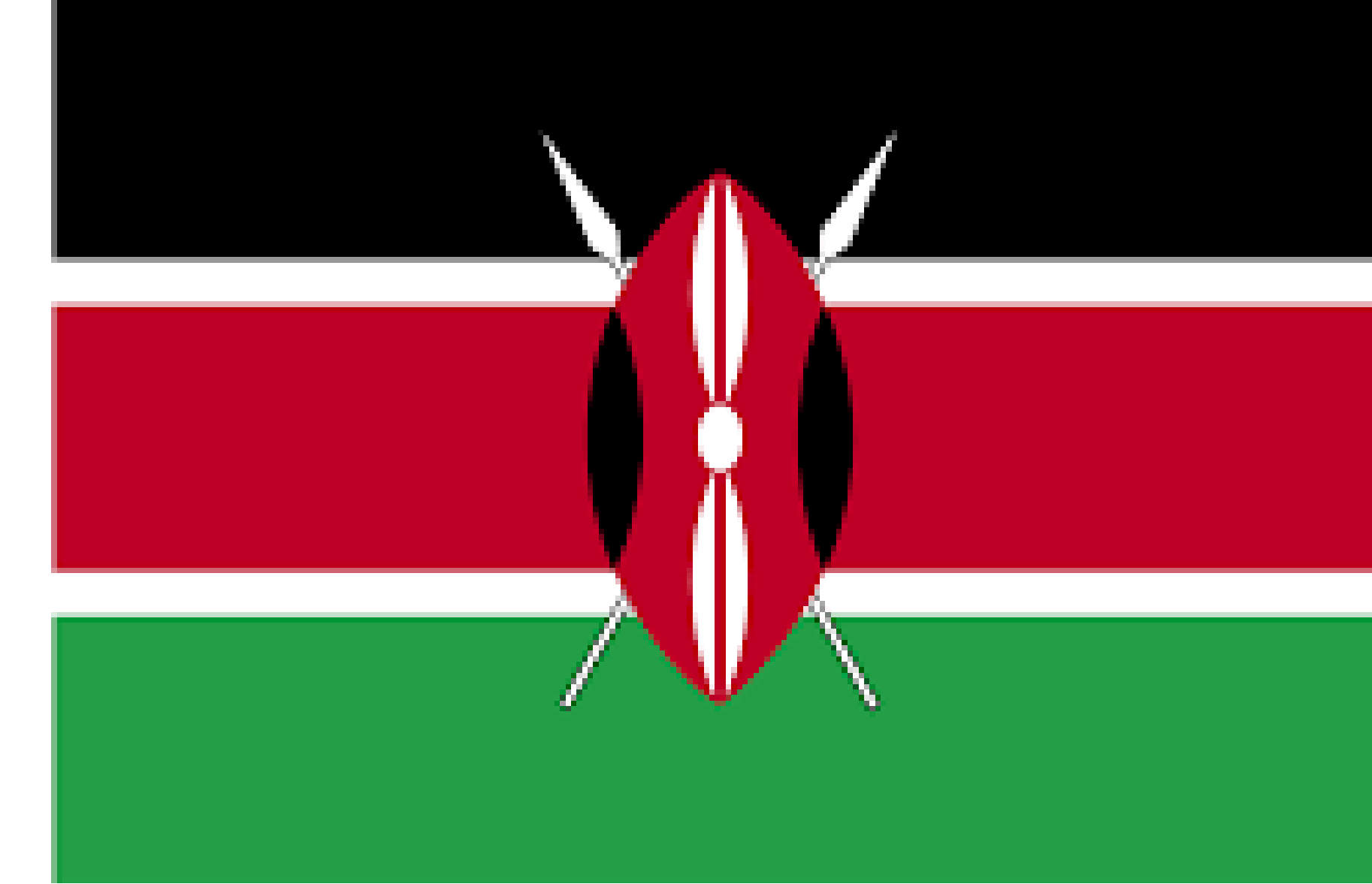


Domestic Workers' Violations in Kenya

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Introduction

In an increasingly corporate and industrial global economy, those employed in private homes away from the public eye often face exploitation and abuse with nowhere to go. Domestic workers in Kenya, largely comprised of women and young girls, migrate to Gulf countries in the Middle East including Saudi Arabia and Qatar. Here, they experience a wide range of workers' rights violations including physical and sexual abuse, reduced wages, and the inability to leave their employment. After an overwhelming number of desperate calls from Kenyan domestic workers trapped in the Gulf, the Kenyan government instituted several measures to mitigate the risk of abuse abroad. However, with desperate calls still coming through everyday, various organizations are advocating for the ratification of the International Labor Organization (ILO) Convention 189 to improve working conditions, gain protections, and earn fair wages for domestic workers in Kenya. However, efforts like these can only be so effective without supporting legislation. This study will examine the violations against domestic workers' rights in Kenya by researching enforced ILO standards, the government's attempts (or lack of) to remedy the issue, and the impact of advocacy organizations.

Kenyan Labor Statistics

- Total population: 47.8 million
- Employed population: 17,783,200
- GDP in 2019: 89 billion US dollars
- Average monthly earnings: \$592
- Largest sector of employment is agriculture
- Activities of Households as Employers (Domestic) sector: 115,400

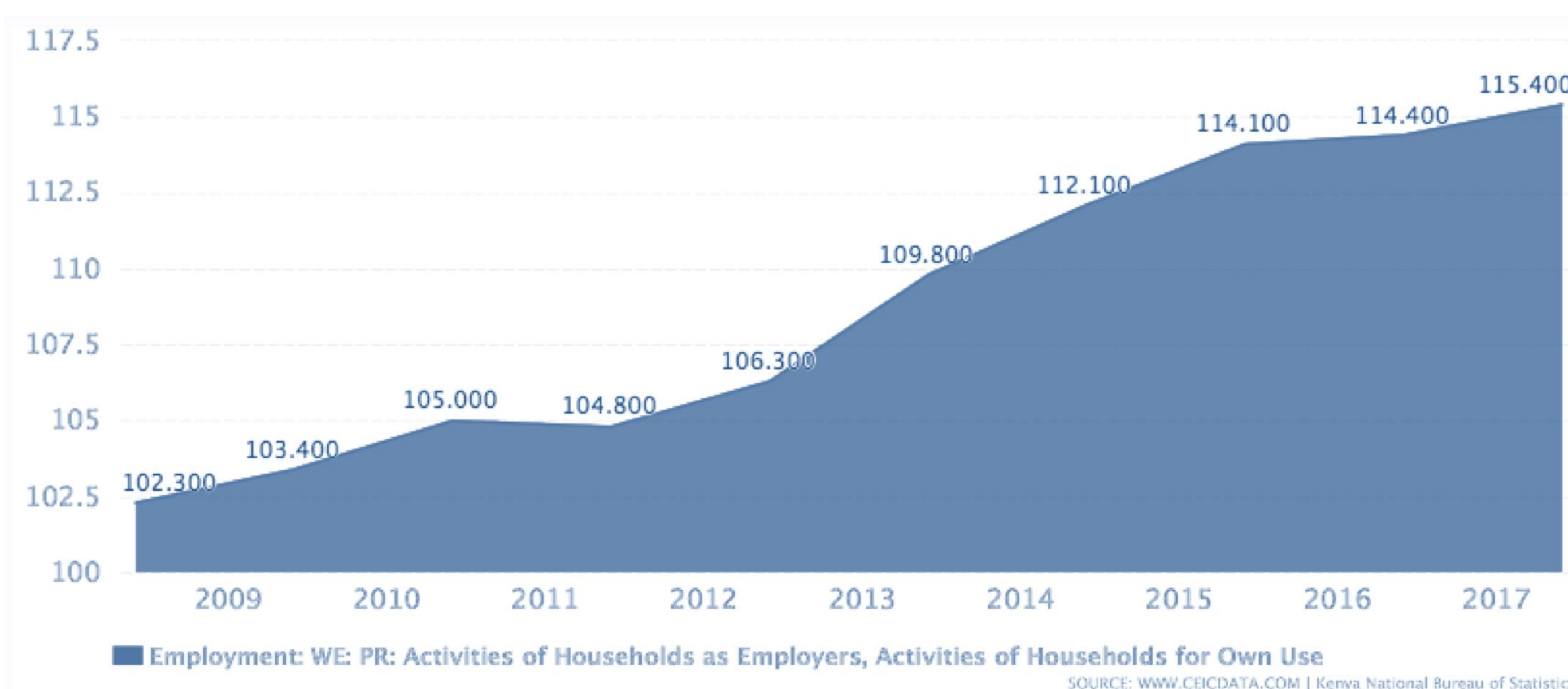


Figure 1. Rising Domestic Worker Population in Kenya. Courtesy of the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics.

Domestic Workers in Kenya



- Mainly women and young girls termed “housegirls”
- Large need for domestic workers in Gulf countries
 - Saudi Arabia, Qatar, etc.
 - Better pay
 - Send money home to families

Figure 2. Kenyan Domestic Workers Migration to Gulf Countries. Map courtesy of Harper College.

Violation Claims

Abuse by employers	• Physical and sexual
Reduced pay	• Legal minimum wage for a monthly contract: 13,000 Kshs per month • Commonly paid: 5,000 Kshs per month
“Kafala system” in Gulf countries	• Prohibits workers from leaving a job without employer’s consent
Recruitment agencies don’t assist workers once at the site of employment	• No legal obligation to help workers return home

Government Response

Banned travel for work to Gulf countries • 2014-2017	Vetted and authorized certain recruitment agencies to operate	Labor attaches to help workers settle abroad
Verified recruitment agencies pay a bond • Money to help trapped workers leave	Agreement with Saudi Arabia • Minimum wage, food, and housing for workers	

Advocacy for Kenyan Domestic Workers

- Rallying for ratification of ILO Convention 189
- Trace Kenya
 - Helps bring Kenyan workers home
- Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO)
 - “Domestic Workers and Convention 189: Making it Real” workshop in Nairobi, Kenya
- Kenya Union of Domestic, Hotel, Educational Institutions, Hospitals and Allied Workers (KUDHEIHA)
 - Educate domestic workers on their rights



Figure 3. Kenyan Domestic Workers March for the Ratification of ILO Convention 189. Image courtesy of the Solidarity Center.

Conclusions

The efforts of the Kenyan government and advocacy organizations give domestic workers confidence to migrate back to the Gulf with hopes of better working conditions. However, “rogue brokers” are still at large and operating without approval from the Kenyan government. Without legal enforcement such as the ratification of ILO Convention 189, Kenyan domestic workers will not have the necessary rights to ensure their protection abroad.

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