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Nearly 500,000 Cubans are self-employed

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The number of workers in Cuba's private sector continues to rise, so by the end of July there were 471,085 people working for themselves, according to official data released Monday.

Almost 70 percent of those "autonomous" workers had no previous employment, *Trabajadores*, the publication of Cuba's official CTC labor federation, said in its latest issue.

Over the past five months, more than 15,500 people were added to the private sector, which "is getting stronger as a valid employment option in the economy," the weekly said.

Food preparation, transport and real estate remain the most frequent activities among autonomous workers.

Of the total number, 311,000 of the self-employed have social security, which offers them benefits comparable to those of state workers, such as weekly days off and protection in case of accident or illness.

Women make up 29 percent of those working for themselves, an amount similar to that of young people, the deputy director of employment at the Labor and Social Security Ministry, Idalmys Alvarez, said in the article.

In September 2013, the Raul Castro administration expanded to 18 the number of occupations eligible for self-employment, such as those of realtor, agricultural wholesaler and agent of telecommunications services and systems, in that way legalizing activities that had previously been done in an illegal way in Cuba.

At that time there were 436,000 self-employed workers on the island, which indicates an increase of 8 percent since then.

Expanding the work done by the private sector is one of the principal reforms promoted by Castro to "modernize" Cuba's socialist model and compensate for the gradual elimination of some 500,000 state jobs between 2011 and

2015.

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