



*What a Way
to Make a Living:*

**VIOLENCE AND HARASSMENT FACED BY MIGRANT WOMEN
IN THE WORLD OF WORK IN ARGENTINA, BRAZIL, PERU,
COLOMBIA, GUATEMALA AND MEXICO**



Global Alliance Against Traffic in Women



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The gender perspective allows us to understand **violence against women** not as a personal or individual issue, but as a problem that concerns the entire **social and cultural structure.**



The research in brief

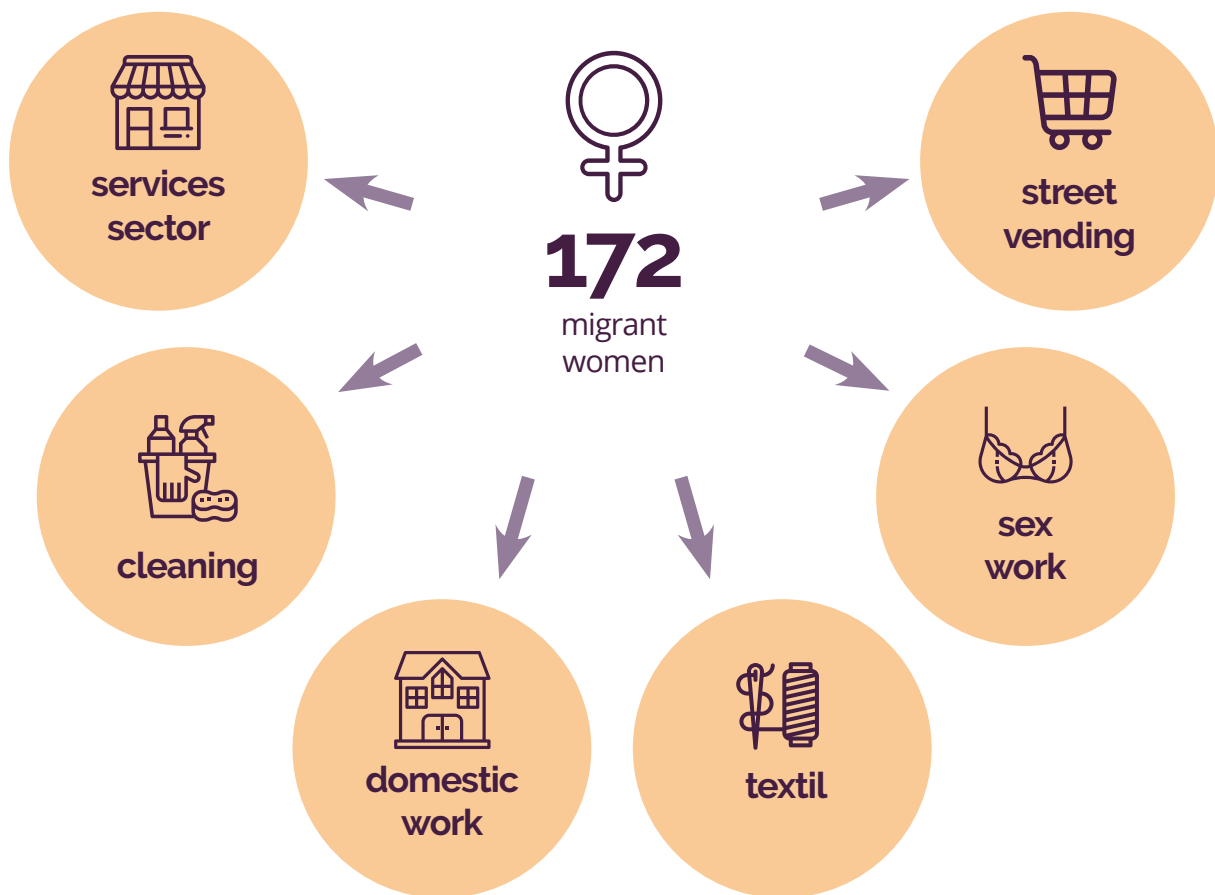
In 2019, eight Latin American members of GAATW carried out a research project titled ‘Migrant women against violence in the world of work’ in Mexico, Guatemala, Colombia, Peru, Brazil and Argentina¹.

The objective of the research was to explore the nature of gender-based **violence in the world of work** from the perspective of women migrant workers. The study privileged the views and perceptions of participants, while recognising that inequalities do not affect all women in the same way.¹

The researchers held **individual interviews** and **focus group discussions** with the women in order to gain insights into their experiences with discrimination, exploitation, violence and abuse in the world of work, and the strategies they use to deal with these situations.

Since work life cannot be separated from personal life, participants shared their experiences of discrimination, inequality and harassment by employers as well as society in general and their partners in particular. Sometimes the women themselves made comments such as ‘*Women should not wear a certain type of clothing*’ or ‘*[Women] need to respect themselves, otherwise they could suffer some kind of violence*’ without realising the violence of these statements. To deal with these issues, the research process encouraged **reflection together with the participants**, including conversations about *machismo*, labour rights and women’s rights.

1. The organisations were: Brigada Callejera de Apoyo a la Mujer “Elisa Martínez” AC, Mexico, ECPAT, Guatemala, Corporación Espacios de Mujer, Colombia, Sindicato de Trabajadoras Domésticas (SINTRASEDOM), Colombia, CHS-Alternativo, Peru, Associação de Defesa da Mulher, da Infância e da Juventude (ASBRAD), Brazil, Instituto Brasileiro de Inovações pro Sociedade Saudável (IBISS-CO), Brazil, and Asociación Civil de DDHH Mujeres Unidas Migrantes y Refugiadas en Argentina (AMUMRA), Argentina.



In total, **172 migrant women** took part in the research. These women worked in different sectors but mainly in **cleaning and domestic work, textile, sex work, street vending and the services sector.**

Many of the interview participants were domestic workers, whose work is largely informal. The ILO report *Decent Work for Domestic Workers* states that 'Domestic work is essential for the economy outside the household to function and, yet, it is undervalued and poorly regulated. It is undervalued because the skills and competencies associated with it are considered to be a woman's innate, rather than acquired, ca-

capacity. It is poorly regulated because it is not regarded as "real" work, and, where the law protects it, enforcement is often problematic'.²

Work in the *maquila* (textile factories under special economic rules) was another job performed by a large number of the participants. In many cases *maquila* is synonymous with violation of human and labour rights, with daily wages of just over 1 US dollar, 68-hour work weeks, unhealthy environments, lack of healthcare benefits, restrictions on union membership, etc.³ On many occasions the workers live in the same place where they work, in very preca-

2. ILO, Decent work for domestic workers, International Labor Conference, 99th Session, 2010, Chap. X, Section 324. https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/@ed_norm/@relconf/documents/meetingdocument/wcms_104700.pdf

3. Oxfam International, Rights hanging by a thread: textile free zones versus fair trade cooperatives, 2015, Page 4. <https://oxfamintermon.s3.amazonaws.com/sites/default/files/documentos/files/DerechoQuePendenDeUnHilo.pdf>

rious conditions and under constant control and supervision.

The research participants who work in the sex industry face violence not only from employers and clients, but in most cases from the state through public official. They were also the only workers who also reported extreme violence by neighbours, church members and journalists. *'In San Cristóbal de las Casas, Chiapas, several people in the neighbourhood insulted us, they ripped off our clothes, they beat us with sticks, they threw us into the freezing river and threatened to burn us alive the next time they saw us by the inn.'*

Unfortunately, most cases of **labour rights violations** are not reported for fear of dismissal or reprisals or for lack of trust in the institutions responsible for ensuring compliance with labour legislation. This fear is well founded, because the workers

① Have experience with **not being heard or believed**, so they assume that their situation will not change if they complain.

② They **feel shame**, especially if they experienced sexual violence, because in many cases they have been blamed for causing it.

③ They cannot risk losing their jobs because of the **strong economic need** to support their families. Those who did decide to report did not see any change or action that would improve their circumstances.

The prospect of being unemployed and therefore without income to support their families, pay for their daughters' and sons' school, medicines, food and housing appears as the primary reason why participants endured many of the situations they shared. As one of them argued:

It was better to keep quiet; if you said something or protested, it was worse – they would kick you out without paying you for the time you had already worked.'



Violence in the world of work is closely related to the structural violence against women that is rooted in the fact that women and everything considered feminine is undervalued. **Gender-based violence** is not an isolated phenomenon, but **is part of a patriarchal structure** based on unequal power relations that assign different roles, attributes and spaces for women and men, justify the subordination of women and position men in a situation of privilege.

Many of the participants experienced violence first at home, by their partners, and when they went to work, they met with sexist attitudes, harassment, mistreatment and exploitation, but also with lower wages than men and very few possibilities for promotion.

The gender perspective allows us to understand violence against women not as a personal or individual issue, but as a problem that concerns the entire social and cultural structure. Many of the participants commented that violence against women comes from cultural patterns and that, in order to change them, it is important to have gender equality education, practise good treatment and promote respect for women.

Through the interviews we observed that many of the workers remained in a cycle of constant exploitation during their migration process. In addition, economic and social structures operate in such a way that the first labour option found by migrant women is within feminised jobs, where **precariousness and informality are the norm** rather than an exception.

The types of violence that research participants reported were very similar, but the violence and the experience itself varies according to the labour sector, nationality, ethnicity, age, and other factors. Intersectionality is evident in all their stories.

At the same time, despite the various forms of violence, the lives of **these women are marked by strong resilience**. As many of them said, *'It is very difficult to be a migrant, to live in a country that is not yours, to live in a country without speaking the language'*. However, they resist daily and adopt their own strategies to foster social change. They look at the future with optimism and consider that their migration has allowed them to improve their and their families' living conditions. This makes them happy and proud.



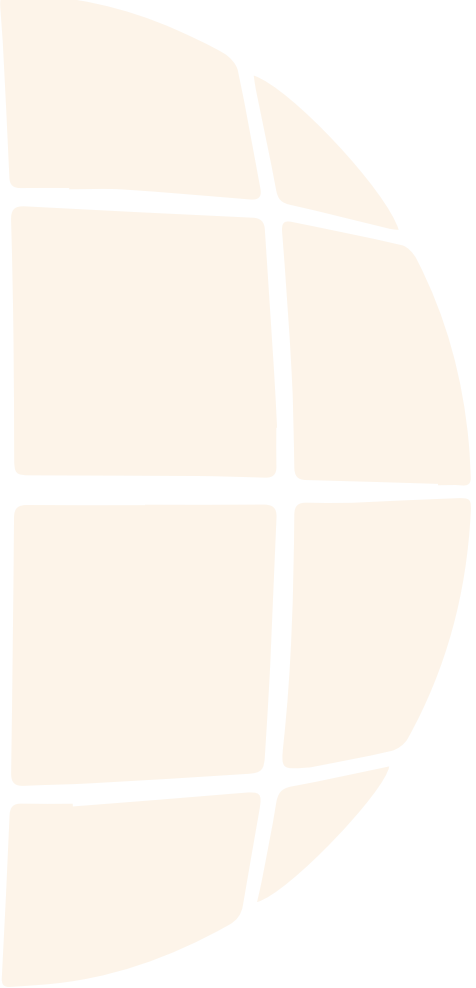


There was a common **desire for decent working conditions**, guaranteed rest and leisure time, and remuneration according to the work done and national laws.

What is appropriate is to work from Monday to Friday, to be paid for holidays, to be paid for overtime, to stop believing that you are doing [employers] a favour or it's just for fun and there is no kind of compensation; that [employers] agree that, according to your work and experience, they should increase your salary, so that you can grow within the company'.

Through their participation in the research, the women saw **the importance of sharing experiences of violence in order to collectivise and promote zero tolerance towards abuse**. They indicated that in order to enjoy their rights, it is important that women know them and that the authorities promote and protect them since *all women have the right to live their lives safely and without violence*.

The information presented in this summary reflects the realities of the women who participated in this study and is not intended to be a generalisation of the conditions of women migrant workers. However, this information allows us to identify common elements and adapt our political advocacy.



Results



Migrant women are responsible for the physical, emotional and financial wellbeing of their family, both in the country of destination and origin.



The main reasons to migrate are related to the lack of educational and labour opportunities; the search for better living conditions; and the family's survival. In some cases, the decision to migrate was prompted by instances of male violence against women and lack of institutional response.



Economic needs and the lack of public services force women workers to put up with different kinds of violence.

They have to accept informal jobs and work under conditions of exploitation. Companies and employers know this and offer migrant women precarious jobs without any labour protections.



The risk situations experienced by migrant women are associated with their multiple identities (women, poor, migrants, afro-descendants, indigenous, etc.) and the sector

in which they work (domestic work, textile, sex work, street vending, etc.) The simple fact of being a migrant woman already puts them in a situation of double vulnerability, as a woman in a patriarchal and misogynistic society and as a migrant in a xenophobic society.



Sex workers face particular situations of violence that begin with the criminalisation of their source of income (and sometimes their children are taken away from them for this reason), mandatory medical exams and pregnancy tests in order to be able to work, and in some extreme cases, disappearance and murder. The workers who participated in this study consider these patterns of violence as a measure to discipline them as women.



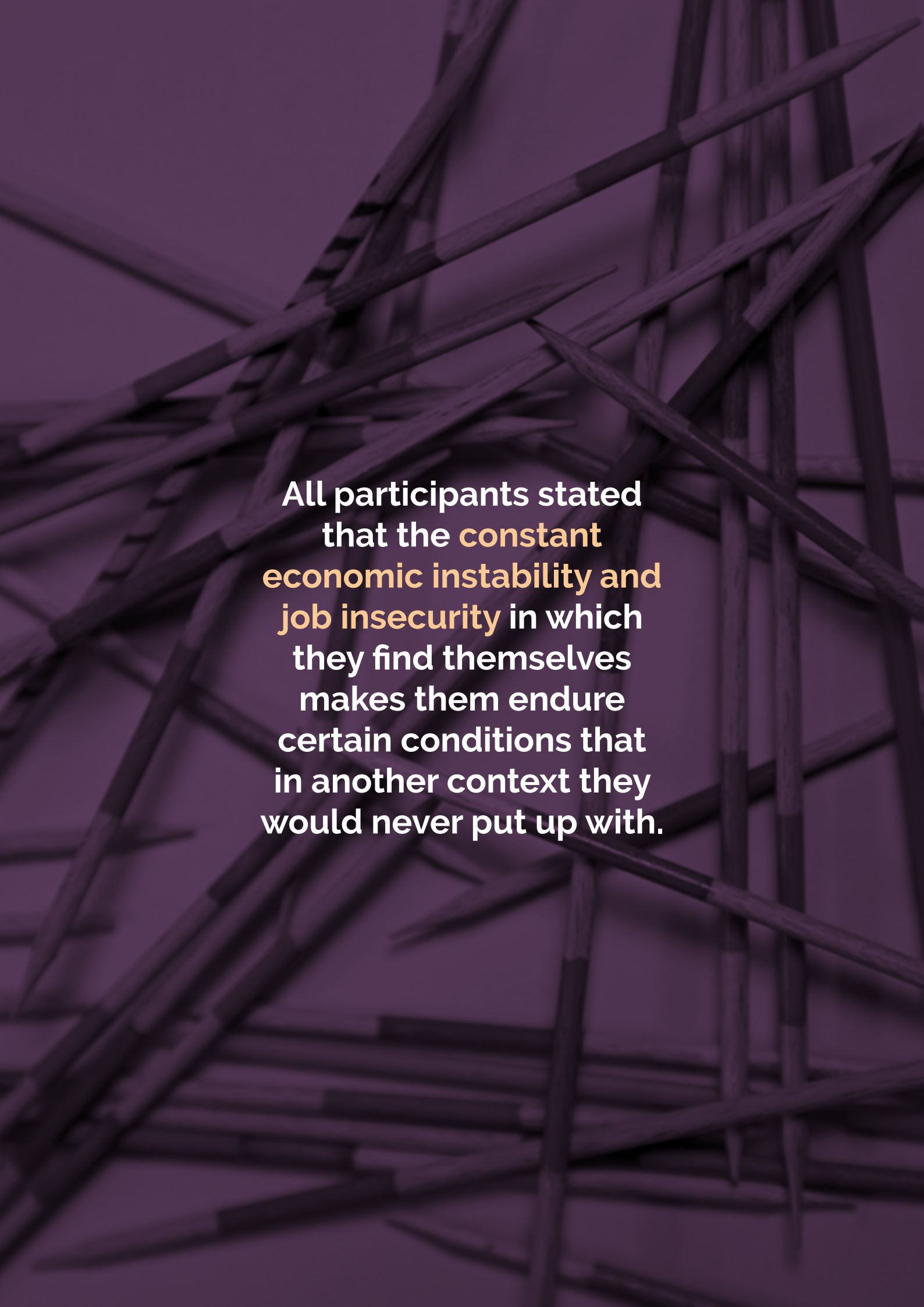
In general, the countries in the study have legislation against gender-based violence; however, **there are no real measures that protect women's**

rights. It is obvious that the implementation and regulatory frameworks face challenges, especially in relation to protection and access to justice. Some countries, such as Brazil and Argentina, have inclusive immigration laws that guarantee migrants the same rights as nationals. However, the implementation of the laws is not enough to guarantee these rights and the current political and social environments lean towards more restrictive legislation.



There is a knowledge gap and a **great distrust in public institutions responsible for guaranteeing justice concerning both male violence against women and labour issues.** Some participants perceive these institutions as a space where impunity and revictimisation prevail. Others do not trust the police and in general have a long history of bad experiences with these institutions where the response they received was insufficient and, in many cases, reproduced violence.

The exploitation and violations of labour rights are not an aberration of the system, but are integrated into the neo-liberal economic paradigm. Labour relations must be consistent with national and international standards and must respect fundamental rights such as freedom, independence and unionisation. Otherwise, circumstances associated with labour exploitation or extreme forms of human rights violations, such as human trafficking, will continue.



All participants stated that the **constant economic instability and job insecurity** in which they find themselves makes them endure certain conditions that in another context they would never put up with.

Most common forms of violence

The situation faced by women migrant workers should be seen in light of the consequences that the neoliberal capitalist economy has created and normalised: lack of social coverage, poverty wages, exploitative working conditions and job insecurity.

All participants stated that the constant economic instability and job insecurity in which they find themselves makes them endure certain conditions that in another context they would never put up with. They were also aware that this situation of need is exploited by the people or companies that employ them.



Working conditions

Research participants work under conditions of precariousness and labour exploitation. In the informal sectors, low wages, excessive working hours and lack of time off, and huge physical and psychological stress are the norm. All this has an impact on women's health and reduces their time for personal and family life.

The testimonies also speak to the unequal social and cultural burden on women in terms of care, with lacking public services for childcare, or policies that allow them to balance work outside and within the home.

Contractual relationships are mostly verbal and are continuously breached, with frequent changes of the conditions, schedule, remuneration, duties or the place where the work is performed. Although having a written contract does not guarantee the protection of labour rights, not having it complicates the claim of rights.

The most frequent situation I have faced is breach of contract: when they offer you the job, they tell you that you'll have such and such benefits, that they'll pay you

this much, that you'll work that many hours, but everything is verbal and little by little conditions begin to change; in the end you end up working many hours, for a lower pay, often while they scream at you.'

Most participants receive a **salary below the national minimum wage** and below both the men and the local workers who do the same work. For example, in the case of Haitian workers in Brazil, they earn up to 20 per cent less than a white Brazilian woman in the same position. In the case of textile factories, *'normally, it works like this: they [factory owners] pay more to the Bolivian man than to the Bolivian woman, for the same piece produced. If you ask, they say that men work better, because they don't have to stop to go to the bathroom or to look after the children. But that is not true because the payment is per piece. If I made 10 shirts and a man made 10 shirts, why does he receive 55 cents and I 50? What a nonsense! This is discrimination and this always happens.'*

In other cases, women received lower salaries than agreed, received them late or not at all because of supposed food or other costs. *'I was looking for a job and I made it clear that I was a newcomer and didn't have my papers. The lady hired me for 250 soles a week that included lunch, but she didn't stick to that agreement and at the end of the work week she reduced money for all lunches and paid me only 100 soles.'*

In most cases **employers do not insure workers, nor register them with the national social security system**, even those who have documents or who do not need documentation for it.

Workers are not granted permission to go to the doctor and even if they are sick or injured, they have to work under threat of losing the day's wage or being fired, *'I had a scaphoid fracture for nine months; I was disabled in one hand, and I did everything with my left. They didn't give me any time off.'*

On many occasions, employers refuse to accept medical certificates; they consider it 'taking time off' and deduct the hours from the worker's salary or free time. This means that in many cases the workers continue working even when they are sick.

Excessive working hours and demanding work with few or no days off were common; in some cases it meant constant availability. In the case of live-in domestic workers, some work every day, 10 – 15 hours a day. They must also be available to work for night parties but they receive no overtime or night additions.

In garment factories, employers impose deadlines and targets that are hard to reach and put pressure on women workers to work more and faster: *'... many hours of work and I could not go out to see my children, because if I did, I would not make progress. Also, they didn't let me go out and I felt like I was incarcerated; I could only go out one Sunday. I had to work from 8.00 in the morning until 10.00 at night.'*

Something specific that occurs in the *maquilas* is known as *velada*, which means locking the workers inside the *maquila* during the night so that they continue working and reach the production targets. *'They said well, we are late, so now it is velada; they closed the gate and nobody could leave, you*

had to keep working sometimes all night. They didn't ask if you wanted or not'.

The women said that the pace of work does not leave them any time for personal life, leisure or organising and all these activities become unimportant.

People don't have time, not even for family [...] It's like they want you to not have time, so that the system is maintained.'

Usually **the women do not receive a clear instruction about the tasks they have to perform** and, on many occasions, they have to do jobs that were not agreed in advance.

In cases where workers work and live in the same space, such as live-in domestic workers or some of the women in garment factories, **they do not have access to proper food or adequate rest and hygiene spaces.** *'I cook and do all things... but, when it comes to food, they always give me the*

worst [...] They don't give me meat, only fat; they spread the rice on the plate to make it look enough or they give me what they don't want to eat; their son said "don't give this to the lady, these are leftovers, she is not a dog".'

Participants also reported cases in which they are **fired suddenly and without explanation.** *'One day I'm going to work [...] [My employer] barely greets me, he comes with a folder and says, I'm tired of you. He gives me a hundred pesos and tells me, take that and get out of here. And I ask him, but why are you firing me? I cried because my children were still so small.'*

Women also spoke about **limitations on their freedom of movement** through confinement: *'I asked the lady why she locked me up and she said nothing. One day I couldn't do that anymore, I was alone, I was afraid that something would happen to me locked up there with no way to defend myself. [...] So I called my relatives and they came with the police to get me out of there';* or through the retention of their identity documents: *'When I got to work, she told me, "Since you are you going to be wor-*



king with our clothes, you have to give me your ID card so I know who you are, and if you run away, I have your ID”.

Street vendors in Argentina and sex workers in Mexico spoke of **continuous police harassment** (the merchandise is taken from street vendors and both groups are insulted, physically assaulted and fined). This causes them a continued uncertainty regarding their physical, economic and psychological integrity.



Physical and psychological violence

Women workers suffer constant abuse and humiliation. Even before any type of violence or harassment, the threat of losing their jobs is always present and this creates a lot of fear.

There is a lot of abuse, violation of rights, yes. It is not easy for a woman who is alone, away from family, in a crowded place, such as factories. The bosses make a lot of jokes, but the other employees do too. Usually it remains there, [the workers] don't want to cause problems and have nowhere to go’.

Most of the workers experience physical violence from the people who employ them. However, in the case of sex workers more than 70 per cent of violence comes from the State, as well as neighbours, journalists, church members and other local groups.

Of all the labour sectors included in this study, domestic workers and sex workers re-

ported the most physical and verbal abuse.

In the case of domestic workers, verbal and physical abuse is exercised both by the homeowners and by their children. The participants defined yelling as a form of humiliation and a mechanism of intimidation: the first step to physical abuse. *‘She explained to me by beating me; she pinched me, she hit me on the head, but I had to put up with it.’*

In the case of sex workers, this violence is extreme and, in many cases, results in disappearance or murder. *‘Juanita was not seen again at this place. On Friday, she didn't get back to her family. They've gone to see if she's in the SEMEFO [Forensic Medical Service] but nobody knows where she is. Other women have left for fear of being killed’.*



Violence and sexual harassment

Participants referred to multiple experiences in the work cycle (hiring, permanence, promotion) where sexual harassment is used as a form of abuse of power and control. *‘Once I showed up for a job and the employer told me I was too young for that job, but that he could help me if I would “behave well” with him. [...] He made me understand that I had to sleep with him in order to get the job’.*

Participants mentioned direct sexual harassment through innuendos, demands for sexual favours and unwanted physical contact, but also more indirect through creating a hostile environment for women, making sexist jokes or asking them to dress and behave in a certain way. *‘Also, because you are Venezuelan, they assume that you have to be*

kind, cheerful... there were only men there and they wanted me to dress and be "suggestive" with customers in order to sell more; "commercial flirting" they called it.'

The study with domestic workers in Colombia shows how employers appropriate the body of the workers because 'they know what's best for them'. They deny them the right to decide and limit their emotional relationships in order to make them asexual women, and make them only work.

The employer thought that I had no right to have friends, or boyfriend or to have sex, because poor women are ignorant and we always screw up and if I had a child she was not going to "take care of me"; she decided for me.'

Historically women's bodies have been controlled and subjected to norms in order to respond to certain standards. From the conversations with the participants it became clear that women who experience sexual violence rarely speak about it and even more rarely report it, because the patriarchal society holds women responsible and this makes them feel guilty and ashamed.



Economic violence

Women also spoke of economic violence where employers do not pay them on time, deprive them of or damage their goods and property, work instruments or personal documents. *'Yes, many times they paid me less than promised, they charged for me things that had been lost or damaged in the house, they paid*

me days or weeks after the payday...; they don't take into account our and our families' needs; sometimes they behave as if they are doing us a favour.'

Employers do not make payments for retirement and social security contributions, and workers are sometimes asked to make expenses out of pocket for which they are not reimbursed afterwards. *'On Saturdays when she gave me money to buy her things, vegetables, everything for the week, it was always too little, so I pay out of my pocket and when I told her, she said, later I will give you the money, later I will give you the money; but she never gave it back.'*

Indebtedness appears as a systematic practice, where economic need makes the labour relationship become a lender-debtor relationship. In the case of sex workers in Mexico, the testimonies show that, in order to work, women have to go into debt all the time and if they do not pay on the terms imposed, they are physically assaulted. Since most of them do not have a written contract, it is impossible to access credit or other formal financial services.




Domestic violence

Many of our participants shared experiences of physical and psychological violence by their partners. There were common stories of violence in which men attacked their wives, abandoned them and robbed them.

I don't have teeth because my ex-husband broke them. At that time, I didn't do anything, I didn't go to the police or anything because I'm afraid

of him. I know that he is also involved in bad things and I am afraid he will do something against my son. After that day we separated and I don't know where he is. He doesn't pay child support and he doesn't even ask about the child.'

When this violence occurs in families living in garment dormitories, there is no separation between family life and working life. Women suffer violence and witness violence experienced by other women.

 *The situation of husbands who beat women in the factory dorms is very common. Once in my room I heard a woman crying. Her husband was drunk and had beaten her badly. Her face was all bruised. It's horrible; people are listening, but really can't do anything. I asked her if she wanted me to go with her to the police, but she didn't want to. It is what it is. I also had my days when I was beaten. We feel very ashamed because everyone finds out. But the next day we carry on as if nothing happened and life goes on.'*



Institutional violence

The institutional violence exercised by public officials reproduces the violence of patriarchy; it makes the abused woman invisible, discriminated against and it denies her the right to be protected by the State.

From the participants' stories it was obvious that institutional violence is normali-

sed and these experiences condition their decisions and limit their possibilities of demanding their rights. Only some of the participants made some kind of complaint or presented their case to the authorities, but almost none of these cases were successful. *'When I went in the labour office and they told me I had to start a process, I felt it was a form of violence not only from the employer, but also from the official. If they are not paid at the end of the month, I'm sure they claim their wages, but because I'm a domestic worker and poor, I have nowhere to go.'*

Street vendors in Argentina reported situations of physical abuse, verbal aggression and removal of merchandise by the police. This leaves them without their means of work, in addition to the constant stress caused by the risk of violence. *'Selling as a street vendor is a very difficult job. I see many colleagues whose things are taken away [...] How can you report, what can you do? They have the gun in their hands.'*

In addition to physical and verbal aggressions by public officials, sex workers in Mexico face threats, gang rape, false accusations and extortion: *'They ask us 200 pesos a day to let us work. When we don't pay, they take us in custody or they steal money from the client they find us with.'*

Finally, many women spoke about the lack of access to public services. In general, they felt that there is a lack of public policies that guarantee them access to health, education and housing. And when they do access public services, they do not feel well received and often experience discrimination. This has a direct impact on women and their quality

of life. The general feeling is that governments are not committed to the well-being of migrants.



Other types of structural violence

“What a woman is supposed to be”

The cultural stereotypes of women in other countries marks the discrimination they experience in those countries. For example, in the Brazilian imaginary, Bolivian people ‘are only good for slave labour’ and Bolivian women do not fit within the beauty standards of Brazilian society. *‘I don’t like the street, because they always tell me: you are the ugliest woman in the world.’*

On the other hand, Venezuelan women are perceived as beautiful and all related experiences where they were sexualised and asked to wear certain clothes and behave in a certain way. *‘I was a saleswoman. The bosses didn’t respect the payment schedule and the job description but wanted me to dress nicely and flirt with customers to sell more; they called it “commercial flirting” so I left that job.’*

In the case of Colombian women, the prejudice is that *‘Colombians are nothing but whores and people who come to steal their money. If I went to a mall or a store to buy food, there were places where they would ignore me because I’m Colombian [...] Yes, I was discriminated against; they always think that you come to do prostitution or they ask what you bring in your suitcase. Just because I’m Colombian. I have no criminal record, I’ve never committed a crime.’*

It was beyond the scope of the research to analyse the symbolic and cultural aspects

of these preconceptions and their impacts on women workers. But it was clear that they directly affect self-perception, hinder the notion of belonging and social inclusion, and limit access to work.

Racism and xenophobia

Women workers experience discrimination on a daily basis and are aware that it varies according to ethnicity. In their experience, European and white migrants are accepted and well treated; African and black women are discriminated because of their skin colour and, like Latin people, are offered only precarious work.

Participants often mentioned that they were treated differently from national workers. *‘When we go to the Health Centre we see that Brazilians and migrants are treated differently. The receptionists and doctors have no patience to explain, to listen to us. This also happens with the police. If a Bolivian woman is a victim of domestic violence, she will not go to the police. Why? They don’t answer, they don’t understand what we’re talking about, they treat us with disrespect, and they say they there’s nothing they can do.’*

Almost all participants had heard ‘jokes’, racist insults, comments that they are in the country ‘to steal jobs and overload public services’, or that they are to blame for the lack of work for local people. They have also sensed contempt by their employers for being foreigners or for ignoring cultural codes. Women workers feel that they are perceived as cheap labour that does not know how to work and, in times of crisis, they notice that the local population looks at them as a threat.



These situations can be exacerbated by the political climate. For example, participants commented that in Brazil the situation has worsened in the last two years due to racist and xenophobic speeches from the government.

Many participants have experienced discrimination because of their skin colour and because they are immigrants. *'They discriminated me because of my skin colour, they told me that the work is not for black people, they called me for a job but as soon as they saw me, they told me that the position was taken'*. Many times, the women were confused and did not know if the treatment they received was because of their skin colour, or because they are immigrants, or both.

Machismo

Machismo was a dominant part of women's stories, reflecting a patriarchal culture in

which men do not value women. This is reflected in their treatment at work, but also in other areas of life.

I had an issue with my husband – I did not want to take birth control pills and we agreed that he would use condoms. But he didn't do it and I had to take the morning after pill every month. One day I decided to put in the device without telling him. When he realised, he got very angry and I told him that I make my own decisions, I have my rights and I recognise them.'

In general, as women receive information about their rights (labour, reproductive, sexual, etc.), they begin to make decisions about their lives and share this information with other women.

Venezuelan participants in Peru commented that gender violence persists because of a culture of *machismo* that 'teaches women to be submissive and men to feel that they are above them.' They emphasised that *machismo* is a learnt behaviour and that the solution involves gender-equality education.

In a macro way, it would be a matter of education, because it is a problem of the system [...] so that men get it out of their heads that we are things. But women need education too, because we live in a patriarchal system in which women are taught to endure and accept things, so one assumes that it's normal that they talk to us and treat us in a certain way... but no, it's not normal – they have normalised it.'

Participants also shared that *machismo* hinders the development of a justice system that really responds to their needs as migrant women. They stressed the need to educate and train public officials so that they do not perpetuate practices that re-victimise, and so that the institutions responsible for cases of gender violence in the world of work can function efficiently with foreign victims.

I think that the State has to carry out awareness campaigns no matter what. The mechanisms are there, but they are not recognised by the people in power. Education is super important, not only for children but at all levels of society.'

The background of the image is a large, ancient stone face carved into a wall. The face has a serene expression and is partially obscured by a modern, dark, zigzag pattern in the lower-left corner. The overall image has a dark, purple-tinted overlay.

**It is urgent
to promote a culture
of good treatment
and respect that value
and protect people's
lives for the simple
fact of being a person,
regardless of where
they come from.**

Actions 4 for change

The research identified actions for change and these will be developed by each organisation together with the participants.

The actions are varied and were defined in line with the reality of each country and labour sectors, as well as the demands of the migrant workers who participated in the research.

Most of the activities fit under the following ideas:



The actions are varied and were defined in line with the reality of each country and labour sectors, as well as the demands of the migrant workers who participated in the research.

Social change strategies need self-organisation around collective interests to guarantee access to justice,

knowledge and protection of rights, and professional training. It is necessary to facilitate favourable social and community conditions so that women workers can organise themselves independently and as equals, with the support of other actors, but without depending on or being conditioned by them. This organisation would allow **politicising their individual experiences** and demanding the guarantee of their rights collectively.

The **support to the workers** must be given by civil society organisations that are close and aware about their reality and promote spaces for exchange among the workers, but also with academia and public institutions. These spaces will open opportunities to **share their experience with other women, participate in local advocacy activities and create alliances.**



Many of the study participants belong to associations of migrants from the same country, trade unions, volunteer groups, and other communities that stimulate the establishment of social leadership and strengthen both people and the community. These spaces also serve to create peer support tools and networks beyond the migration process and labour issues.

To this effect, it is necessary to **implement educational activities** for gender equity, respect and human rights so that societies can guarantee women and migrants full enjoyment of their rights. This would lead to respect for labour rights regardless of gender, work sector or legal status.

We must demand universal access to social protections that guarantee the fundamental rights of all people in a country. This would lead to better living conditions of migrant women and give them more power in their work relations.

Research participants were adamant about two demands: first, that **governments generate decent work opportunities** that correspond to people's training and capacities. And second, that they are able to go to public institutions and receive correct and understandable in-



Likewise, it is urgent to **promote a culture of good treatment and respect that value and protect people's lives for the simple fact of being a person**, regardless of where they come from or what they have, and that does not tolerate any form of exploitation or abuse towards women.

formation about their rights as migrants, opportunities for education, employment and health, and administrative processes. *'Information is power [...] If you have it and know where to go, where they can help you, you will be more protected'.*



For women to enjoy their rights it is important that they know them, but knowing their rights does not mean much without a commitment by the authorities to promote and protect them. In this sense, **it is necessary to work with those who perpetrate violence and with those who have the power to eradicate it.**

Another recommendation by participants was **to train women leaders who can represent the interests of migrant workers** vis-à-vis employers and the government. They also stressed the need for **government oversight, labour inspections and other mechanisms** to control employers' compliance with the law, as well as spaces for dialogue and negotiation with the companies' human resources departments.

It is key to **promote dialogue and collaboration between academics and migrant women**, not only for the highly necessary training and education projects, but also to make violence against migrant workers visible and analyse it within a wider political, economic and social context.

For their part, many of the participants expressed their **commitment to actively**

participate in citizen spaces and political advocacy with governmental institutions, the academy and other civil society actors to share their knowledge and proposals and contribute to the development of public policies.



*Wake up my friends! Stop ignoring!
Don't hesitate! We need to be united
to demand our rights.
Let's fight against the oppression.
Victory will be on our side one day!*

*Wake up! from Messenger Band.
(Women garment workers band from Cambodia)*



