Gender-Based Violence in Paid Domestic Work in Latin America and the Caribbean:
Experiences, Voices, Actions and Recommendations of Workers' Organizations to Eliminate It.

Authors: Ana Lima and Elba Núñez

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INTRODUCTION

The present report is based in the Consulting “Mapping of successful experiences and best practices in the prevention and elimination of gender-based violence and harassment in the world of work” carried out for the International Domestic Workers Federation (IDWF) and the Confederación Latinoamericana y Caribeña de Trabajadoras del Hogar (CONLACTRAHO - Latin American and Caribbean Confederation of Household Workers) with the support of CARE Ecuador.

CARE is an international non-profit organization that contributes to the reduction of poverty and social injustice all over the world. Its strategy is focused on the empowerment of women and girls.

The International Domestic Workers Federation (IDWF), established in its founding congress in Montevideo, Uruguay in 2013, is a global membership-based domestic workers’ organization made by 69 domestic workers organizations and labor unions in 54 countries with over 500,000 individual members in Asia, Africa, Latin America, North America and Europe. Its main goal is to help building strong, democratic and accountable domestic workers’ organizations to protect the rights of the DW around the world.

The Confederación Latinoamericana y Caribeña de Trabajadoras del Hogar (CONLACTRAHO) is an organization established in 1988 to contribute to the formation of new organizations, promote the recognition of the domestic work and fight against the discrimination. It is made up by 23 DWs’ organizations and labor unions in 14 countries of Latin America and the Caribbean that are articulated between labor unions, associations and groups in each country.

IDWF and CONLACTRAHO have continually demanding for decent labor and for the equality of the DW with other workers. They have achieved the recognition of their human rights as well, through the adoption of laws that guarantee an equal salary, rests, severance pay, pension regime, among others, advocating for their adequate implementation. They have strengthened the voices and made the DW visible as well, creating powerful women organizations to defend and promote their rights after their specific needs.
This is a qualitative study, based on the approach of gender and rights human. In the month of March of the current year, a 143 question-survey was carried out with 23 DW organizations affiliated to IDWF and CONLACTRAHO in Latin America. The experiences were enriched with semi-structured and in depth interviews both to experts and technical and political representatives of both organizations.

Violence in the World of Work

The violence in the world of the work is a threat to the dignity, safety, health and wellbeing of all the people. It is an action, incident or behavior that is away from what it is reasonable by the which a person is assaulted, threatened, humiliated or injured by another in the exercise of his/her professional activity or as a direct consequence of it. The internal violence in the place of work is the one that takes place among the workers, or between workers and supervisors. The external violence is the one that takes place between workers (including supervisors) and any other person present at the workplace.
In contrast to other sectors, the domestic workers have a high degree of exposure and vulnerability to the violence in the work:

- Very asymmetric power relations
- Isolation
- Undervaluation and under recognition of the profession
- Insufficient level of organization
- Insufficient effective legal protection

**Gender-Based Violence and the Paid Domestic Work.**

The violence against women is a serious violation of human rights, based on an unequal power relation between men and women, aiming at, intentionally or as a result, undermining or denying the use and enjoyment of their human rights, both in the public and private fields, as well as in their workplace, which is shown in unacceptable attitudes and behaviors, the threat or announcement of such conducts.

Approximately 37% of the paid domestic workers (PDW) in the world are in Latin America. Out of the 19 million people who work in this sector, which represents around 7% of the jobs in the cities, approximately 95% are women (ILO, 2012). It is the gateway to the world of jobs for the poorest women, with low levels of education, belonging to the marginalized population groups. Afro-descendent women in Brazil constitute nearly 95% of the PDW, the indigenous and domestic migrant women in the Andean countries represent approximately 96%, or migrant workers. (ILO, 2011).

In spite of the work contribution of these women, their work is not recognized nor valued, since they receive low wages with extensive daily working hours in precarious environments. In many cases, these women work in the informal sector and, as such, they are deprived of having social security, medical care coverage and at the end of their work life, from having decent wages that ensure decent living conditions.

The trivialization of the violence occurs so often that it becomes seen as a normal or unquestionable part of daily work.
According to ILO reports (2016), 90% of the domestic workers in the world do not have social protection, out of the 67 million domestic workers, more than 60 million are excluded from the security social. This study exposes the difficulties posed to the paid domestic work in order to get social protection: it is a work carried out in private homes, with low wages, high turnover rates, performed for more than one employer, work relations without written contract, variability of worked hours, part of the wage is paid in kind (housing, food, transportation), stigma and social discrimination.

In Latin America and the Caribbean, there is a trivialization of the violence towards the PDW and a social devaluation of the domestic works that, at the same time, reproduce the social practices of discrimination towards the women.

To understand the complexity of the violence it is important to take into account the construction of power relations between people, the subordination and appropriation of the bodies and life of the PDW. They cannot conceive or think of having their own life, outside of their employers’ home (mostly women of middle and upper classes).

From the intersectionality of gender and racism in the PDW, the Afro-descendent, indigenous and peasant women are overrepresented in the paid domestic work. (Miranda, 2018).

The acts of violence and discrimination that women suffer in the realm of work include, among others, workplace harassment, sexual harassment, physical violence, psychological violence, economic violence, limitation of their autonomy, demands on their language, ways to speak, relate, their motherhood and the conditions of motherhood, of dressing, depreciating the world of the work.

**On the Working Day and the Risk of Violence**

According to CARE (2018), the household, the place where the PDW carry out their job, is not considered as a workspace and therefore it not considered as a place under the protection of the labor laws. Additionally, the obligations of the State to ensure their rights has been inadequate. The Article 10 of the ILO Convention 189 deals with ‘availability for work’.
If the domestic workers remain at the disposal of the household, it shall be regarded as hours of work.

In the “live-in” agreement model, the workhours, privacy and the rest of the PDW are often ignored. They are mostly confined to spaces small, sparsely furnished, without the comfort enjoyed by the family to whom they contribute to provide a better quality of life. (CARE, 2018)

In this sense the C189 (Article 9) provides that the workers who reside in the household are not obliged to remain in the household or with household members during periods of daily and weekly rest or annual leave. (Article 9)

Some common discriminatory practices include different or lower quality food, little food, no time to rest, humiliations, mostly perpetrated by the children of employers. Not only the labor rights of the paid domestic workers have been ignored in the world of the work, but also their human rights to a life free of violence, with dignity, privacy, sexual rights, reproductive rights, right to housing, right to health, among others have been denied to them.

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**It is pending in the legal protection frameworks, national public policies on life free of violence towards PDW and obstacles to access the legal system.**

In spite of the different advances in the legal frameworks and public policies on the recognition of the PDW labor rights such as salary, rest, maternity leave, severance pay, some issues are still unsolved.

The main obstacle to implement properly the legal framework, as referred to the respondents of IDWF and CONLACTRAHO, is the lack of political willingness to recognize the Labor Unions integrated by women. The State gives little recognition to such Labor Unions as partners and therefore they are not considered as such by other labor unions.
According to Leon (2007) "(..) the existing information on the explicit integration of the PDW in the national policies is limited, dispersed and not always specifically the PDW, both in its contents and in their action plans". Most of the surveyed organizations from IDWF and CONLACTRAHO point out that there are no policies aimed at making visible the contribution of the PDW to the wealth of the country.

While most countries have policies to prevent, punish and eradicate gender-based violence and the violence against women, most of the organizations affiliated to IDWF and CONLACTRAHO, however, notice that there are no specific policies aiming at the prevention and protection of GBV against the PDW as showed in the following table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Does your country have policies aimed at making visible the contribution of domestic workers to national wealth?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NO</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Existence of GBV against PDW prevention policies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Despite the historical accomplishment of the eight-hour daily working hours for workers in general, the maximum daily working hours of the PDW are different according to the countries. Valiente (2017), declares that:

“...Eight countries in the region (Costa Rica, Peru, Ecuador, Venezuela, Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay) have in their legislation the maximum 8-hour daily working hours for domestic workers, irregardless of the contract terms. Another group of countries formed by Colombia, Bolivia and Chile states the maximum 8-hour daily working hours for the domestic work in the modality with rests and live-out.” (Brave, 2017: 21).

In other words, for the second group of countries, it is accepted that those who resides in the household are legally allowed to work more than 8 hours.

Comprehensive gender-based violence against women laws do not specifically include domestic workers; As a result, criminal systems end up subjecting the victims to a “critical path” for the investigation and punishment of such cases.

As Miranda (2017) points out, it is necessary to review the discriminatory norms that persist to equalize the rights the PDW with other workers, as well as to promote administrative control processes and the assessment of the conditions in which the domestic work is carried out (in particular in the “live-in” regime).

The legal system is not unaware of the existing resistance to recognize the human rights of the PDW. Although, the basic principles of labor law such as the principle of protection for the working party as the weakest part or that the working party has no possibility of obtaining evidence to support their claims, the reality principle, the pro persona principle, the principle of in dubio pro reo, lead to think that the claims will be heard and that the access to the legal system is available, this is not always true since the judges do not incorporate the gender perspective with ease in their actions.
As can be seen in this table, most of the organizations affiliated to IDWF and CONLACTRAHO point out that there are serious obstacles for PDW victims of gender-based violence to access the legal system.

In relation to the obstacles that PDW victims of GBV face, here below are the main factors associated:

- Absence of shelters for protection 11%
- Little information about their rights 20%
- Absence of answer from institutional mechanisms 20%
- Lack of investigation and punishment to the aggressors 18%
- Lack of investigation in the case of complaints 16%
- Employers don’t give permit to receive support – 15%
Delving into the causes and factors associated with obstacles for the PDW access the legal system, they indicate:

- The access to the legal system is hampered by the lack of information about their rights.
- Lack of knowledge and gender awareness among public officials and insufficient training on offering proper advice to the victims. Unawareness of the justice officers on GBV that affects the PDW.
- Existence of institutional racism and prejudice against the PDW who have low education and lack of the clear routes of accessing the legal system.
- Lack of timely assistance and specific spaces for the PDW report cases of violence. The authorities are biased in favor of the employers.
- Scarce free legal assistance along with the existence of few professionals to meet the existing demand.
- Absence of institutions that consider cases of violence against workers as well as there is no specific inspection law for PDW. Poor follow-up in the lawsuits, and many times the PDW cannot file a lawsuit because they are not taken into account.
- Little credibility to the worker, high costs of filling a lawsuit, cultural prejudice from the system regarding the responsibilities or duties of the PDW, public force repression, poor laws on protection and the corruption in the legal system.
- The absence a registry of employers and of an inspection specialized in PDW, causes that the cases are assumed by the Ministry of Labor, from a purely labor perspective, providing a space of conciliation between the employer and the worker. Nevertheless, the legal advice and access to justice services on GBV or even filing a labor lawsuit require that the worker get a lawyer. Although some labor unions have teams of lawyers who provide free advice, this is not provided by the State.
- Employers prevent permissions of PDW to relevant allegations or claims before the justice.
Best practices and progressive legal frameworks in Latin America

There are good practices and successful experiences in the prevention of gender-based violence against paid domestic workers in Latin America and the Caribbean. In the mapping process, there are plans, programs, projects, campaigns that recommend different stakeholders to prevent, address, punish and eradicate the various forms of violence towards PDW. It also describes some strategies and educational tools implemented by the PDW organizations.

ILO Convention No. 189 on Decent Work for Domestic Workers establishes basic rights for domestic workers: respect and protection of fundamental principles and rights at work. It also establishes effective protection against all forms of abuse, harassment and violence. (Articles 3,4,5 and 11). Currently 28 countries in the world and 16 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean have ratified the Convention No. 189.

The fundamental principles and rights at work are:

- Freedom of association and the effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining.
- The elimination of all forms of forced or compulsory labor.
- The effective abolition of child labor.
- The elimination of discrimination in respect of employment and occupation.

Working Day:

The working day also includes definitions of daily work and rest periods, even during the working day (for meals etc.), vacation, holidays, special working days: for breastfeeding, for example.

- It is a topic of discussion in all countries.
- Any progress towards equalizing rights is important.
- It is important that there is a gradual advance.
The ILO managed to include in the 2030 Agenda, the target 8.8: “Protect labor rights and promote safe and secure working environments of all workers, including migrant workers, particularly women migrants, and those in precarious employment”. This is a milestone to demand the inclusion of the GBW against PDW on the public agenda.

The areas and regulations to be defended, both in their existence and in their compliance monitoring and enforcement by the States, are among others, the Universal and Inter-American Human Rights Protection Systems.

At the level of the Inter-American system, the Inter-American Convention to Prevent, Punish and Eradicate Violence against Women, so-called Belém do Pará Convention, recognizes that the right of women to a life free of violence includes the right to be free from all forms of discrimination. It also includes in the Guide of indicators of implementation of the Belém Do Pará Convention, in a generic way, a variable on labor situation according to productive and reproductive scope.

The Quito Consensus (2007) of the Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean, expressly recommended to the States:

“... Match the conditions and labor rights of domestic work to that of other paid work, in accordance with the ratified International Labor Organization Conventions and international standards on women’s rights...” (INAMU, 2007).

In the Montevideo Consensus adopted at the First Regional Conference on Population and Development of Latin America and the Caribbean (2013) in Chapter C, paragraph 32, the countries agree to: “(...) Expand the systems of protection and social security, with gender perspective, incorporating women who have dedicated their lives to productive work, domestic workers, rural women and informal workers”.

At the national level, since the 1990s, legislative reforms have been carried out and they have enabled the recognition of labor rights, with major improvements in the region and especially in countries such as Argentina, Uruguay, Bolivia, Costa Rica and Peru, although the compliance of the laws in the reality of domestic workers remain with some gaps. Brazil is the only country that recognizes the PDW in its own constitutional framework, since that in 2013 it approved the Constitutional Amendment Proposal (PEC) of the domestic workers.
In Paraguay, at the time of making this report, paid domestic workers and women human rights defenders have achieved a historic achievement: the approval of the minimum wage for PDW by 100% of the minimum wage overcoming the debate and resistance to an unjustified cut in the value of an equivalent to 70%. Now, we only have to wait for the promulgation of the Law.

Another of the best practices in legislative matters, in line with art. 7 of ILO Convention 189 which states that the employment contract must be preferably written have been adopted. By 2015, Argentina, Brazil, Bolivia, Chile, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Mexico and Paraguay established the obligatory written contract for PDW, although it should be noted that in countries such as Uruguay, verbal contracts are accepted in other areas and they are recognized as such. Knowing clearly the rights and obligations of employers and workers, what is expected from the worker and what is expected from the employer, as well as salary and vacations, strengthens working conditions. Their registration allows, on the other hand, to adequately quantify the workers and consequently guide public policies that guarantee the rights.
Regarding public policies, it is evident that most of the countries have adopted national equality plans, have recognized the importance of the mechanisms for the advancement of women, seeking their institutional strengthening, while at the same time providing them with genuine budgets, participation of the stakeholders, especially feminist organizations, which are key to monitoring the compliance and advancement of the agreements.

The majority of the organizations surveyed from IDWF and CONLACTRAHO mentioned that the countries have policies, plans and campaigns to raise awareness about the rights of the PDW and highlighted the cases of Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Guatemala, Mexico, Nicaragua and Peru.

As an emblematic case, the achievement obtained by the organized PDW in the case of Peru receives special attention. There, they formed a Work Table for the implementation and monitoring of the 2019-2021 Action Plan for the fulfillment of the rights of domestic workers in the framework of the implementation of ILO Convention 189.

At the same time, they mentioned that in countries such as Bolivia, El Salvador, Paraguay and Republic Dominican, the campaigns of awareness are driven by the PDW organizations.
Actions from the organizations of Domestic Workers to face gender-based violence

The experiences in this sense are diverse and range from the preventive actions such as Campaigns, Training, the support, such as legal, psychological and social support, to the promotional, which is related to organizational strengthening and partnerships to influence the public agenda.

*Training is the best form of prevention of GBV*, as stated by Mary Goldsmith (2019). The majority of the workers’ organizations surveyed develop training activities for their associates on the issue of gender-based violence.

![Self-elaboration, based on the survey to PDW organizations](image)

Most of the surveyed organizations affiliated to IDWF and CONLACTRAHO have actively participated in the process of promoting the next ILO international instrument to *Confront gender-based violence and harassment in the world of work*, through the participation in meetings at the ILC in Geneva in 2018 and 2019 where the issue of violence and harassment in the world of work was discussed. They also participated in different regional trainings organized by IDWF on VBG and Domestic Work since 2016.

More than half of the PDW organizations affiliated to IDWF and CONLACTRAHO have standards and protocols for prevention and attention to gender-based violence.
Self-elaboration, based on the survey to PDW organizations

Most of the organizations surveyed provide guidance, support and follow-up to the PDW victims of GBV. In the first place, the orientation, advice and information to the victims on how to file the complaint and to which public instances to attend stands out. Secondly, in some cases they provide legal assistance or legal guidance through legal promoters to their affiliates who are victims of gender-based violence. Thirdly, the follow-up and referral of cases stand out. A smaller number of organizations develop workshops, give psychological support, provide lodging and food especially to migrants PDW victims of GBV.

All organizations of paid domestic workers consulted agree on the importance of *strengthening organizational structures to address gender-based violence towards domestic workers*.

Most of the organizations surveyed consider that it is necessary to deepen alliances with local, national, regional and international organizations, to put the issue of GBV on the agenda of labor union centers and thereby strengthen the prevention, sanction and eradication of VBG towards PDW.

Likewise, the exchange of experiences through seminars, forums and workshops has allowed incorporating successful experiences developed by other organizations.

![Survey Results](image-url)
Voices and recommendations of domestic workers

In the short run:

- **Deepening the advocacy** and social dialogue to achieve the inclusion of GBV in the public agenda: Design and implement an advocacy strategy to achieve the approval of ILO Convention 190 and work for subsequent ratification by States, to advance in the inclusion of the VBG towards PDW in the public agenda. Participate in decision-making spaces as a labor union and organized PDW sector to strengthen the advocacy in public spaces of decision on public policies that encompasses the GBV towards PDW.

- **Information, communication and awareness:** Have more information about GBV to spread the word about this issue.

- **Training and organizational strengthening:** Promote spaces where women’s voices can continue to be heard and identify the different violence they are going through.

- **Financing to sustain the actions:** Improve the management in the face of a shortage of financial resources to maintain the organizations and labor unions of PDW.

In the medium term:

- **Development of tools and capabilities:** It is necessary to have a solid labor union training on GBV and develop instruments, guides, manuals, protocols for union members so that they can recognize GBV situations.

- **Protection mechanisms for domestic workers:** They include the provision of mechanisms to promote the protection of institutional and state violence, given the persecution of workers’ organizations in the countries where it occurs.
**In the long run:**

- **Organizational strengthening and advocacy capacity**: Organizations identify the need to have a strong organization with new committed leaders to work on the prevention and elimination of GBV towards PDW.

- **Plans and programs for comprehensive assistance to PDW victims of GBV**: Having their own line of assistance for paid domestic workers victims of GBV at work.

- **Sustainable financing**: Resources are needed to implement programs to prevent and provide care for PDW victims of GBV, including the improvement of services and infrastructure of PDW labor unions.
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Valiente, H. (2016). Las leyes sobre trabajo doméstico remunerado en América Latina with the support of ILO Women and co-executed in Paraguay by ILO. Available at: www.cde.org.py/pulbicación/trabajo-doméstico-remunerado. Viewed: March 17, 2019
68% is in Asia and Latin America

The Latin American and Caribbean countries that have not yet ratified Convention 189 are:
Antigua and Barbuda, Bahamas, Belize, Canada, Cuba, Dominica, El Salvador, United
States, Guatemala, Haiti, Mexico, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago and
Venezuela.

**Latin America and the Caribbean (16):** Uruguay, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Bolivia, Paraguay, Chile,
Argentina, Colombia, Guyana, Dominican Republic, Panama, Jamaica, Ecuador, Brazil and Peru.

**Asia (1):** The Philippines  **Africa (3):** Mauritius, South Africa, Guinea.  **Europe (9):** Italy, Switzerland,
Finland, Ireland, Germany, Belgium, Portugal, Sweden. **North America (0).**

Access:  
https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex-
/es/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:11300:0::NO::P11300_INSTRUMENT_ID:2551460

Maria Elena Valenzuela: Gender-Based Violence in Paid Domestic Work. Quito Feb 8, 2019

The Universal Rights Protection Systems such as CEDAW and the Committee of Experts, the
Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR) that monitors compliance with the
ICESCR Pact; At the regional level, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (Commission)
and the Inter-American Court of Human Rights (I / A Court HR), have incorporated the so-called civil
and political rights early and for less time labor rights as fundamental social, cultural and economic
human rights.

Constitutional Amendment N° 72
Access: Ministerial Resolution N°057- 2016-TR
Surveyed Organizations

1. Unión Personal Auxiliar Casas Particulares (UPACP). Argentina
2. Federación nacional de trabajadoras asalariadas del hogar de Bolivia, (FENATRAHOB)
3. Sindicato das Trabalhadoras e Trabalhadores Domésticos de Campina Grande-PB, Brazil
4. Federación Nacional de Trabajadoras Domésticas, Brazil (FENATRAD)
5. Unión afrocolombiana de trabajadoras del servicio doméstico, Colombia (UTRASD)
6. Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadoras del Servicio Doméstico, Colombia (SINTRADEDOM)
7. Sindicato de Mujeres Trabajadoras del Hogar Remuneradas Salvadoreñas, El Salvador, (SIMUTHRES)
8. Sindicato de Trabajadoras Domésticas, Similares y a Cuenta Propia, Guatemala (SITRADOMSA)
9. RED DE MUJERES EMPLEADAS DEL HOGAR, A.C, Mexico (REHMO)
10. Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadoras y Trabajadores del Hogar, Mexico, (SINACTTRAHO)
11. Federación de Mujeres Trabajadoras Domésticas y de Oficios Varios de Managua, Nicaragua (FETRADOMOV)
12. Sindicato de Trabajadoras Domésticas del Departamento de Granada, Nicaragua (SINTRADOMGRA)
13. Asociación de Trabajadoras Domésticas, Costa Rica (ASTRADOMES)
14. Sindicato de trabajadoras domésticas afines de Itapúa, (SINTRADI), Paraguay
15. Sindicato de Trabajadoras del Servicio Doméstico de Paraguay (SINTRADES-PY)
16. Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadoras del Hogar, Peru (SINTRAHOGARP)
17. Centro de Capacitación para Trabajadoras del Hogar, Lima, Peru (CCTH)
18. Federación de Trabajadoras y trabajadores del Hogar Remunerados del Peru (FENTRAHOGARP)
19. Instituto de Promoción y Formación de Trabajadoras remuneradas del hogar, Peru (IPROFOTH)
20. Sindicato de Trabajadoras y trabajadores del Hogar de la Región Lima (SINTTRAHOL)
21. Unión Nacional Trabajadora remunerada del hogar, Dominican Republic (FENAMUTRA)
22. Asociación trabajadoras remuneradas del hogar, Dominican Republic (ATH filial CNUS)
23. Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadoras Domésticas, Dominican Republic (SINTRADOMES/CASC)
Mapping of successful experiences and best practices in the prevention and elimination of gender-based violence and harassment in the world of work for the International Domestic Workers Federation (IDWF) and the Latin American and Caribbean Confederation of Household Workers (CONLACTRAHO) with the support of CARE Ecuador.

Regional Advocacy Strategy Workshop to Eliminate Harassment and Gender-Based Violence in the World of Work. International Domestic Workers Federation, February 2019.

Contact

www.idwfed.org
adriana.paz@idwfed.org