



# Decent Work

## for Women in the Colombian Cut Flower Value Chain



**Vamos Tejiendo**  
Comunidades y aliados  
construyendo puentes de EQUIDAD



### Research findings on working conditions and conflict resolution mechanisms in the cut flower value chain in the municipalities of Facatativá and Funza, Cundinamarca.

**The Vamos Tejiendo project**, financed by USDOL and implemented by Pact, conducted research to analyze the working conditions, and conflict resolution mechanisms – based on the principles and indicators of decent work- that either support or limit the labor rights of women and adolescents (ages 15 to 17) working in the cut flower value chain in the municipalities of Facatativá and Funza , located in the Sabana de Occidente, Cundinamarca.



Most responses were obtained from employees of a single company and three union organizations. **87 surveys (56 women and 31 men), two focus groups, and 11 interviews** were conducted with union representatives, direct employees, labor academics, public authorities, and civil society actors.



#### Context:



Flowers are Colombia's second-largest agricultural export, **79.7%** of the country's total sales are exported to the **US market**.



The cut flower industry relies heavily on human labor, providing nearly **200.000 jobs**. **Women** making up approximately **68%** of the workforce. Less than **0.1%** employees are **union** members.



In 2022, Colombia exported **241 million** net kilos of fresh flowers, generating sales of approximately **\$2,029 billion**, 19.1% more than in 2021 and 45.6% more than in 2020.



#### Thematic areas of study:

- Working conditions
- Awareness of labor rights
- Practices related to demanding compliance with labor rights
- Workers' attitudes toward their income
- Union membership
- Mechanisms for resolving labor disputes

The Colombian cut flower industry has made significant strides toward embracing decent work values. However, inconsistencies remain in employment practices, including:

- Temporary contracts and subcontracting
- Low wages, physical demands, and lack of incentives for long-term retention
- The denial of maternity leave for a small number of workers





## Findings and Results

1.



**92% of the interviewees** hold permanent employment, with **38%** having worked steadily for over ten years. Most respondents (**93.1%**) reported having written contracts directly with their employers, and **95.4%** are affiliated with social security. **60%** of female workers benefit from transportation services provided by their companies.

4.



State officials have identified several labor issues in the cut flower sector, including access to social security, and compliance with economic obligations. There is a recognized need for **equitable economic opportunities for women**, especially in operational roles, where discrepancies in pay compared to their male counterparts remain a significant issue. In response, the Ministry of Labor has established a specialized group to analyze these issues and has developed a social dialogue strategy with labor unions and NGOs.

2.



**44.64%** of surveyed women do not know about protection against violence, harassment, and abuse. **57.14%** were unaware of their rights related to union activities. Workers face pressure discouraging union membership.

5.



Academics point out that the cut flower industry's transformation has been positively influenced by trade **agreements and international standards**. However, labor precariousness is a persistent issue, especially for women who face social vulnerability.

3.



Union representatives expressed that employers continue to favor temporary and outsourced labor arrangements, **undermining collective bargaining** and workers' rights.

6.



According to women's networks in civil society, the division of labor responsibilities within the sector reflects deeply rooted cultural perceptions about what tasks are appropriate for women versus men. However, employment in the cut flower sector provides financial independence for women, previously limited by unpaid **domestic work**.



Recommendations:



For the private sector

- Address critical issues like **wages, overtime, and maternity leave** recognition to boost job satisfaction and productivity.
- Providing **appropriate tools** will enhance female employees' participation in tasks traditionally assigned to men in warehouse areas, boosting productivity and reducing workplace accidents.
- Empower committees to promote labor **best practices and gender equity**, ensuring a positive organizational culture and supporting employee well-being.



For public stakeholders

- Revise laws to allow flexible working hours, helping women **balance their professional and personal lives** while boosting productivity.
- Implement **stricter penalties** for labor rights violations and increase inspection frequency, along with a public database for transparency on compliance.
- Strengthening **Coexistence Committees**, which are tasked with ensuring equitable labor practices. They should play a central role in educating employees about forms of harassment, providing channels for reporting incidents, and strengthening intra-company communication around these issues.



For the Vamos Tejiendo project

- Promoting **gender/ women mainstreaming good practices** among cut flower companies reflect on women's & men's interactions in the labor scenario.
- Provide **protocols and care guides** that describe care routes in the event of labor rights violations, including gender-based violence.
- Organizing meetings, workshops, and symposiums will further aid in **disseminating information about labor rights and conflict resolution**.



For unions

- Consolidate a **unified voice**.
- Strengthen their role as key actors in labor dynamics and raise **women workers' voices** as important members of their associations.
- Guiding the **Ministry of Labor inspectors** on which companies to inspect and what specific issues to address during these visits.