WAGE AND CONTRACTUAL CONDITIONS AMONG BANANA WORKERS ON BANANA FARMS AND PLANTATIONS IN THE PROVINCE OF EL ORO, ECUADOR

2024 (UPDATED JANUARY 2026)

BananaLink

Wage and contractual conditions among banana workers on banana farms and plantations in the province of El Oro, Ecuador, 2024

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Glossary and abbreviations

COLSIBA: The Latin American Coordination of Banana Trade Unions

ITUC: International Trade Union Confederation

FAO: Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations

GIZ: German Technical Cooperation

GLWC: Global Living Wage Coalition

IESS: Instituto Ecuatoriano de Seguridad Social (Ecuadorian Institute of Social Security)

ILO: International Labour Organisation

NGO: Non-Governmental Organisation

PPE: Personal Protective Equipment

GDP: Gross Domestic Product

SBU: Basic Unified Salary (in Ecuador)

OHS: Occupational Health and Safety

EU: European Union

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Summary

This report is based on research conducted in the province of El Oro, Ecuador in 2024. The study design was purposive, worker -centred and non-probabilistic. Therefore, findings are descriptive of interviewed workers and plantations—not population estimates. Interviews with workers were conducted mainly in the canton of Pasaje, but also in the surrounding cantons of El Guabo, Machala and Santa Rosa. One hundred and fifty workers were surveyed on wages, contractual and working conditions in the banana industry on 140 banana plantations of different sizes.

The survey was designed and carried out in collaboration with local independent workers' associations. It is part of a larger project, funded by the German Technical Cooperation - GIZ, with the support of the German Retail Group, and coordinated by Banana Link with local workers' organisations in Ecuador. The report was revised in January 2026. The revised report uses Net calculations for living wage estimates to ensure the best possible comparison with workers' self-reported take-home pay. The methodology, limitations, results and discussion of the study are presented below.

The aim of this study is to provide reliable, gender-disaggregated data on wages and contractual conditions in a "typical" banana export territory in Ecuador. In addition, workers were asked a series of questions about broader working conditions in order to build a more complete picture of their situation. We hope that this report can open up a space for dialogue around the findings and serve as a reference for assessing future progress towards decent work and the implementation of living wages in the banana sector in Ecuador.

The findings of this study present a reality that appears to have changed little in recent years, with previous studies describing some of the main problems faced by workers in Ecuador's banana industry (see Oxfam 2018; Polo Almeida, 2020). Contractual and wage conditions remain opaque, workers often do not have a physical contract to which they can refer to know their rights, and there is a lack of clarity around whether or not workers are registered with social security and are accumulating seniority for their retirement. On the other hand, the salary received by almost a third of the workers interviewed (45 in total) is far below the Living Wage calculated for Ecuador[1] , aggravated by the requirement to work overtime, which is not always recognised or paid as such. Non-compliance with occupational health and safety (OHS) standards is common. On the other hand, union organisation, although apparently free, is hampered by the lack of conditions for participation and the belief that permission is needed to join a union. Gender discrimination is common, with women suffering poorer working conditions and lower wages than men.

[1] For the purposes of this study, we use the Net living wage calculated by the Global Living Wage Coalition for 2023, which is USD 450 per month (Global Living Wage Coalition, 2023).

Introduction

Workers in agriculture: global trends

Agriculture provides direct employment for some 857 million people worldwide (FAO 2023), around 450 million people employed in agriculture are wage workers, many of whom earn their living on agricultural plantations (ILO, n.d.). In Ecuador, 30% of workers are employed in agriculture, a figure that has remained fairly stable since the 1990s (Roser 2023).

Over the years, many human rights and environmental risks have been identified in agricultural supply chains. For the worker, agricultural employment is among the highest risk jobs in terms of work-related injuries, deaths and diseases (ILO and Vision Zero Fund 2023). Workers in the agricultural sector often lack stable employment and social protection. Violations of their labour rights in terms of working hours, wages and occupational hazards are common and, worldwide, agricultural workers make up a large proportion of the rural poor, who earn the lowest wages (Silliman Bhattacharjee, 2023). International legislation has struggled to sufficiently protect workers and ensure their welfare. According to the International Labour Organisation (ILO),

"...agri-food workers are often inadequately covered by labour and social security legislation due to the nature of their work, or because in rural areas, where most agri-food activities take place and where there are limited conditions for development and productivity, with a lack of infrastructure, sustainable investment and presence of the State, and where high levels of informality are present, law enforcement, labour inspection and compliance are often lacking or ineffective" (ILO, 2023, p.8).

The banana industry

It is estimated that around 400 million workers and smallholders worldwide depend on income from direct employment in the banana industry (FAO, 2019). Unlike other tropical fruits, the banana plant produces fruit throughout the year. This offers producers and workers the possibility of securing a stable source of income: bananas can be sold every week of the year, and workers can be paid for harvesting, cleaning, pruning, washing, weighing and labelling them. However, for those exporting bananas on the global market, an obstacle to income stability has emerged in the form of low prices per box paid by retailers engaged in a 'race to the bottom', and the repercussions this has had on farms and large plantations.

For many years in countries where this practice is legal, European and North American retailers have used bananas as a 'loss-leaders', sold at limited margins, or even at prices below the cost of production. The assumption is that consumers will be attracted to shop

in supermarkets by these low-priced commodities, with profits made when they purchase other, more expensive products (Fassler, 2019). Banana retail prices have stagnated for many years. For example, in 2022 it was reported that banana prices in UK supermarkets were still below 1987 levels.[2]

The consequence of this has been an artificially low price for producers in the South, where production costs have risen faster than the price of a box of bananas.[3] These low market prices exacerbated the power imbalance between producer and retailer and created conditions in which producers had to cut costs to remain economically viable. In part, this has favoured large producers, who can enjoy economies of scale, but not small and medium-sized producers. Another consequence of the low and stagnant market price for bananas has been that, for many years, indispensable investments have been treated as externalities, and any efforts by producers to improve wages and working conditions or transition to sustainable production systems have been hampered.

Bananas are a labour-intensive crop. Wages in Ecuador account for up to 40-48% of total production costs (FAO, 2016 p. 22). Downward pressure on prices in banana value chains has inevitably led producers to seek savings in hired labour. The result has been a trend away from full-time, permanent contract labour towards different employment structures, such as casual labour, piecework, temporary work and subcontracted work, all of which translate into lower chances of the worker receiving a stable and decent income.[4] The most vulnerable workers, such as migrants, tend to be more affected by precarious work (FAO, 2017), and studies have shown that women are more likely to be employed part-time (Cooper, 2015). The fact that there is often a labour surplus in banana-producing regions and that worker education levels remain low has exacerbated the downward pressure on wages (NewForesight 2021).

The Ecuadorian banana industry

Ecuador is the world's largest banana exporter by a wide margin, consistently accounting for over 30% of global trade. In 2023, 6,190,172 tonnes were exported with a value of US$3.48 billion. The largest importer of Ecuadorian bananas was the European Union

[2] See Fruitnet.com 'UK banana prices remain below 1987 levels' https://www.fruitnet.com/fresh-produce-journal/uk-banana-prices-still-below-1987-levels/246600.article and Elproductor.com 'Latin American banana producers fight for a fair price in the face of sustainable challenges' https://elproductor.com/2023/12/productores-de-banano-latinoamericanos-luchan-por-un-precio-justo-frente-a-desafios-sostenibles/

[3] See Dw.com 'Latin American banana hopes are in Europe. https://www.dw.com/es/las-esperanzas-del-banano-latinoamericano-est%C3%A1n-en-europa/a-60502321

[4] This is an established trend. In 2014, the Fairtrade Foundation reported that price pressures generated by banana value chains have pushed many employers to convert permanent jobs to casual labour or to outsource to lower labour costs (Fairtrade Foundation, 2014).

(28%) (Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock of Ecuador, 2023). In the same year, 126,821 people were employed in the Ecuadorian banana industry (Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock of Ecuador, 2023). Several studies have estimated that around 10% of Ecuador's population derives its economic livelihood directly or indirectly from the banana sector (FAO, 2016). About 40% of the land cultivated for banana production is owned by large producers, 35% by medium producers and 22% by small producers (Ministry of International Trade, Ecuador, 2017). [5]

As in the rest of the industry, work in Ecuador's banana plantations is highly sex-segregated, with an overwhelming majority of women hired to work in the packing houses, where they wash, weigh and pack the fruit, and men hired to work in the fields in tasks such as weeding, pruning and harvesting the fruit, and applying pesticides and fertilisers, among other tasks. Field work is more physically demanding, which has led to a widespread view that it is not suitable work for women (Cooper, 2025). This is one of the factors that has led to the highly male-dominated industry we see today. The most recent data indicate that, in Ecuador, women account for only 14% of the sector's workforce (Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock of Ecuador, 2023).

Lack of clarity around workers' pay and contractual conditions is known to be a prevalent problem across the sector. In Ecuador, it has been shown that many workers are not provided with a written contract, and payrolls lack sufficient transparency for workers to establish whether overtime has been paid correctly (Oxfam 2018). Furthermore, it has been shown that banana plantation workers have suffered multiple labour violations ranging from poor sanitary conditions, lack of social security affiliation, lack of paid holidays and poor OHS standards, along with an increasingly intense work regime and punishments or even dismissals when workers attempt to organise (Polo Almeida, 2020, p.12-13).

Living Wage and Decent Work: Driving due diligence for corporate sustainability in banana supply chains

In response to some of the problems identified in global agricultural supply chains, companies have committed to human rights due diligence reports to identify, prevent, mitigate and account for potential and actual human rights risks in their supply chains. In recent years, there has been a trend in Europe to move from voluntary reporting to mandatory human rights due diligence reporting. The UK Modern Slavery Act came into force in 2015, followed by the French Duty of Vigilance Act in 2017, and in 2023 the German Act on Due Diligence Obligations of Companies in Supply Chains. In April 2024,

[5]The definition of small, medium and large producers varies between banana producing countries. In Ecuador, small producers are considered to be those with up to 30 hectares cultivated, while medium producers have between 31 and 100 hectares cultivated and large producers are those with more than 100 hectares cultivated (Ministry of International Trade, Ecuador, 2017). These are the parameters we have used in this study.

the European Parliament voted to adopt the Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Guideline, representing a milestone in the movement towards protecting people and the environment at the front end of European supply chains. [6]

Changes in national legislation and company approaches to human rights risk occurred in the context of major shifts in the broader policy environment. In the wake of the 2008 financial crisis, the ILO launched a Decent Work Agenda, with four key elements: job creation, rights at work, social protection and social dialogue. In 2015, the ILO's Decent Work Agenda was formally incorporated into the Sustainable Development Goals 2030. **Decent work -** where ***workers are treated equally, earn a fair income and work in safe working conditions -*** was understood to be central to driving sustainable development. Subsequently, the UN Global Compact introduced the living wage as an essential element of decent work.[7]

In Europe, the Living Wage movement gained momentum, with groups of retailers in four European countries (Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands, and the UK) publicly committing to implementing living wages in their banana supply chains in the coming years.[8] While the debate in the industry has focused on the most effective means of implementing a living wage, most now recognise the importance of the role of collective bargaining by independent workers' unions in achieving a living wage that is context-specific, corresponding to the realities of workers' lives in national, local and even farm-level settings, which can be very different.

International organisations working to promote living wages have broadly defined a living wage as the level of income necessary for a decent standard of living for the worker and his or her family, based on earnings during normal working hours (i.e. not including overtime). For example, the Global Living Wage Coalition, a knowledge-action partnership led by researchers and certifiers, defines the term "living wage" as follows:

> *The remuneration received for a standard workweek by a worker in a particular place sufficient to afford a decent standard of living for the worker and her or his family. Elements of a decent standard of living include food, water, housing, education, health care, transportation, clothing, and other essential needs including provision for unexpected events.* [9]

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[6] See: Europarl.europa.eu 'EP approves rules for business on human rights and environment' https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/es/press-room/20240419IPR20585/el-pe-aprueba-normas-para-las-empresas-sobre-derechos-humanos-y-medio-ambiente

[7] See: Ilo.org 'Decent Work' https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/wcmsp5/groups/public/@dgreports/@dcomm/documents/publication/wcms_436923.pdf and unglobalcompact.org 'Think lab on living wage'. https://unglobalcompact.org/what-is-gc/our-work/livingwages/think-lab-on-living-wage#

[8] See: Bananalink.org.uk 'Retailers Commit to Ensuring Living Wages for all Banana Workers' https://www.bananalink.org.uk/blog/retailers-commit-to-ensuring-living-wages-for-all-banana-workers/

[9] See: https://www.globallivingwage.org/about/what-is-a-living-wage/

Similarly, the International Labour Organisation (2024) defines "living wage" as follows:

> *The wage level that is necessary to provide a decent standard of living for workers and their families, taking into account the country circumstances and calculated for the work performed during the normal hours of work; calculated in accordance with ILO principles of estimating the living wage; to be achieved through the wage-setting process in line with ILO principles on wage setting.*

On the other hand, the Ecuadorian Ministry of Labour (2022) does not include any reference to normal working hours, and focuses on the 'basic needs' of workers and their families:

> *The minimum monthly living wage is that which covers at least the basic needs of the worker and his or her family, and corresponds to the cost of the basic family basket divided by the number of recipients in the household.*

In 2023, the GLWC set the Gross living wage for banana workers in Ecuador at USD $489 per month, based on a family of four with 1.6 full-time workers, and a total monthly cost of USD $724 per month for a decent standard of living (Global Living Wage Coalition, 2023). In 2024, the Ecuadorian Ministry of Labour set the national minimum wage (applicable to agricultural workers) at USD $460, and the Living Wage at USD $484.75, only a few dollars less than the GLWC figure (Quito Chamber of Commerce, 2023).

Work of the German Retail Group and GIZ in Ecuador

Ecuador is the world's largest exporter of bananas, and the largest single supplier to the EU and German markets. In 2021, the EU imported 1,601.8 thousand tonnes of bananas from Ecuador, of which 314.2 thousand tonnes were imported by Germany, representing about 4.6% of Ecuador's total export volume that year (FAO, 2022). Approximately 200,000 men and women are directly employed in the Ecuadorian banana industry.

The Ecuadorian Constitution states that remuneration must be fair, and the Ministry of Livestock and Agriculture has publicly stated that the total wage for a banana worker exceeds the GLWC recommendations, reaching USD $525 in 2023 (Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock of Ecuador, 2024). In addition, the industry, through its producers' association, has also stated that Ecuador not only meets living wage standards, but exceeds them (Cluster Bananero de Ecuador, 2021).

However, reports made to Banana Link in the same year claimed that workers in El Oro province were seeing rapid downward pressure on wages and contractual conditions, casting doubt on these claims. Workers reported a reduction in daily wages for male workers from USD $40 to $25 for the same work; while female casual workers had seen their wages reduced from USD $15 to $18 a day to USD $10 to $12. A trend towards underemployment was reported, where workers who had previously enjoyed full-time

work could now only count on two or three days of work per week. In addition, more and more workers are being hired on irregular rather than permanent contracts. Workers pointed to the availability of cheap migrant labour from Venezuela and changes in labour legislation allowing for more flexible working hours as possible factors (Banana Link, 2021).

In 2022, the German Technical Cooperation - GIZ, in collaboration with the German Retailers' Working Group on Living Wages and Incomes, developed a project with Banana Link and local workers' organisations in Ecuador that aimed to create favourable conditions for the development of social dialogue, with the ultimate goal of enabling production companies and workers to engage in collective bargaining for living wages in the Ecuadorian banana industry. Specifically, the project aimed to strengthen workers' dialogue and bargaining; raise workers' awareness of the technical dimensions of discussions on wages, legislation, living wages and decent work; improve the capacity of workers' representatives to communicate both internally and externally, with a focus on capacity building for social dialogue; and support the creation of conditions that increase the potential for constructive social dialogue, especially with suppliers in the German market. Among the activities designed to achieve the project's objectives is a participatory study on wages and contractual conditions in a "typical" banana export territory, with a clear gender dimension, which can serve as a baseline for assessing future developments. The methodology, limitations, results and discussion of the study are presented below.

Methodology

The study was coordinated by Banana Link with the support of trade unions and local independent workers’ associations. The questionnaire and research methodology were designed in collaboration between Banana Link, representatives of local independent workers’ associations workers and industry experts.

The El Oro region was chosen for its diversity of types of banana export operations (large and medium-sized producers as well as small producers); and for the presence there for over twenty years of independent banana workers' associations, with members on a variety of farms in the participating cantons, who worked closely with Banana Link in the design and implementation of the research.

A total of 150 workers were interviewed, working on 140 banana plantations of different sizes. The questionnaire was divided into 8 sections covering: farm data; general demographics and family situation; living wage; working and contractual conditions; and open-ended questions.

Interviews were conducted between January and March 2024 in the cantons of Pasaje, El Guabo, Machala and Santa Rosa in El Oro province. Interviews were conducted by a small research team of four independent worker representatives, led by local consultants with industry expertise.

Methodological limitations

Given our purposive, worker-centred design, findings describe patterns among interviewed workers in these cantons. Results are not designed to be statistically representative of all banana workers or plantations in Ecuador and should be interpreted as an exploratory baseline for dialogue and future monitoring.

Findings describe patterns among interviewed workers and plantations and are not designed to produce statistically representative estimates. Daily-to-monthly wage comparisons use a standardized conversion (see Methods) and are reported as descriptive shares. Where disaggregation yields small denominators (N<5), we suppress bars or present Ns. Contract, seniority and social security indicators reflect workers' reports and should not be read as audited compliance metrics. Gender figures are unadjusted and may reflect task allocation; where possible, we stratify by work area. Given the concentration of interviews in Pasaje, some results may reflect local conditions; canton splits are not provided.

Map of the study region

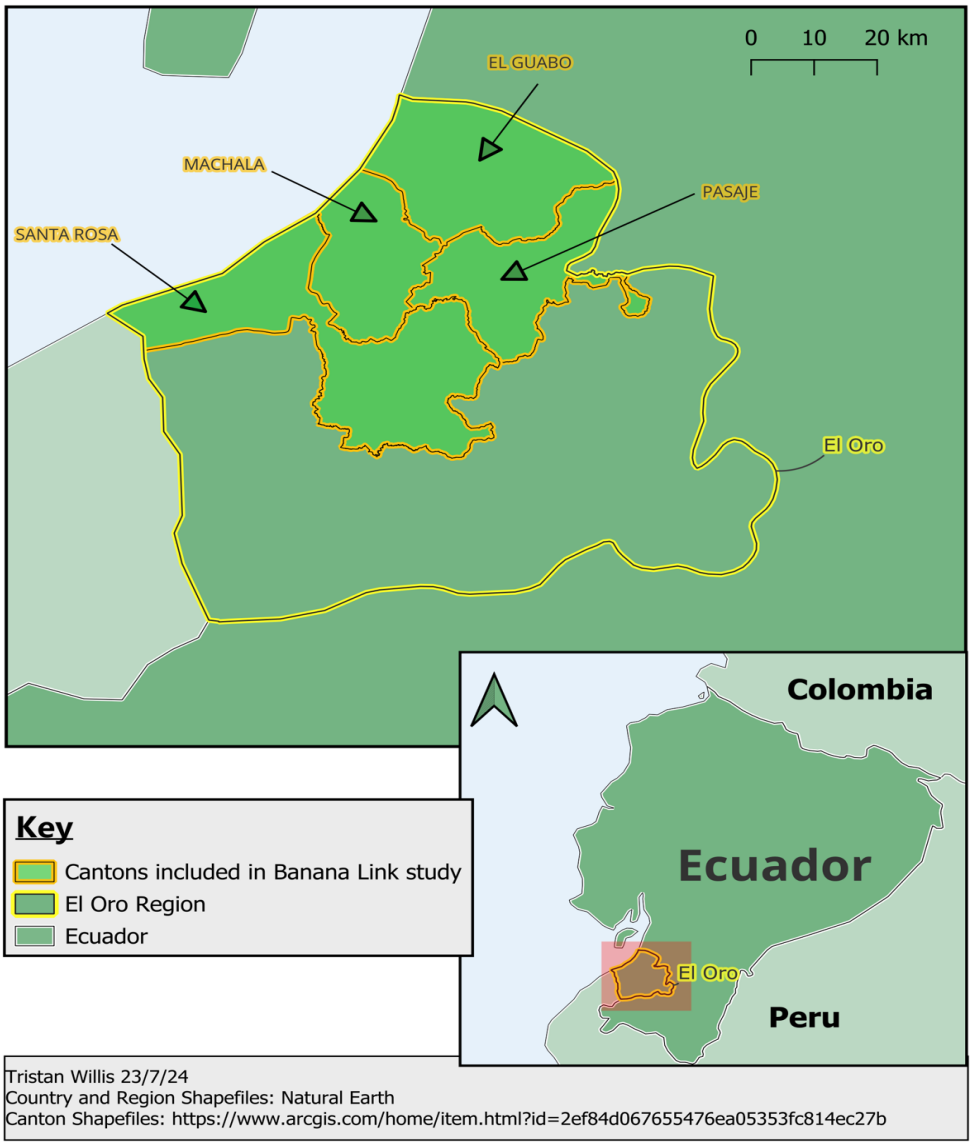
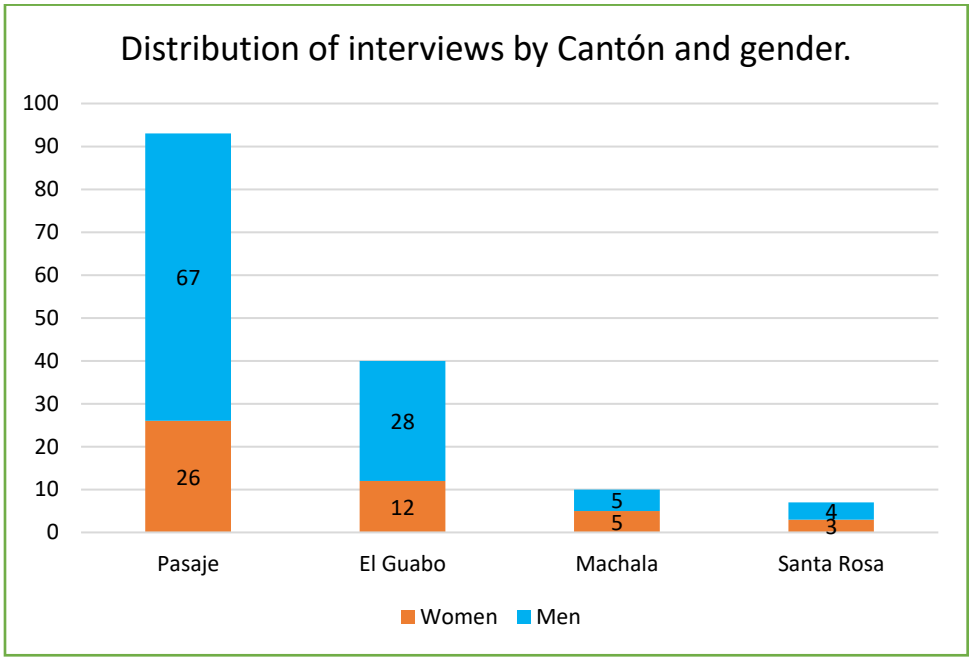


Illustration 1 Map of the cantons included in the study.

Participation in the interviews was voluntary, the objective of the study was explained to each participant, an informed consent form was included, and the confidentiality of their personal data was guaranteed. The interviewees were selected with the aim of including workers from different areas of work. The aim was to generate a relationship of trust between interviewers and workers that allowed participants to speak openly. All the surveys were anonymised to ensure that personal data was processed in accordance with current legislation in Ecuador and the European Union. Despite the confidentiality

measures taken and the rapport established between interviewers and workers, it was not possible to make audio recordings of the interviews as foreseen in the methodological design. Instead, questionnaires were filled out, in some cases from notes taken by the interviewers, and it is possible that information was lost during this process.

The 140 banana plantations included in the study are classified as 41 small (29%), 62 medium (44%) and 36 large (26%). The distribution of interviews by canton was as follows: Pasaje 93 interviews (62%); El Guabo, 40 interviews (27%); Machala, 10 interviews (7%) and Santa Rosa, 7 interviews (5%). Given the concentration of interviews in Pasaje, some results may reflect local conditions, no canton-disaggregated breakouts are provided.



Graph 1 Distribution of interviews by Cantón and gender

The distribution of interviews by farm size is shown in the table below.

Table 1 Interviews by farm/plantation size

Size	Women	Men	Total
Large > 100 ha	12	28	**40**
Medium >30 ha <100 ha	23	44	**67**
Small < 30 ha	11	32	**43**
Total	**46**	**104**	**150**

The respondents were 104 men and 46 women, representing 69% and 31% of the total sample respectively. The percentage of women interviewed is higher than the 14% female participation in the Ecuadorian banana industry estimated in the *Boletín situacional cultivo de banano 2023* by the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock of Ecuador.

The study was designed to interview a higher than proportionally representative number of women precisely because of their historical disadvantage in seeking work in the banana industry. Women were intentionally oversampled to improve the descriptive power of gender-specific questions. By interviewing a proportionately larger number of women, we aimed to collect data that could provide new insights or confirm current knowledge about the obstacles to their employment. In addition, interviewing a proportionally representative group of women in a survey of this size would have meant interviewing only 37 women, which would not have been sufficient to establish clear trends in the data. All gender-disaggregated figures are descriptive of our purposive sample; they are not adjusted for differences in task, contract, farm size, seniority, or canton and should be read as indicative patterns for the interviewed workers.

Table 2 Distribution of interviews by age and gender

Distribution of interviews by age and gender				
Size Ha.	**Women**	**Men**	**Total**	**Percentage**
Less than 20	6	3	9	6%
21-30	12	16	28	19%
31-40	15	25	40	27%
41-50	8	27	35	23%
51- 60	5	18	23	15%
More than 60	0	15	15	10%
Total	**46**	**104**	**150**	

The distribution of the interviews by age and gender shows that there is a much higher proportion of young women and women of reproductive age than those over 50 years old, and no women workers over 60 years old participated in this study as they were not present during the plantation visits to conduct the interviews. The question arises as to why this age group of women are not working on the plantations.

The highest proportion of respondents, both male and female, comprise the 31-40 age range with 27%, followed by the 41-50 age range with 23% of the interviews. The two age extremes, Under 20 and Over 60 years of age are the groups with the least number of interviews.

The main activities carried out in the Ecuadorian banana industry are divided between field work and packing house tasks. In the field the main jobs are: Harvesting, Turning, Pole-lifting, Trimming, De-suckering, Sorting, Stacking, Watering, Application of Fertiliser and Supervision.

In the packing house, the team of workers is responsible for putting the harvest into the banana boxes. The jobs in the packing house are: Defoliating, Tape Scoring, Sheath Washing, Post-Harvest Fumigation, Labelling, Weighing, De-handing, Loading, Packing. Bunch Washing, Carton Gluing, Evaluation, and Supervision.

All work, both in the field and in the packing house, is physically demanding and requires dedication, knowledge and effort. The distribution of work areas and interviews carried out included a higher proportion of workers in the packing house (Cuadrilla), 27 women and 54 men, representing a total percentage of interviews of 54%; the field area had a proportion of interviews of 45%, including 17 women and 50 men; finally, the administrative area was included with 2 women, representing 1% of the participants.

Table 3 Participants' area of work, disaggregated by gender

Gender-disaggregated work area			
	Women	**Men**	**Total**
Cuadrilla	27	54	81
Field	17	50	67
Administrative Area	2	0	2

The division of the interviews and the areas of work by gender was distributed as follows: Of the total number of women interviewed (46), 59% worked in the packing house, 37% worked in the field and 4% worked in the administrative area. This is a surprising result, based on existing knowledge of the banana industry, where it is understood that there is a rigid division of labour, with women employed almost exclusively in the packing house and men in the field, where the work is more physically demanding. This division of labour is understood to be a central factor in the low levels of female employment in the industry.

Previous studies have noted that there are some exceptions to this rule in Ecuador. In 2015, a study on gender in the banana industry in Latin America noted that, in Ecuador, small-scale women producers performed many of the field tasks themselves, employing men only to do the heavier work (Cooper, 2015, p.13). However, the women who were

identified as field workers for this study were not smallholders, but hired labour on plantations owned by third parties, so this does not explain the results. Among the tasks that women perform, they mentioned post-harvest fumigation, removing protective sheaths and deflowering; however, there is no detailed information on the activities performed by all the workers interviewed.

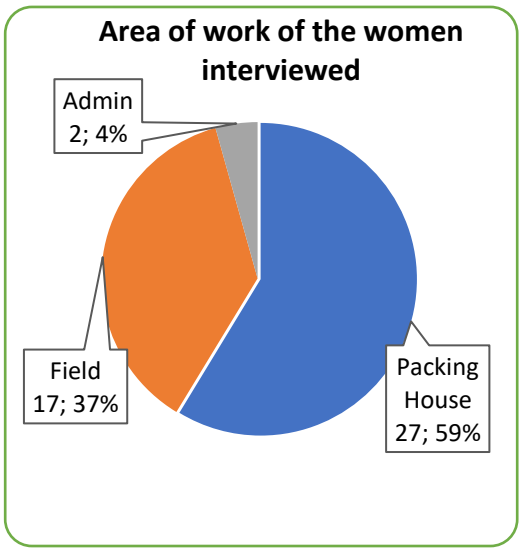
Although the survey results do not offer a clear explanation for the unusually high levels of women identifying themselves as field workers, the authors consulted local experts to ask whether these results seemed unusual.

Representatives of the independent workers' associations stated that the women who identified themselves as agricultural workers for this study work on medium and large plantations. They perform specific tasks of removing bananas, washing their protective sheaths ("diapa") and removing insects. These women work part of the week processing boxes and other days washing the fruit for insects and washing their protective sheaths for a second use. This is paid for by the farm and they work as day labourers in the fields. According to workers representatives, they work two or three days, they are not on the payroll, and they are casual workers with a salary of USD $15 a day. However, the wage data does not clearly correspond to this, as some women who identified themselves as farm labourers earned above the living wage.

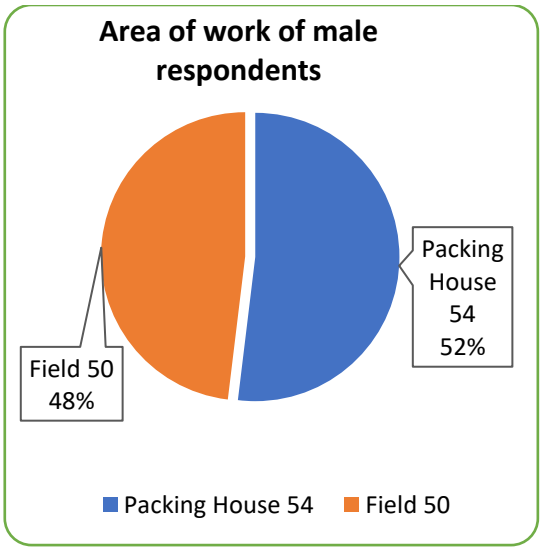
A local gender expert was consulted and shared the view that these results reflect a broader trend in which the rigid gender division of labour in the Ecuadorian banana sector is breaking down. In her opinion, this is the result of the confluence of economic difficulties and the national security crisis, which is putting families in very difficult situations and forcing women to take work in the fields in order to compete in the labour market and keep their jobs. Women's current tasks include the most physically demanding jobs, such as hauling banana crops to the warehouse with a cable tied around their waists.

The finding of the proportion of women currently working in the field raises many questions that are beyond the scope of this study, but which would merit further investigation. How do women feel about working in the field? How is the breakdown of the gender division of labour in the banana industry affecting gender stereotypes and "machismo"? Is the proportion of women employed in the industry increasing? What effect, if any, will this have on women's empowerment and leadership? Are women in the field exposed to more hazards, both through the tasks they perform and through exposure to possible violence and harassment? Are women working in mixed or single-sex teams, or both? Are adaptations made to support women in the field, in terms of loads carried, appropriate OHS provisions, etc.? Are women working in the field mainly single heads of

households? Are women working in the field paid the same as men for the same work? Is this a trend that is repeated in other banana producing countries in the region?

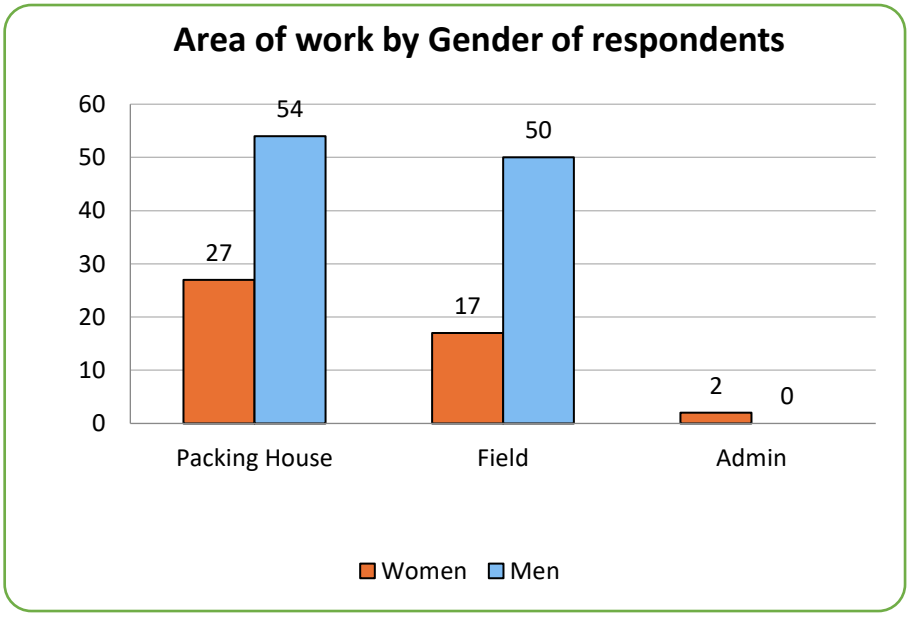


Graph 2 Area of work of the women interviewed



Graph 3 Area of work of male respondents

Of the total number of men interviewed (104), the majority (52%) belonged to the packhouse, among those who specified their job roles we found Graders, Quality Supervisors, De-handers, Packers, Weighers, Stevedores and Supervisors. Workers from the field (48% of the men interviewed) did not specify the tasks or roles they were engaged in. None of the men interviewed worked in administration.



Graph 4 Area of work by gender of respondents

Workers were not asked to disclose their nationality due to the sensitivity of this information. When asked whether migrants workers were among those employed on the farm/plantation where they worked, 83% of all participants said they were not, while only 17% reported that they were (22 respondents). This information is in contrast with the reported effects of the labour flexibilization promoted by President Moreno's government in 2020, which, according to local independent workers associations, has increased the number of Venezuelan migrant workers in the Ecuadorian banana industry (Banana Link, 2021). While the survey included a question on the perceived percentage of the migrant workers within the workforce, it must be emphasized that the reported figures are workers perceptions rather than hard data. Those participants who stated that migrant workers were among those hired at their workplace estimated them to make up between 1% - 45% of the total workforce.

The questionnaire allowed the collection of information, disaggregated by gender, on the following topics:

Table 4 Main themes - Findings.

Living Wage
● ***Wage conditions*** ○ Salary received ○ Payment of bonuses, holidays, sickness/maternity leave, overtime, etc. ○ Gender pay gap
● Household composition and household expenditure
● General knowledge about the Living Wage and the Minimum Wage ● Ideal living wage
Decent Work
● ***Contractual terms and conditions*** ○ Type of employment ○ Type of contract ○ Seniority recognition ○ Affiliation to social security and for medical care.
● ***Working Conditions*** ○ Occupational Health and Safety Measures ○ Training and perception of ability to perform assigned tasks. ○ Mechanisms for complaints or to report violence and harassment ○ Length of working hours and forced labour (overtime) ○ Dignified treatment (discrimination, xenophobia, harassment, gender-based violence)

• ***Trade union membership***
  ○ Freedom of association
  ○ Freedom to engage in trade union activities without reprimands
  ○ Familiarity with trade unions present on farms
  ○ Views on trade union activity in the workplace

Satisfaction with work in the banana sector

Limits of the study

The study was conducted between January and June 2024. The research methodology, and the ability to gather information via surveys, were strongly affected by the turbulent national context during that period, which saw the security situation in Ecuador rapidly decline. Throughout 2023, reports of extortion, violence, corruption and homicides increased. This situation directly affected the banana industry; in August 2023, Spanish police seized 9.5 tonnes of cocaine hidden in banana shipments from Ecuador. The same month, presidential candidate Fernando Villavicencio was assassinated. Daniel Noboa, who had been elected president in October 2023, declared a state of emergency and internal war in January 2024[10], after armed gangs took television show hosts hostage during a live broadcast. Citizens received official advice on how to avoid crimes such as kidnapping and carjacking.

The context of generalised insecurity made it difficult to follow the research schedule. Additional security measures were necessary to ensure the safety of all research participants. In view of the general national security crisis and specific barriers to freedom of association, the survey and methodology were designed in anticipation of higher-than-average levels of anxiety and caution on the part of participants. The quantity of personal information requested from participants was limited to include only questions relating to essential personal data and core research questions on pay and contractual conditions. In order to obtain information on the more general elements of decent work, direct questions ("have you experienced...?") were replaced by indirect questions ("do you know anyone who has experienced...?"). As a result, much of the more general data on decent work can only present an overview of workers' perceptions, rather than concrete statistics and percentages.

Specific issues for workers have also become more acute, particularly in relation to freedom of association. In 2023, the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC)

[10] https://static.poder360.com.br/2024/01/equador-decreto-estado-excecao-8-jan-2024.pdf

included Ecuador for the first time in the list of the ten worst countries for workers. The ITUC's 2024 Global Index of Rights found that, 'In Ecuador, workers attempting to form or join a trade union faced death threats and dismissals in a pervasive, dangerous anti-union climate.... Employers are free to interfere with impunity in trade union formation... On top of a restrictive legal framework for unions, authorities regularly rejected applications for union registration without justification' (ITUC, 2024, p.35). The report also mentioned three women trade unionists working in the banana sector who reported receiving death threats because of their trade union activity and criticised the lack of protection for workers.

For similar reasons, despite the confidentiality measures adopted and the good relationship between interviewers and workers, it was not possible to make recordings of the interviews as foreseen in the methodological design; the questionnaires were, in some cases, filled in from notes taken by the interviewers and it is possible that information was lost during this process.

Finally, some limitations were experienced in relation to the number of interviews carried out on farms of different sizes. The initial methodology specified that study participants would be sought on 10 large, 6 medium and 5 small farms, with workers from different areas interviewed. However, due to the security crisis, the methodology was adapted. While a balance between the number of workers employed in the three farm sizes was sought, only in very few cases was it possible to do more than one interview in the same location. The distribution of the number of interviews per farm size can be seen in table 5.

Table 5 Distribution of workers by farm size.

Distribution by size of hectares	**Number of farms**	**Number of workers**
0-30 ha (small)	41	43
>30 ≤100 ha (medium-sized)	62	67
100 ha or more (large)	36	40
Total	139	150

Findings

Living Wage

Wage conditions

Salary

In 2023, the GLWC, using the Anker methodology[11] , set the gross living wage for banana workers in Ecuador at $489 USD per month, for the standard work week (not including overtime) (Global Living Wage Coalition, 2023). For its part, the Ecuadorian Ministry of Labour set the Living Wage at $484.75 USD per month, while the general minimum wage for workers, known as the Unified Basic Wage (SBU), was set at $460 USD per month as of 01 January 2024.

The Gross Living Wage is calculated by adding the statutory payroll deductions and income tax to the net living wage (Anker & Anker, 2017). However, a review of payroll information on worker payslips was beyond the scope of our enquiry. For the purposes of this study, we use the GLWC's definition of Net living wage, which is $450 USD per month. Since our research relied on workers reported Net income, irrespective of whether taxes and statutory payroll deductions were made or not, it was correct to compare this to the GLWC Net LW estimation rather than the Gross LW estimation. In other words, we could only compare the take home pay reported as received by the workers and only assumptions could be made about whether tax and other payments were done or not by the plantations.

When asked about their salary and income, study participants tended to share their income as a daily figure, rather than a monthly salary. This is at odds with the monthly living wage calculations produced by government and research institutions. The fact that around 40% of the workers who participated in this study reported their wage as a daily figure suggests that this is the most logical way for them to understand and evaluate their income. This in itself indicates a certain level of precariousness, or day-to-day living.

To compare the workers' daily wage to the $450 USD monthly Net living wage benchmark provided for the GLWC's, it was necessary to break this figure down to an estimated rate per day of work. We took the monthly net wage of $450 USD, multiplied it by 12 months and divided it by 52 weeks, and then divided it by 5 days. This operation gave us a daily wage of $20.77 USD per day[12]. Whilst this amount excludes overtime or any other extra

[11] See: https://www.globallivingwage.org/anker-living-wage-and-living-income-reference-values/

[12] (450 USD * 12 months) / 52 weeks) / 5 week work days = 20.7USD per day. This equals 21.5 work days per month.

payments or deductions (as income tax), we cannot ensure that the take-home-pay declared by the participants does not include extra payments, such as extra time.

Employing the figure of $20.77USD per day, we calculated eight ranges containing the wages reported by the respondents. As our sample is purposive, the resulting shares are descriptive of interviewed workers. Table 6 specifies the wage received and the corresponding Net Living Wage percentage.

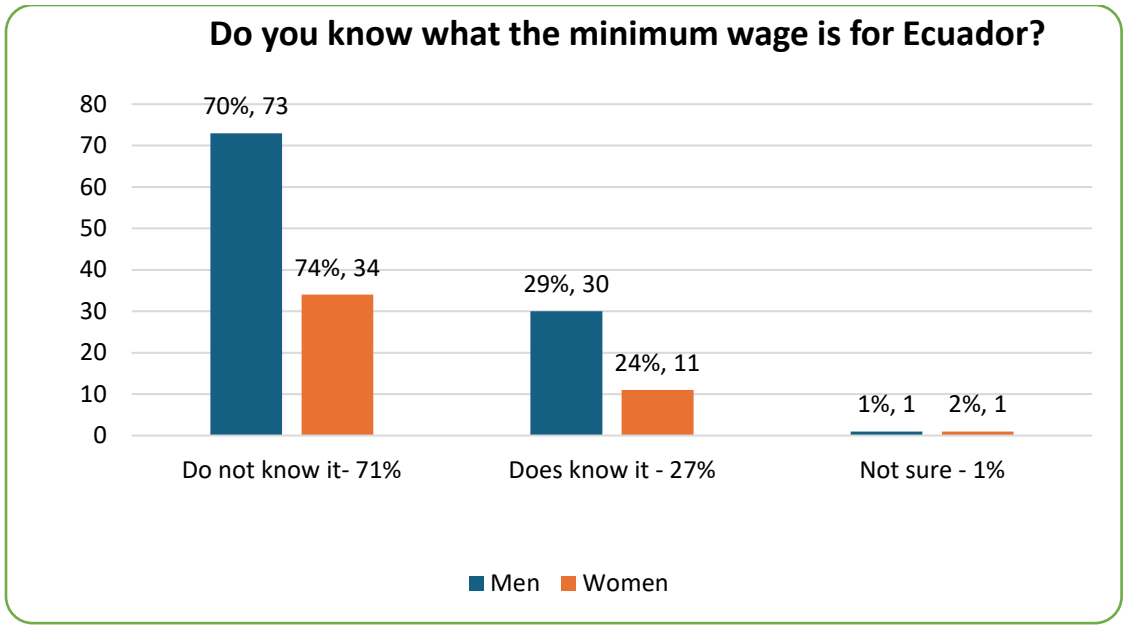
Table 6 Daily Wage Received by Participants VS Daily Net Living Wage

$8.31 USD to $12.25 USD	40% - 59% of daily Net LW
$12.46 USD to $16.41 USD	60% - 79% of daily Net LW
$16.62 USD to $20.56 USD	80% - 99% of daily Net LW
$20.77 USD to $24.72 USD	100% - 119% of daily Net LW
$24.87 USD to $28.87 USD	120% - 139% of daily Net LW
$29.08 USD to $33.02 USD	140% - 159% of daily Net LW
$33.23 USD to $37.18 USD	160% - 179% of daily Net LW
More than $37.33 USD	180% or more of daily Net LW

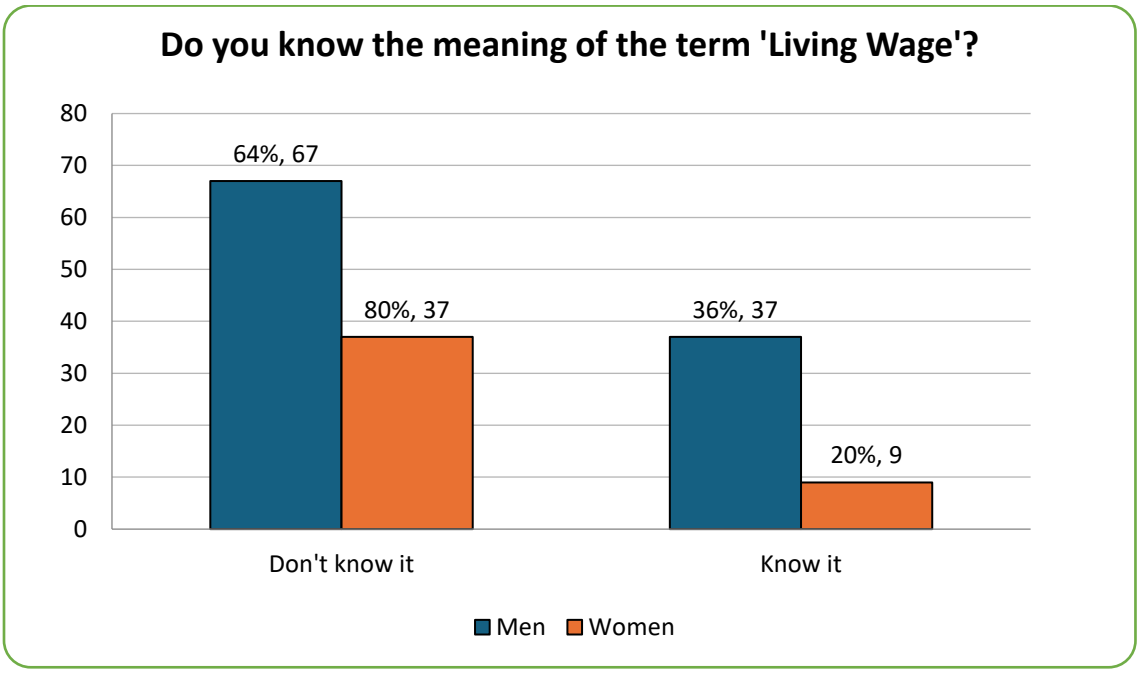
General knowledge on Living Wage and Minimum Wage

When asked if they were aware of the minimum wage in Ecuador, [13] the majority of survey participants (71%) were not. Only 27% claimed to be aware of the minimum wage and 1% were unsure. When asked whether they knew the meaning of the term 'Living Wage',[14] the majority (58%) said they did not know, while 31% said they did and 11% were unsure.

[13] *'¿Usted tiene conocimiento del salario mínimo en Ecuador?'*
[14] *'¿Usted tiene conocimiento del significado del Salario Digno?'*



Graph 5 Knowledge about the minimum wage in Ecuador



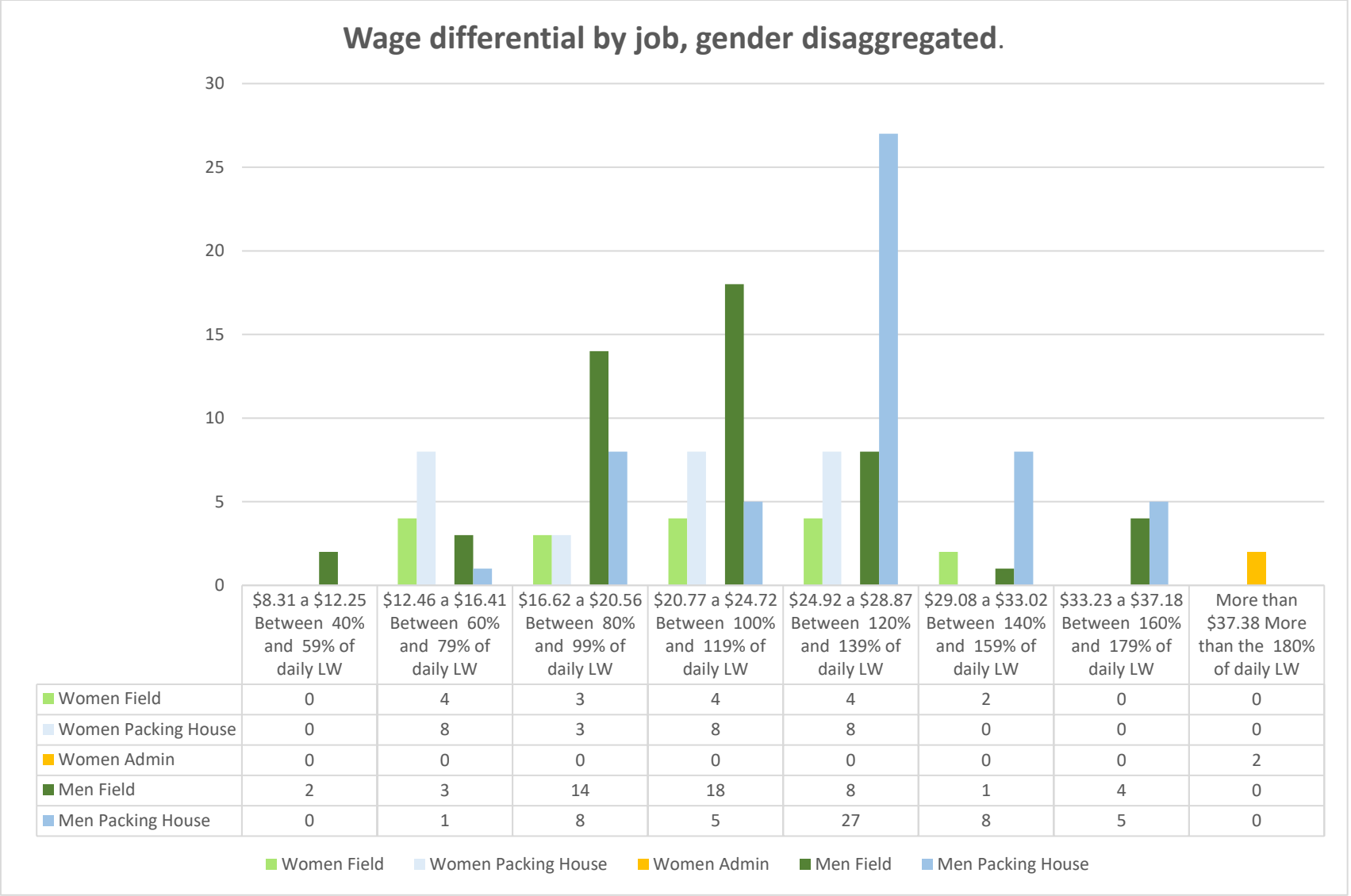
Graph 6 Knowledge of the meaning of Living Wage

As Graph 7 Wage differential by job, disaggregated by genderGraph 7 shows, the percentage of female respondents earning a wage between $12.46USD and $16.62 USD (corresponding to 60% to 79% of the Living Wage) is higher than the percentage of males: for every male earning $16.62USD or less, there are 2 women. Put another way, 26% of

the women interviewed (12 of the sample: 8 from the packing house and 4 from the field) earn between $12.46 USD and $16.62 USD, with women hired in the packing house earning least; meanwhile only 6% of male participants were in this wage bracket (5 field workers and 1 packing house worker). Notwithstanding, the lowest salary reported corresponds to two male field workers, who reported earning between $8.31USD and $12.45USD, corresponding to 40% and 59% of the daily Net Living Wage.

The Daily Net Living Wage calculated for this project is $20.77. It was calculated considering 40 hours of work per week divided by 5 days; 52 weeks were considered to calculate an average number of working days per month: 52 weeks multiplied by 5 days divided by 12 months = an average of 21.7 working days per month. The Monthly NET Living Wage for Ecuador ($450USD) was then divided by 21.7, which gave us a $20.77USD daily Net Living Wage.

We found that 31% of all workers interviewed earned bellow Net LW, 39% of the women and 27% of the men, respectively.



	$8.31 a $12.25 Between 40% and 59% of daily LW	$12.46 a $16.41 Between 60% and 79% of daily LW	$16.62 a $20.56 Between 80% and 99% of daily LW	$20.77 a $24.72 Between 100% and 119% of daily LW	$24.92 a $28.87 Between 120% and 139% of daily LW	$29.08 a $33.02 Between 140% and 159% of daily LW	$33.23 a $37.18 Between 160% and 179% of daily LW	More than $37.38 More than the 180% of daily LW
Women Field	0	4	3	4	4	2	0	0
Women Packing House	0	8	3	8	8	0	0	0
Women Admin	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Men Field	2	3	14	18	8	1	4	0
Men Packing House	0	1	8	5	27	8	5	0

Graph 7 Wage differential by job, disaggregated by gender

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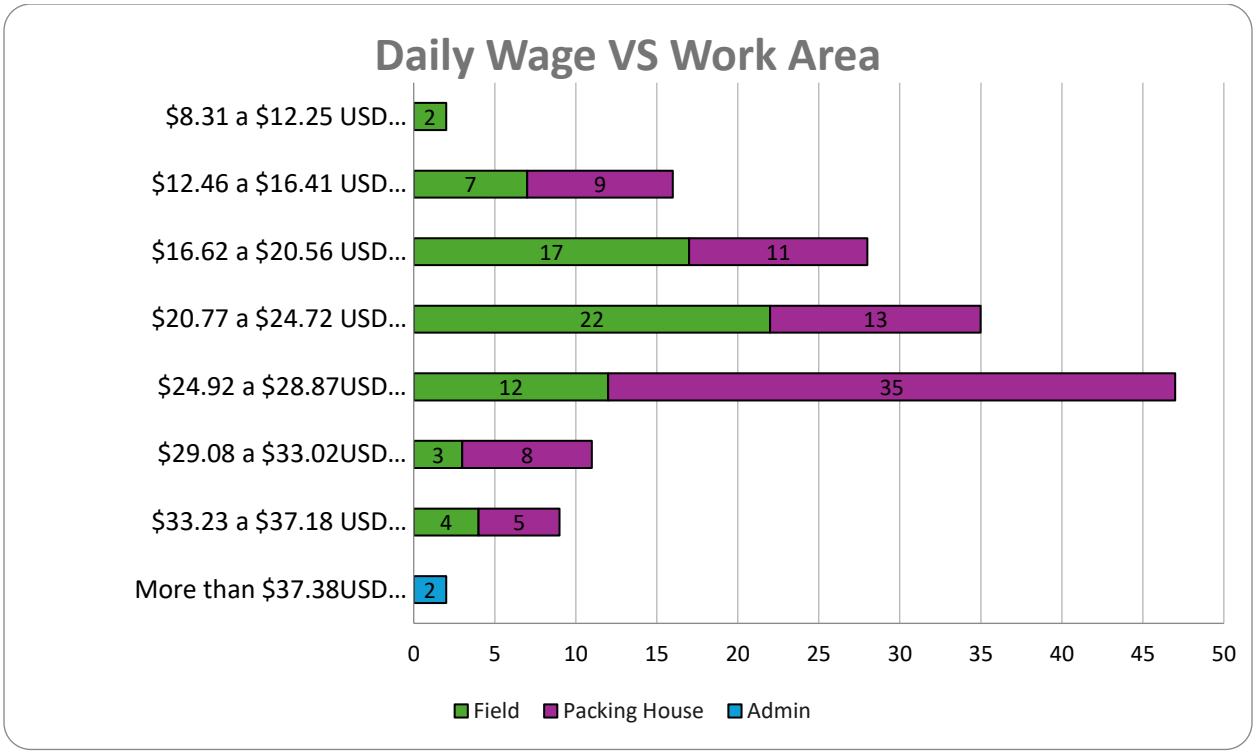


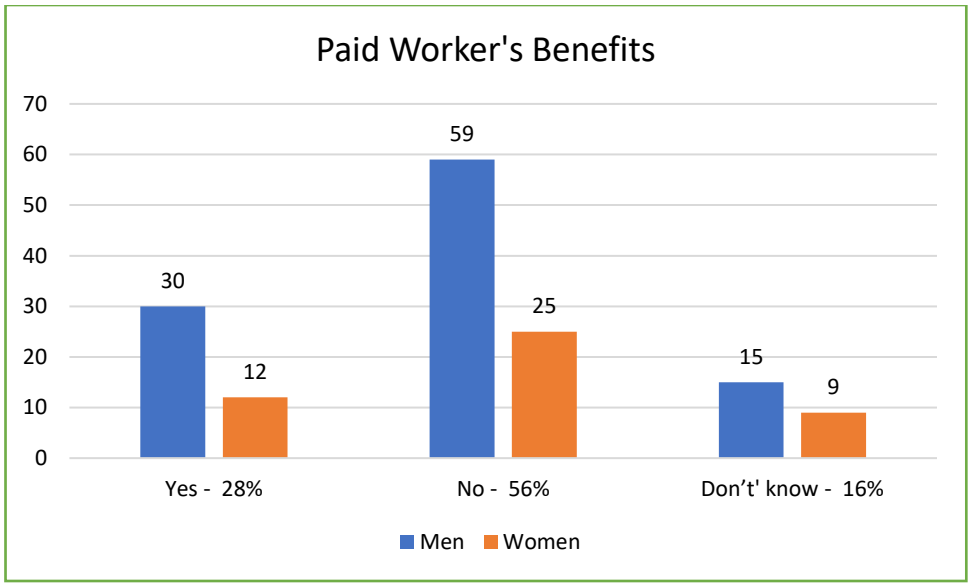
Graph 8 Daily Wage Vs Work Area

Payment of wage benefits: bonuses, holidays, sickness leave, maternity leave

Among the benefits that workers are entitled to, in accordance with the Ecuadorian Labour Code, are paid holidays, which consist of 15 days after one year of service; a share in profits (for casual and permanent workers alike); and bonuses known as the Thirteenth and the Fourteenth (month) bonuses. Thirteenth, also known as 'Christmas Bonus', is paid by the employer in December and is equivalent to one twelfth of the workers annual wages. The Fourteenth, also known as the 'School Bonus', is the amount paid monthly to contracted workers and corresponds to one twelfth of the unified minimum basic remuneration

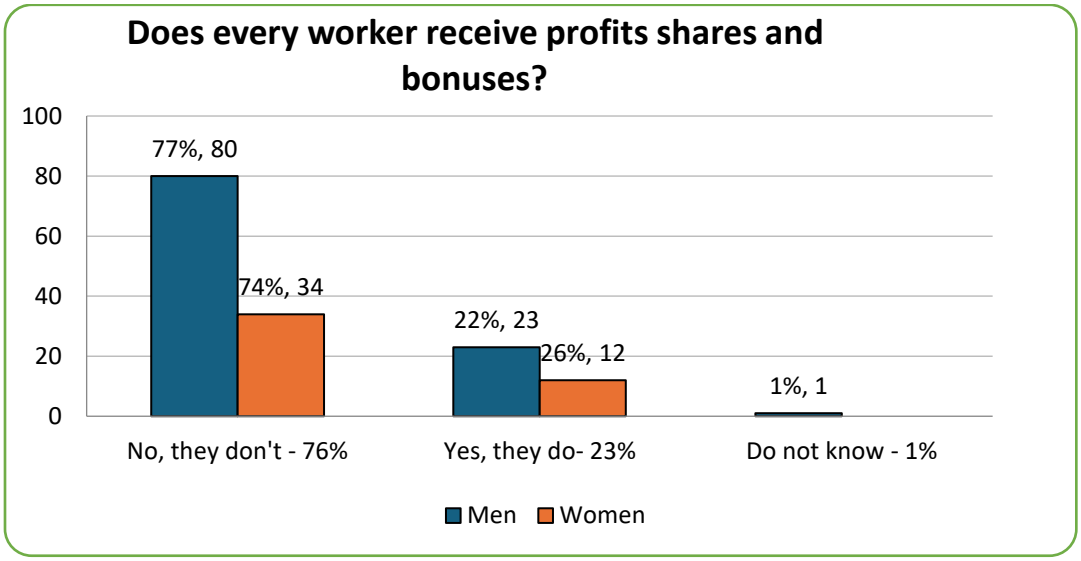
When participants were asked the general question: 'Do they pay worker benefits here?',[15] 54% of the total sample (56 men and 25 women) stated that banana plantations do not provide benefits to workers; 29% indicated that they do (31 men and 12 women); and 17% do not know (17 men and 9 women).

[15] '*¿Aquí les dan prestaciones a los trabajadores?*'



Graph 9 Benefits provided to workers

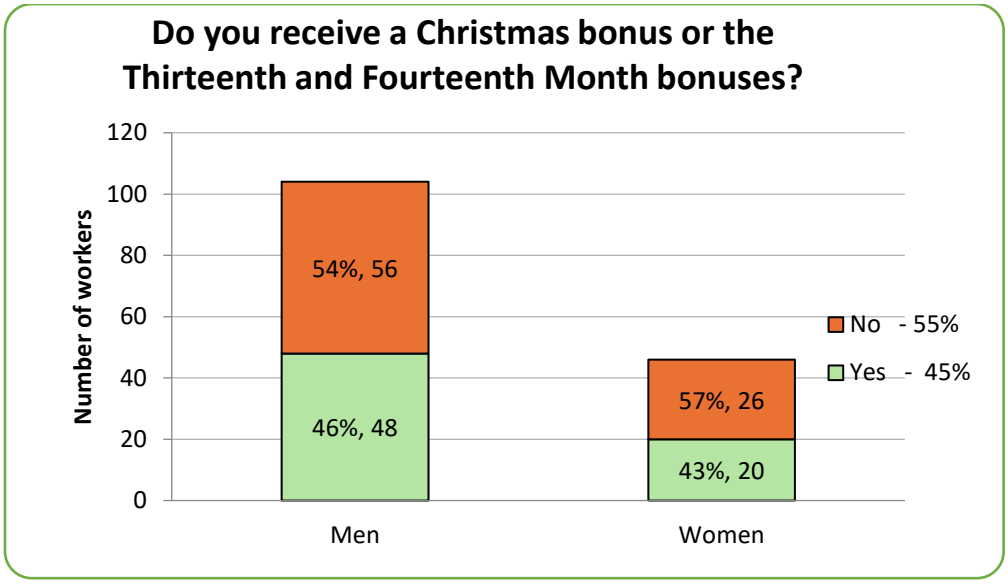
When asked specifically whether all those hired at their workplace received the Thirteenth and Fourteenth month bonuses and a share in profits,[16] 76% of the workers interviewed said that in general they do not, 23% said that they do, and one respondent did not know.



Graph 10 Profits and bonuses received

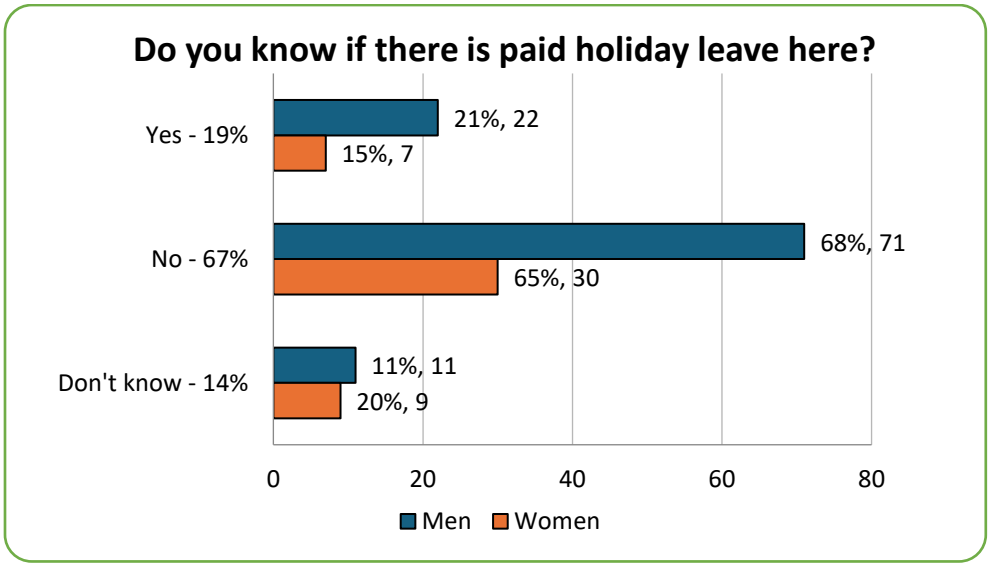
When each of the survey participants was asked if they personally receive Thirteenth- and Fourteenth-Month bonuses or a Christmas bonus[17], 45% said that they do, while 55% did not.

[16] *'¿Reciben beneficios (decimos / utilidades) todos los que trabajan aquí?'*
[17] *'¿Recibe usted aguinaldo o décimo tercero/ décimo cuarto mes?'*



Graph 11 The 13th and 14th Christmas bonuses

When workers were asked about paid holidays[18], 67% of the sample stated that the plantation/farm where they work does not offer paid holidays; 19% said that holidays are paid by the employer, and 14% didn't know. Of the total number of women interviewed, only 15% of them answered that they receive holiday pay, 67% said they do not, and the remaining 20% do not know.



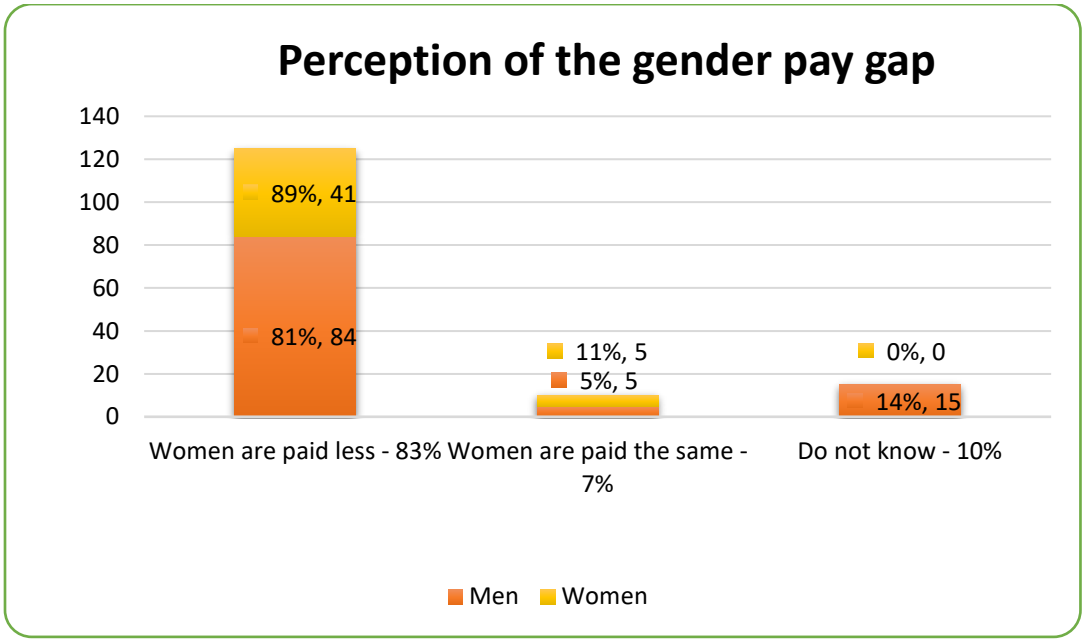
Graph 12 Paid holidays?

[18] '*¿Sabe si aquí pagan las vacaciones?*'

Perceptions of the Gender Pay Gap

As Graph 13 shows, 83% of all workers interviewed (41 women and 84 men) say that women are paid less than men for performing the same activities. This perception aligns with the data gathered on the daily wages (Graph 7 and Graph 8), since at least 26% of the women interviewed earn well below the Living Wage, while only 6% of the men interviewed earn a similar wage. Considering that the number of male respondents is more than double the number of female participants, we can infer that there are more women receiving lower wages than men in the same areas of work.

When asked about women in leadership positions,[19] 31% of participants said that they knew of women in leadership roles at their workplace, 29% said that they did not, while the largest group of respondents (40%) did not know.



Graph 13 Perception of the gender pay gap

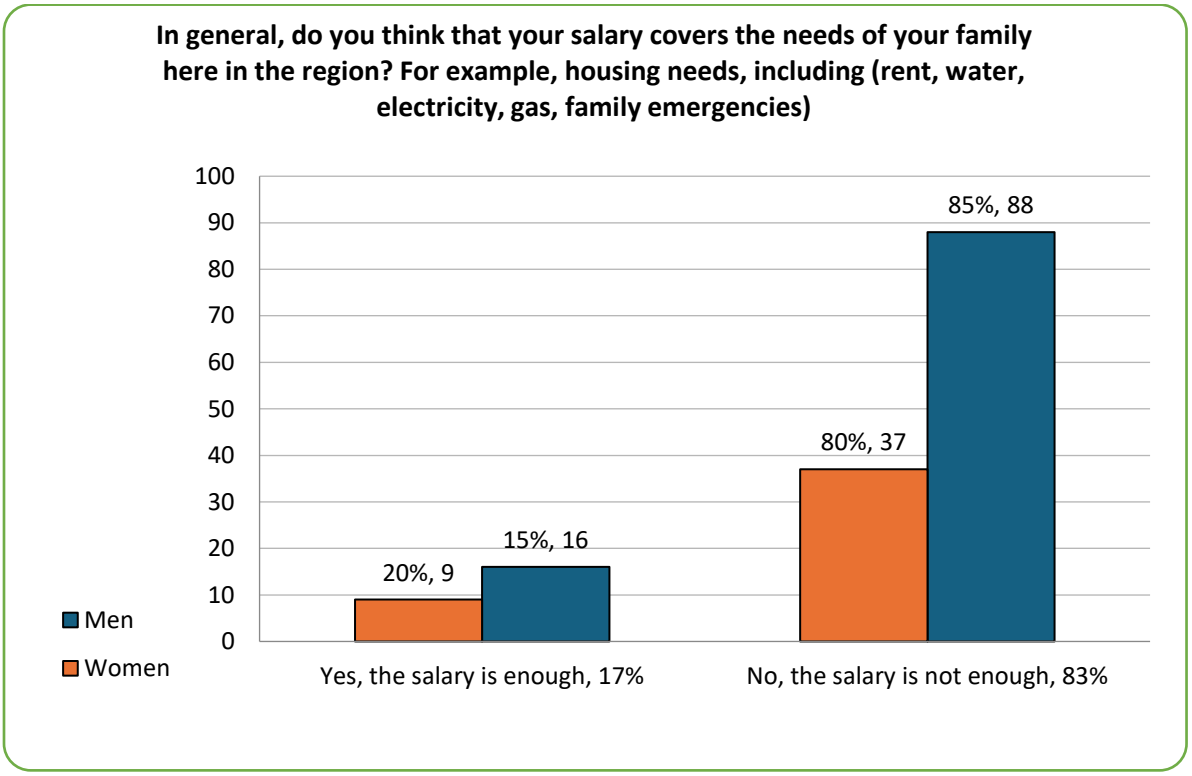
Household composition and household expenditure

Although this study did not investigate in detail the real cost of the basic basket of goods that the interviewees have to cover, workers are considered experts in their own lived experience and able, therefore, to provide an account of whether the salary they receive allows them to live in dignity or not. When asked whether the salary they receive is

[19] '*¿Sabe si hay mujeres en puestos directivos?*'

sufficient to cover the local living expenses of their family,[20] the perception of 83% of the workers surveyed was that the salary they earn working in the banana plantations is not enough to cover their family's needs. Only 17% of survey participants considered their salary is sufficient.

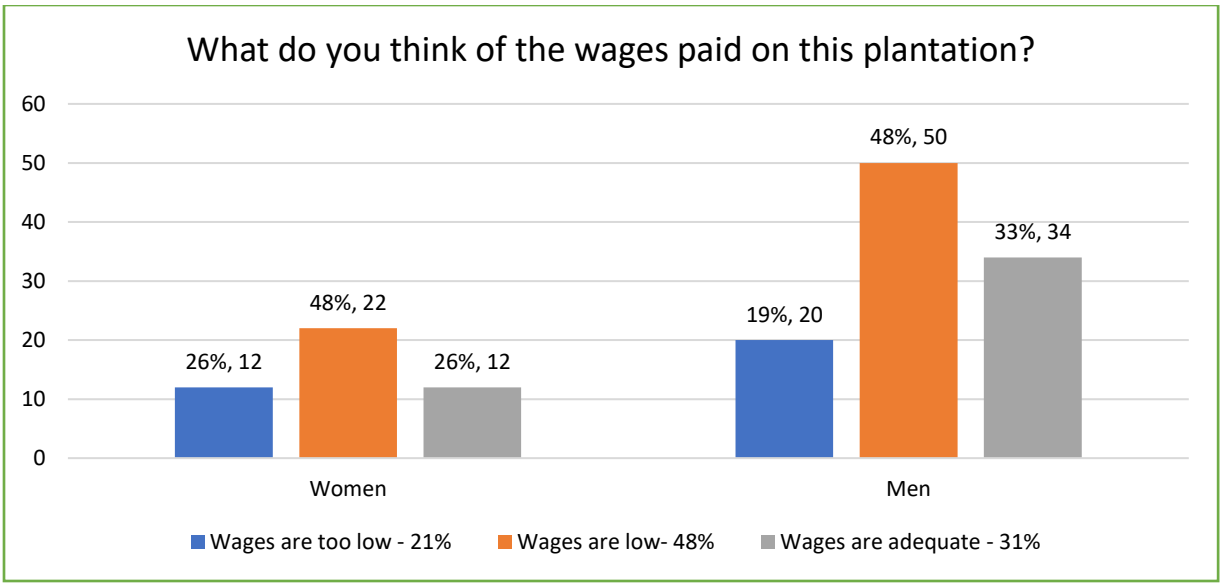
So far, we reported two distinct indicators for Living Wages, self-reported daily earning and perceive adequacy. Here, we focused on perceived adequacy; these are self-reported perceptions and are not a quantified living-wage shortfall.



Graph 14 Perception of salary received VS family needs

The perception of the extent to which the current wages received by the interviewees are sufficient to cover the needs of their family unit is striking. When asked their views about wages paid at their farm or plantation[21], 69% of workers surveyed say that the wages paid by their employers are low or very low, while 31% consider that wages are adequate. Among those who indicated that wages are **very low** were 12 women (corresponding to 26% of all female respondents) and 20 men (19% of the male respondents). Among those who consider wages to be low were 22 women (48% of all female participants) and 50 men (48% of all male participants).

[20] *'¿En general, Cree que su salario cubre las necesidades de su familia aquí en la región? Por ejemplo, las necesidades de Vivienda, incluyendo renta, agua, electricidad, gas, emergencias familiares.'*
[21] *'¿Qué piensa de los salarios que se pagan en esta finca?'*



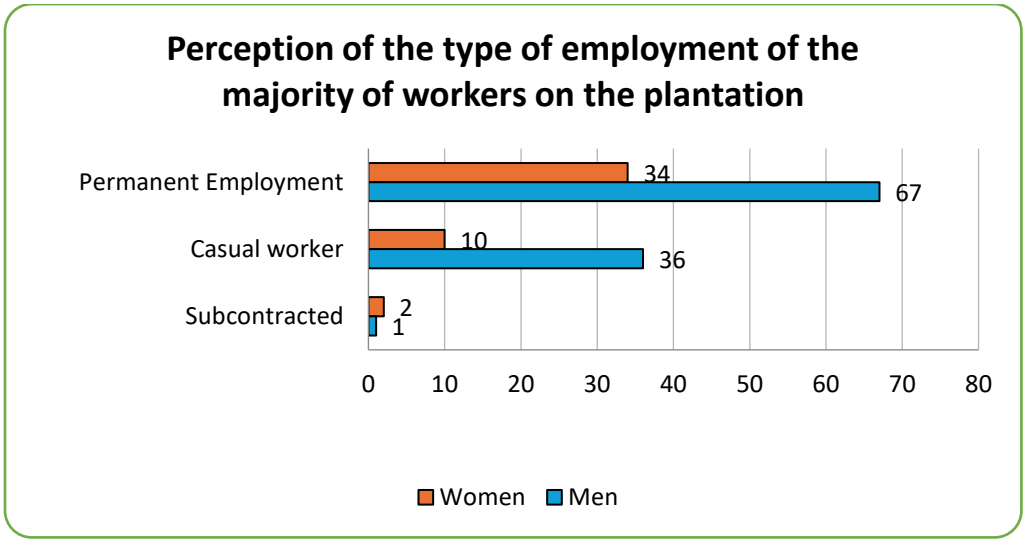
Graph 15 Valuation of the average farm wage

Decent Work and Protection of Human Rights

Contractual terms and conditions

Type of employment and contract

With regard to the management of the workforce, a range of labour violations were identified in relation to hiring, dismissal, the payment of wages, imposition of tasks, and working conditions, among others.



Graph 16 Perception of contract type

Despite the fact that most participants believe that the majority of workers at their workplace are employed on a permanent basis (Graph 16), when asked if workers had a contract (individual or collective) that they were given a written copy of, a significant percentage (57% of the total sample) said that they don't, or that they don't know whether they do or not.

Among those who answered that there are no contracts on their plantation were 33 women (72% of the female respondents) and 39 men (38% of the male respondents); those who indicated that there are contracts were 12 women (26% of the female participants) and 52 men (50% of the male respondents). 13 male and 2 female participants did not know whether or not there are contracts at their workplace.

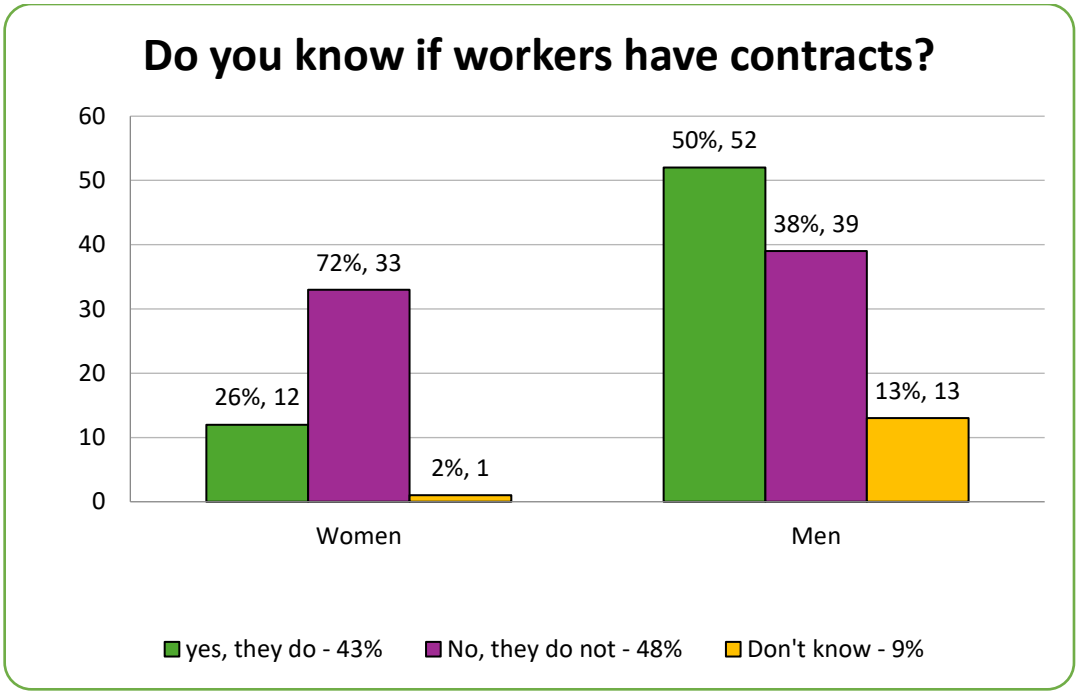
One limitation of this question is how it was formulated: instead of asking participants directly whether they had a contract and if so, whether they had a written copy of it, the question was posed indirectly: *'Do you know if there are workers who have a contract?'*[22] and *'Do you know if they are given a copy of their contract?'*[23] Although we cannot be sure whether the participants have a contract or not, the lack of knowledge about the contractual conditions in their work is indicative of a labour system that lacks transparency and does not meet the minimum conditions for decent work.

Equally telling is that only three male participants reported having a collective bargaining agreement. A collective agreement, negotiated through collective bargaining by a union or independent workers' association with company management, is subject to local law and protects workers' wages and associated contractual conditions for the duration of the agreement. The low proportion of workers with collective contracts indicates weak conditions for social dialogue and possible obstacles to freedom of association.

Those who do not have a contract accept the wages and working conditions that the employer defines.

[22] '*¿Sabe si hay trabajadores que tienen contrato?'*

[23] '*¿Sabe si les da una copia del contrato?'*



Graph 17 Do workers have contracts?

Of the workers who say they have a contract, 52% tell us that they do not know the terms of the contract; they are made to sign quickly and are not given a copy, which is a breach of the law. Contract indicators reflect workers' reports; in the frequent absence of written contracts or pay slips, these results capture perceived – not audited – contractual status.

Recognition of seniority and social security affiliation

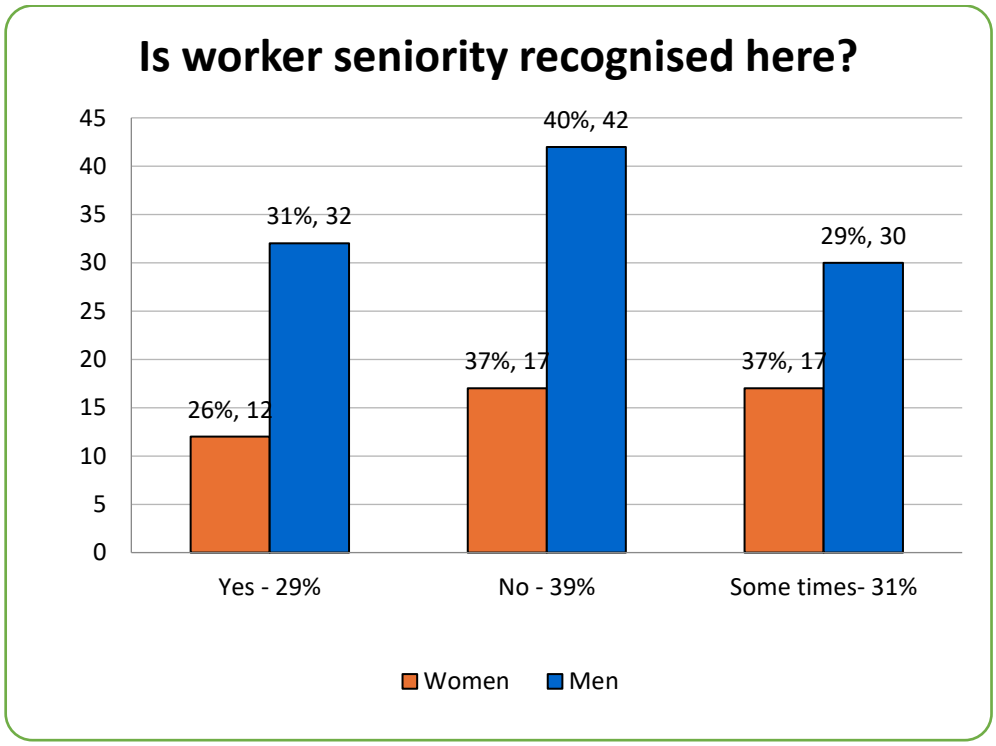
Work seniority refers to the number of years working in the banana plantation and whether or not these are registered by the employer; seniority duly registered with the Ecuadorian Institute of Social Security (IESS) gives the worker access to compensation for dismissal, retirement, maternity leave or compensation in the event of incapacity that prevents him/her from returning to work or death[24] . Affiliation to Social Security and recognition of seniority go hand in hand; the two procedures allow for the full enjoyment of each worker's labour rights; failure in either of these employer obligations is detrimental to the workforce.

When asked, only 29% of the survey participants said that length of service is recognised at the farm or plantation where they work[25], while 39% indicated that it is not. Meanwhile, 31% of participants said that sometimes their employers do recognise their seniority, but sometimes they do not. The lack of clarity on how seniority is

[24] See: https://www.iess.gob.ec/en/web/afiliado/servicios-y-prestaciones

[25] *'Aquí les reconocen la antigüedad de los trabajadores?'*

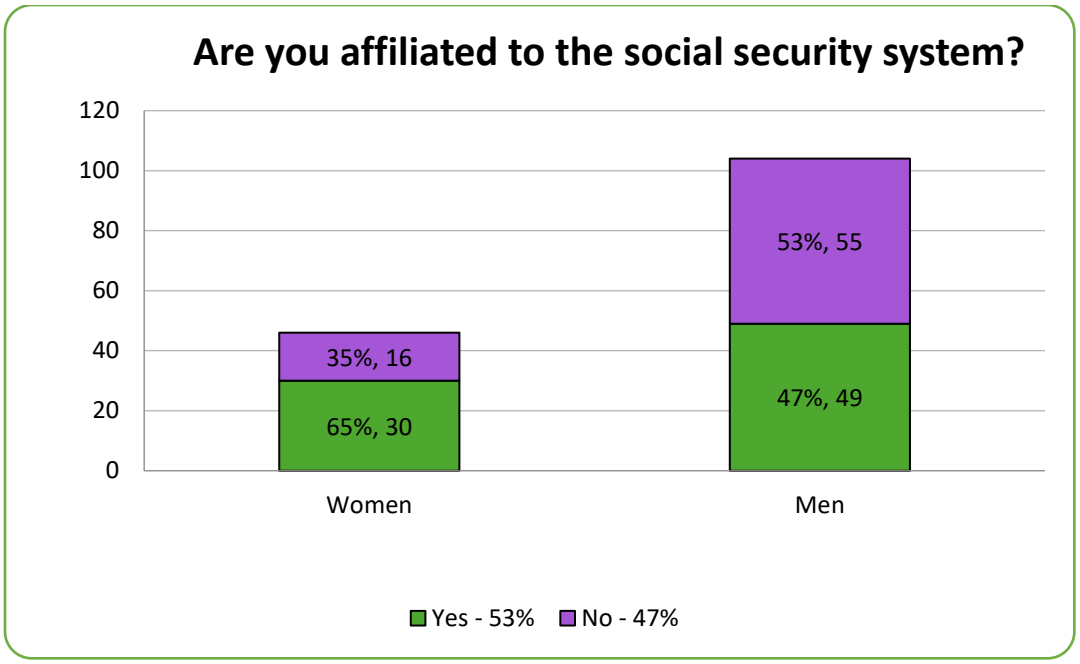
recognised does not allow workers to know whether or not they will be able to have a pension when they retire, or whether they are entitled to compensation in case of dismissal or accident. In future studies it would be important to investigate in depth how seniority is recognised financially.



Graph 18 Seniority recognition

When asked directly whether they are affiliated to social security,[26] 53% of study participants say that they are, while 47% believe that they are not. Of the total number of workers who believe they are affiliated to social security, 49 are men and 30 are women, while 55 men and 16 women are not affiliated to social security. Unfortunately, we did not ask whether or not they had pay stubs that recorded seniority, employer contributions and social security affiliation.

[26] '*¿Está usted afiliado a la seguridad social?*'



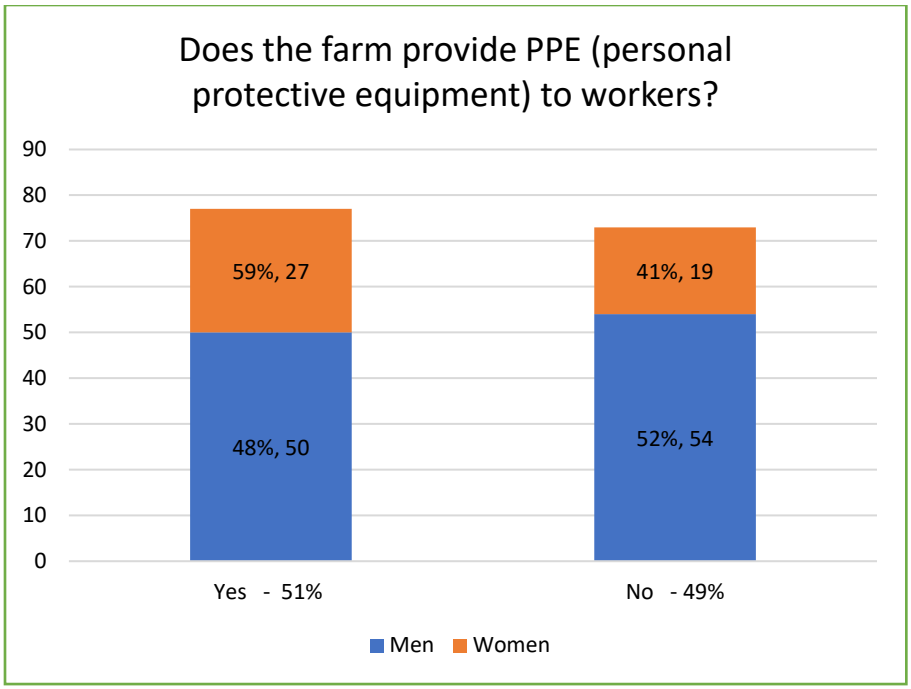
Graph 19 Social Security affiliation

Working Conditions

Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) measures

It is essential that all activities in banana production take place in a healthy working environment: one that respects OHS standards, offers appropriate working hours, develops positive relationships, and where the worker's knowledge and experience is appropriate for the work they do. As an agro-industrial system, banana production entails high levels of exposure to pollutants such as pesticides and other chemicals, therefore it is essential that adequate OHS measures are in place. Because task assignment differs according to both the gender of the worker and the plantation where they work, observed PPE and training differences may partly reflect exposure patterns rather than unequal provision; we therefore treat these as indicative disparities.

An important observation is that 49% of the interviewees indicated that the farm does NOT provide personal protective equipment (PPE) to workers. Although 51% of the total number of interviewees indicated that the farm where they work does provide PPE to workers, 5 male and 1 female interviewee(s) mentioned that PPE is only provided in special circumstances such as when an audit or farm visit takes place.



Graph 20 Personal Protective Equipment provided by the plantation

When asked in more detail about the use of PPE, such as boots, overalls, gloves, aprons, caps, during the working day[27], 55% of participants said that workers have this equipment, while 39% indicated that they do not have this protection. We did not ask how often this type of equipment is provided, whether it is replaced when it shows signs of damage, and although we asked whether they receive salary deductions for equipment or food, we did not specifically ask whether the cost of this equipment is deducted from workers' salaries.

[27] *'¿Disponen los trabajadores del equipo adecuado (botas, monos, guantes, gorros, delantales, por ejemplo) para protegerse en el trabajo?'*

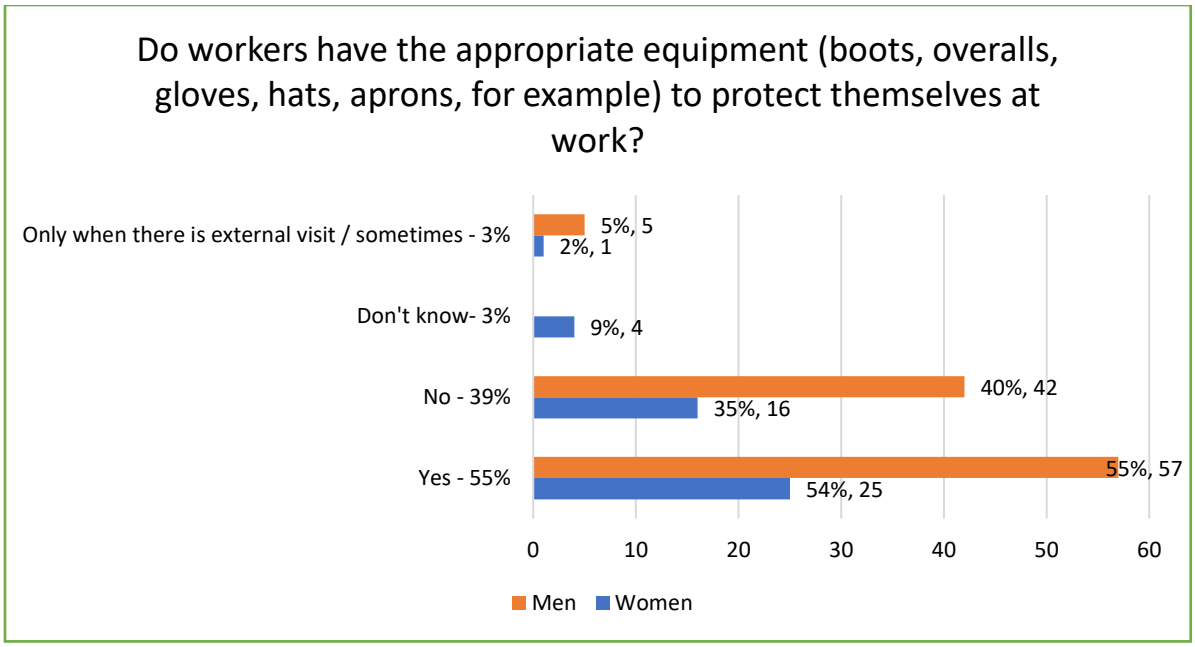


Figure 21 Access to PPE

Training and perception of ability to perform assigned tasks

In the area of professional training and education, 78 of the workers interviewed indicated that they receive training in their area of work, while 71 workers do not receive training, and 1 worker did not know. Details on the frequency and contents of training were beyond the scope of this research.

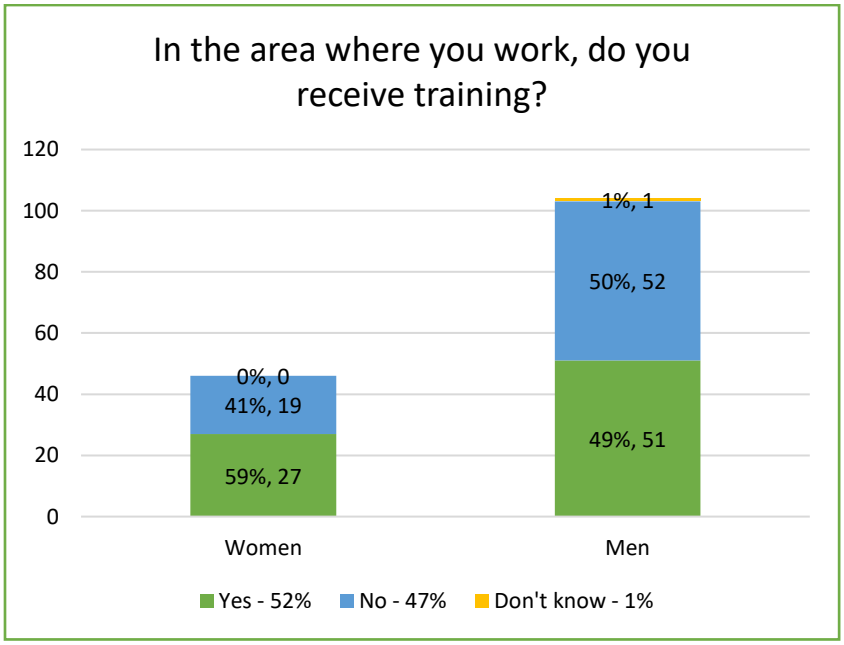


Figure 22 On-the-job training

Training is essential for workers to perform tasks in the safest and most efficient way. When study participants were asked if they believe that workers feel confident to work with fertilisers, insecticides, pesticides, latex and cutting tools,[28] 45% stated that they do while the majority, 55% of the workers interviewed across the 140 banana plantations in our sample, responded that they believe that the workforce does not feel safe, that they felt safe at sometimes but not others, or that they did not know. The main risk mentioned was that of being exposed to highly toxic chemicals and not having adequate protection: workers perceived that the chemicals applied to banana crops are very harmful to health, even deadly.

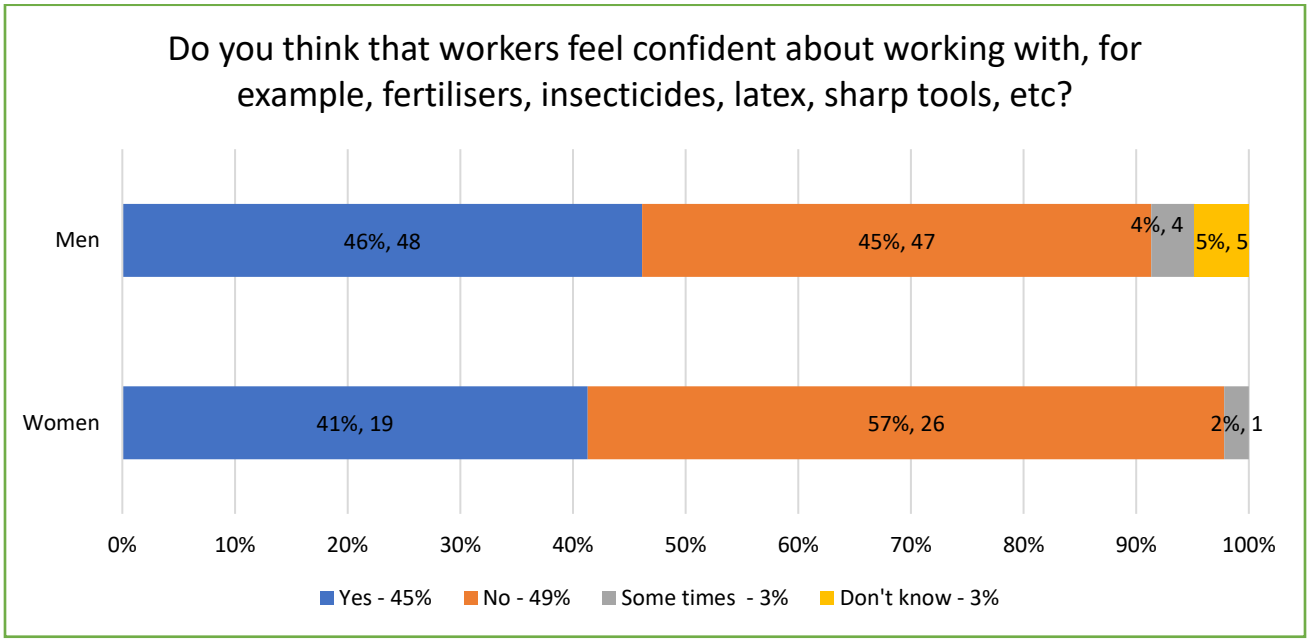


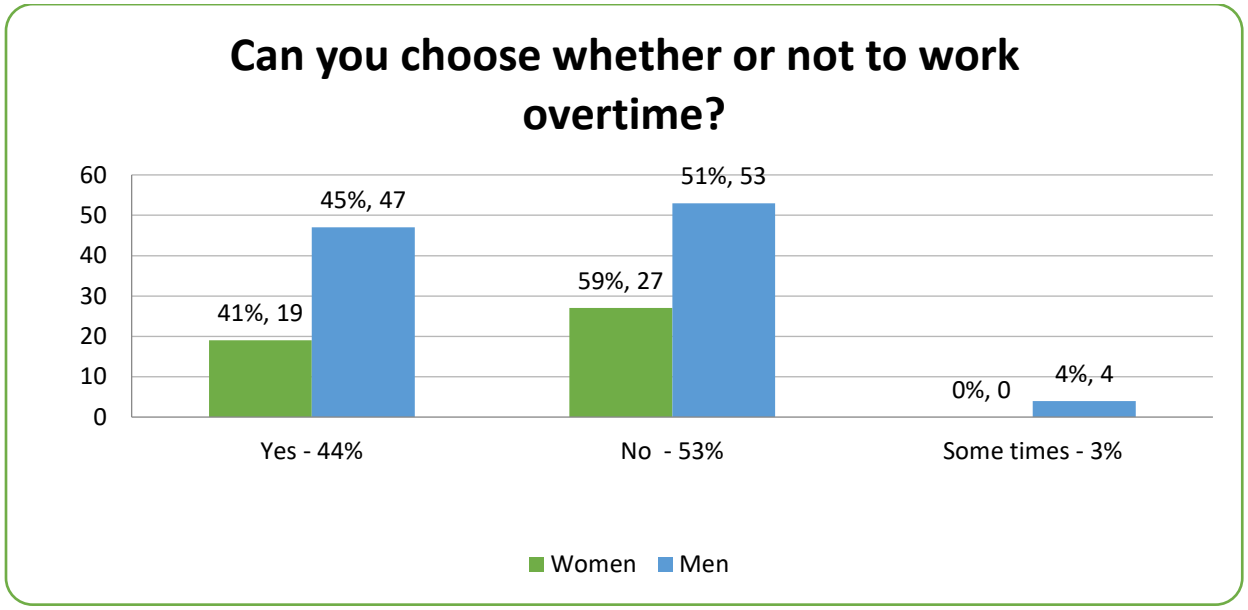
Figure 23 Confidence to perform assigned tasks

Strenuous work, working hours and forced labour (overtime)

Data indicates cases of irregular working hours on the banana plantations that mainly benefit the employer. Workers point out that the employer unilaterally determines the required working hours according to the specific needs of their company, with little consideration of the needs of the worker. This mechanism tends to reduce jobs: instead of hiring sufficient staff for peak production times, existing employees are obliged to work longer hours. This leads workers to become overburdened with more hours of work than those established by law.

[28] *'¿Cree que los trabajadores se sienten con confianza para trabajar, por ejemplo, con fertilizantes, insecticidas, latex, herramientas cortantes, etc.?'*

When asked if about overtime,[29] 53% of study participants say that they have no choice around working overtime or not (53 men and 27 women), and another 4% who say that sometimes they do and sometimes they don't. This group feels obliged to work overtime because if they refuse, they believe they will suffer negative consequences such as marginalisation, withholding of payments and in the worst case, dismissal. These results reflect self-reported experience in Jan–Mar 2024; we do not stratify by contract type or seasonality here, so comparisons should be read as indicative.

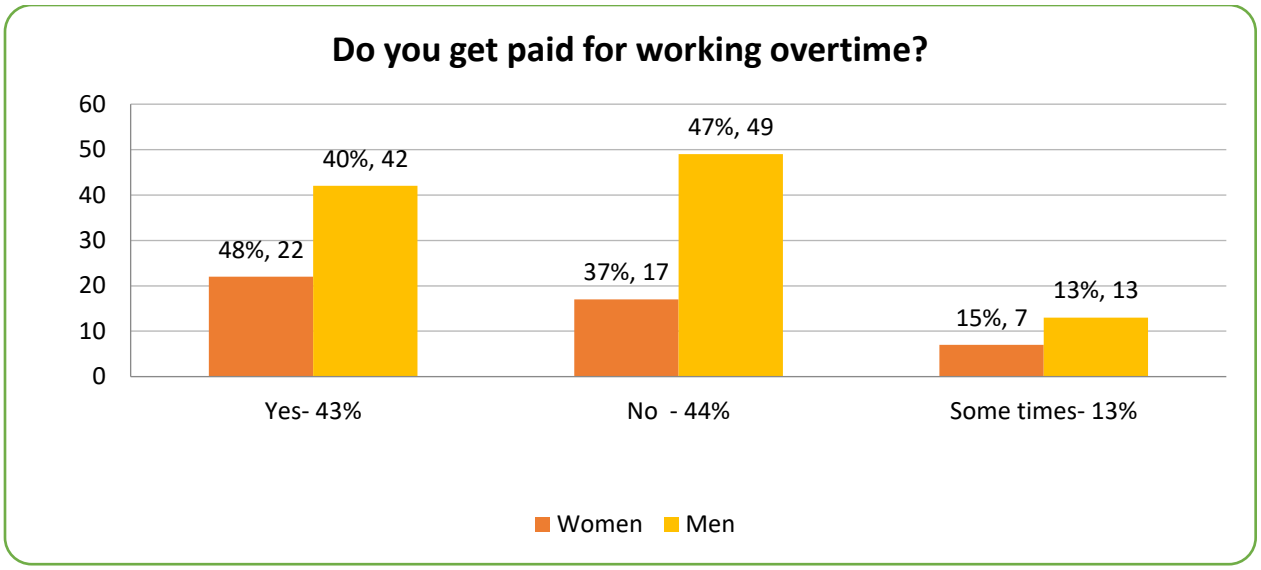


Graph 24 Can you choose to work overtime?

A typical working day in the field varies between 8 - 12 hours. When asked if they are paid for working overtime[30], only 43% of the workers report that they are paid overtime, of which 42 are men and 22 are women.; 44% of the total sample say they are not paid overtime, (49 men and 17 women); and 13% report that they are sometimes paid and sometimes not.

[29] '*Usted puede elegir si quiere o no trabajar horas extra?*'

[30] '*¿Recibe pago por trabajar horas extra?*'



Graph 25 Overtime remuneration

Another specific issue relating to working hours is the conditions of those workers living on the plantation premises. As one worker commented: "*for those who live on the Hacienda, they are under the orders of the boss: there are no working hours, it has become a habit, here they get up at any hour to bring down cardboard, it is quite difficult*".

Dignified treatment (discrimination, xenophobia, harassment, gender-based violence)

Gender. In Ecuador, in line with the rest of the Latin American export industry, the workforce is highly masculine: an estimated 86% of workers are men (Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock of Ecuador, 2023). Women working in this sector face a range of risks, from sexual harassment and gender-based violence to discrimination in recruitment and wage inequality. Participants were asked a series of questions about their perception of the experience of women working in the banana sector.

All workers were asked the question: Is it safe for women to work here?[31] 69% of respondents considered that it is safe for women to work in the banana sector. Although this percentage is high, it should be completely affirmative. No woman should feel in danger at her workplace.

To the open question 'How are women treated?'[32] a large number of interviewees considered the treatment to be *adequate* ('good', 'well', 'they do not do strenuous tasks such as field work', 'respectful', 'appropriate to their physical abilities', 'normal'). However,

[31] '*¿Es seguro para las mujeres trabajar aquí?*'
[32] '*¿Como es el trato hacia las mujeres?*'

there were comments reflecting an inequality in the salary received by women, who are paid less, and although it was mentioned only once, sexual harassment does occur.

Legislation in most parts of the world protects the rights of pregnant workers as central to labour and human rights[33] ; including paid maternity leave, occupational health protection, employment protection and non-discrimination, measures to protect breastfeeding and free childcare.[34] However, in this study, participants indicated that instead of, for example, adapting working hours and tasks to the needs of pregnant women, or providing maternity leave, pregnant women are simply not employed on the plantation. Of the total of 150 interviews, 94% stated that pregnant women do not work on farms or plantations. Generally, being pregnant is grounds for dismissal or suspension without pay, several workers said.

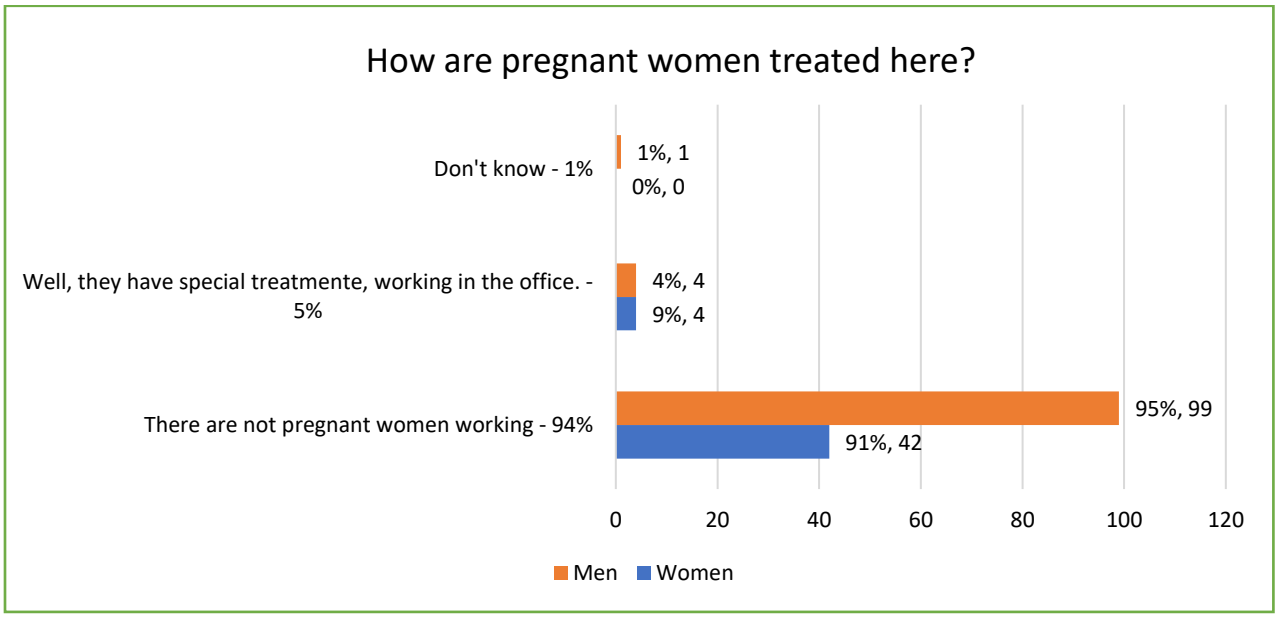


Figure 26 Pregnant women in the banana industry

Sexual Harassment. Two questions were used to explore the existence of sexual harassment on the plantations. To the question 'Do you know if there are any cases of sexual harassment on the farm?'[35] 70% of the respondents said no, 27% said they did not know, and 3% said there were cases of sexual harassment. These percentages reflect a low rate of sexual harassment on banana plantations. Meanwhile, when asked 'Has

[33] see ILO Maternity Protection Convention, 2000 (No. 183)
[34] See: https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/wcmsp5/groups/public/@dgreports/@dcomm/documents/publication/wcms_242617.pdf
[35] *'¿Sabe usted de algún caso de Acoso Sexual en la finca?'*

anyone you know experienced any situation of harassment, violence or other?'[36] 60% of the total number of interviewees indicated that they do not know of anyone that has experienced any situation of harassment or violence, 34% do not know, while 5% say that they do know someone who has experienced some kind of harassment or violence at work.

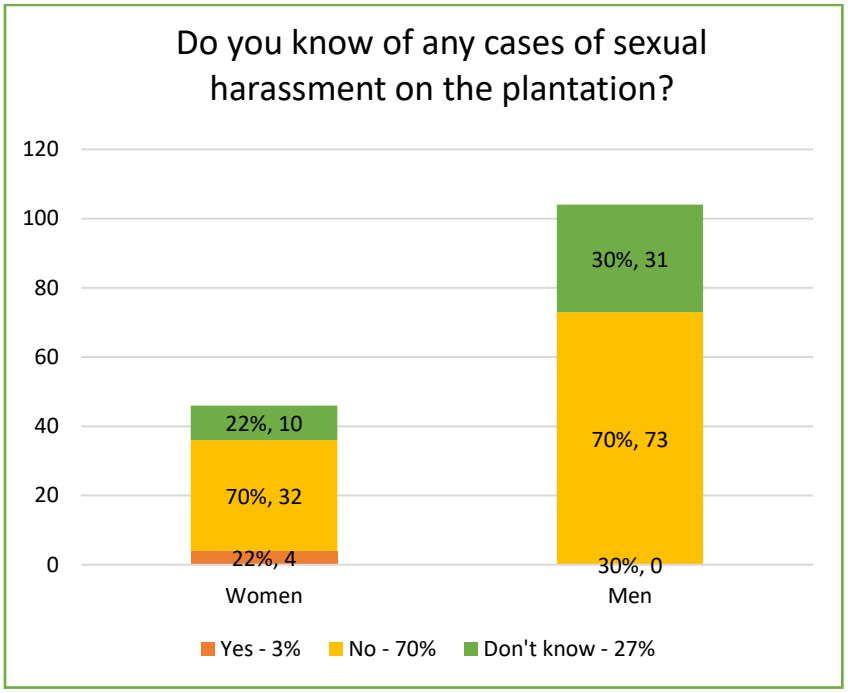
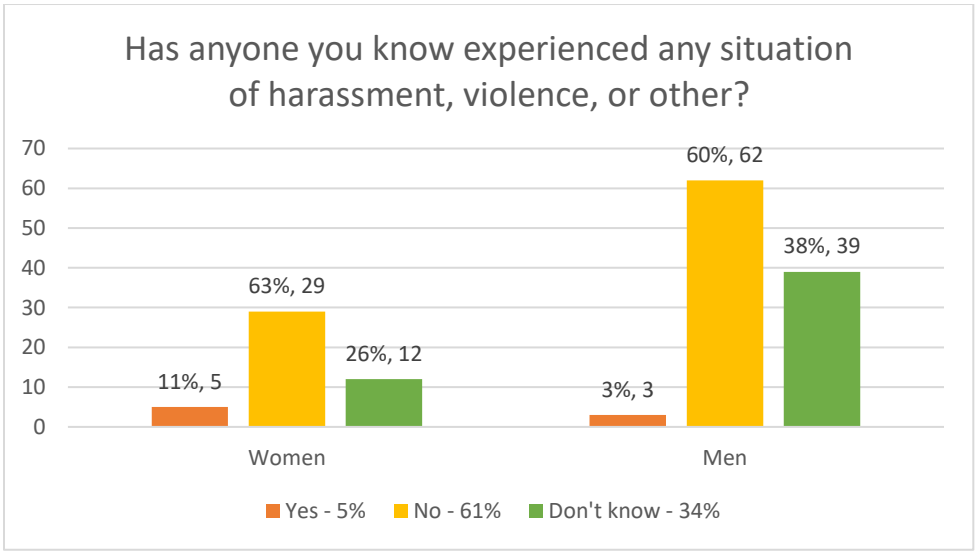


Figure 27 Sexual harassment on the farm

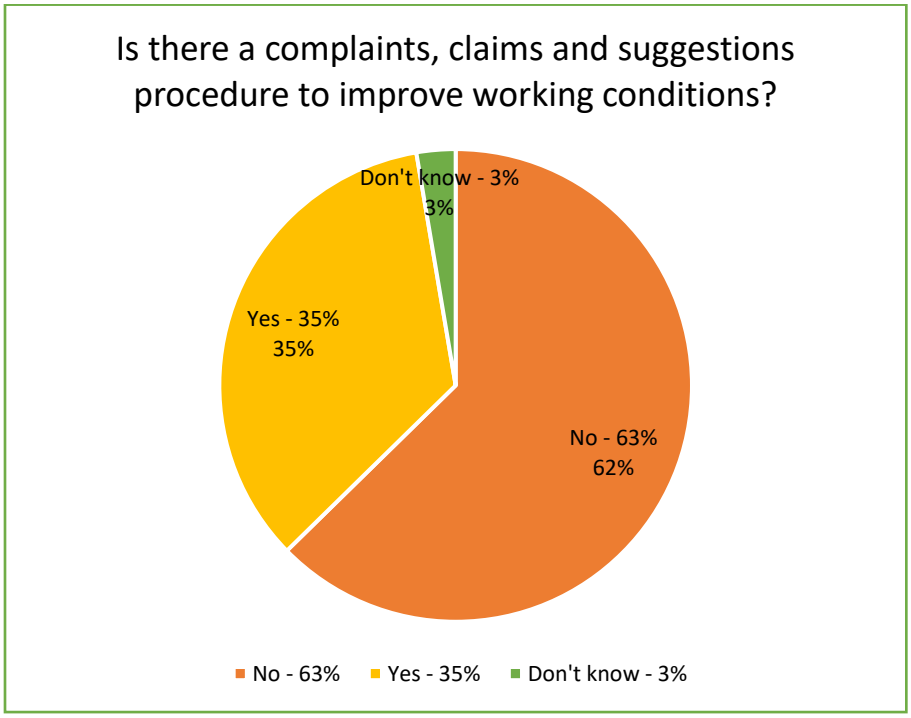


Graph 28 Harassment, violence or other situations

[36] '*¿Alguien que usted conozca ha experimentado alguna situación de acoso, violencia, u otro?*'

Mechanisms for complaints or to report harassment, violence, etc.

In order to reduce cases of harassment or violence at work, clear and accessible mechanisms for reporting incidents is necessary. When asked if whether a process for reporting grievances, complaints or suggestions existed at the workplace,[37] 66% of the respondents said it did not. Respondents were not asked whether those who are aware of such a procedure know how to use it or feel able and confident to do so; nor were details of any procedures gathered, nor were workers asked whether they had used a such a system themselves.



Graph 29 Procedure for complaints, claims and suggestions

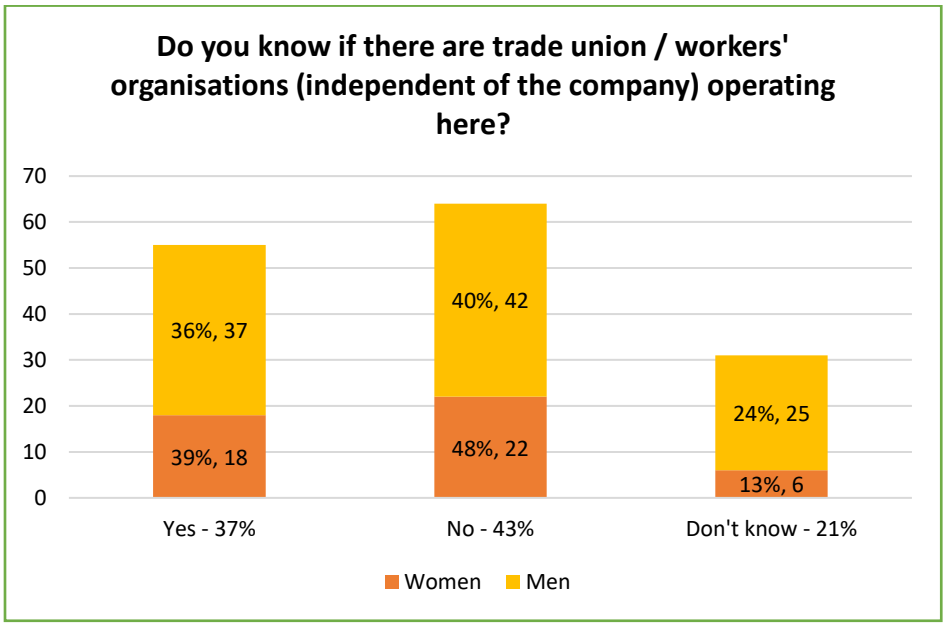
Among the positive findings of the worker survey was that participants did not consider there to be a problem with discriminatory treatment on the basis of race, gender, religion, political opinion, nationality or class. According to their experience, racism, marginalisation and unequal treatment do not exist. Unfortunately, thee survey questions did not ask the workers to specify whether their experience of respectful treatment was between workers or between employer and worker or both.

[37] *'¿Existe un procedimiento de quejas, reclamaciones y sugerencias?'*

Freedom of association

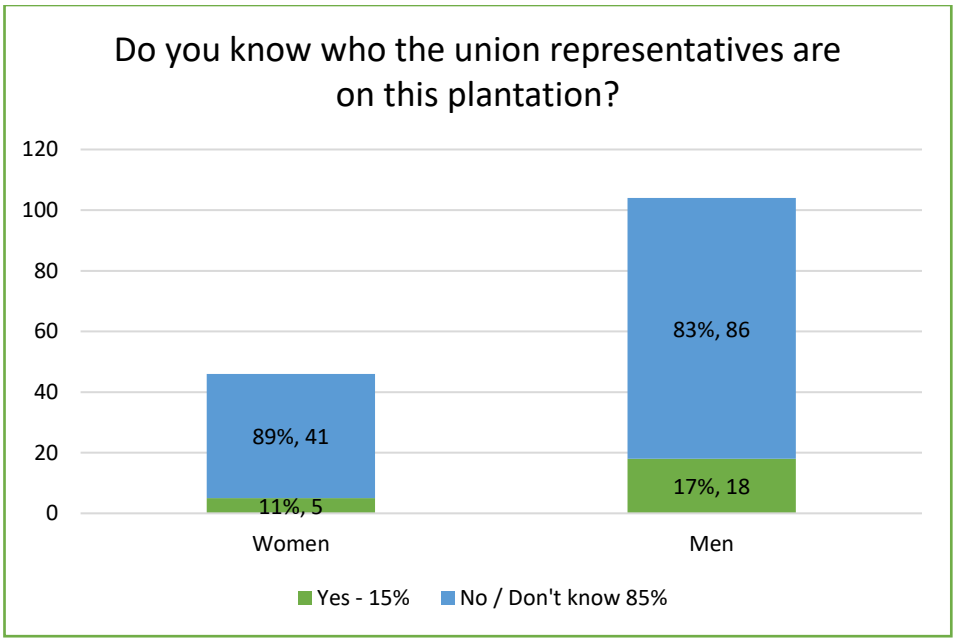
Freedom of Association and freedom to engage in trade union activities without reprisals

When asked about the existence of independent trade unions or other workers organisations on the farm or plantation,[38] 37% of survey participants said that such organisations do have a presence at their workplace. However, 83% of survey participants did not know who their trade union representatives are and 33% confirmed the existence of obstacles to trade union membership. In addition, 46 respondents (almost a third of the sample) stated that that employer authorisation is required join a trade union association, while 22 do not know whether they require authorisation.

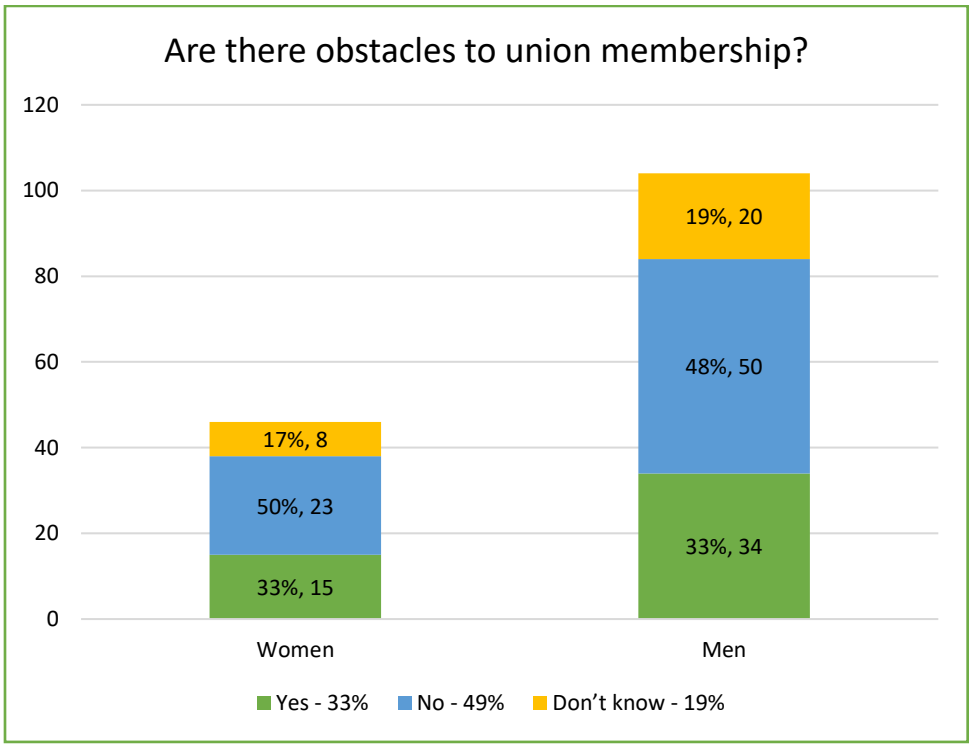


Graph 20 Existence of trade union organisations

[38] *'¿Sabe si operan organizaciones sindicales / de trabajadores (independientes de la empresa) aquí?'*

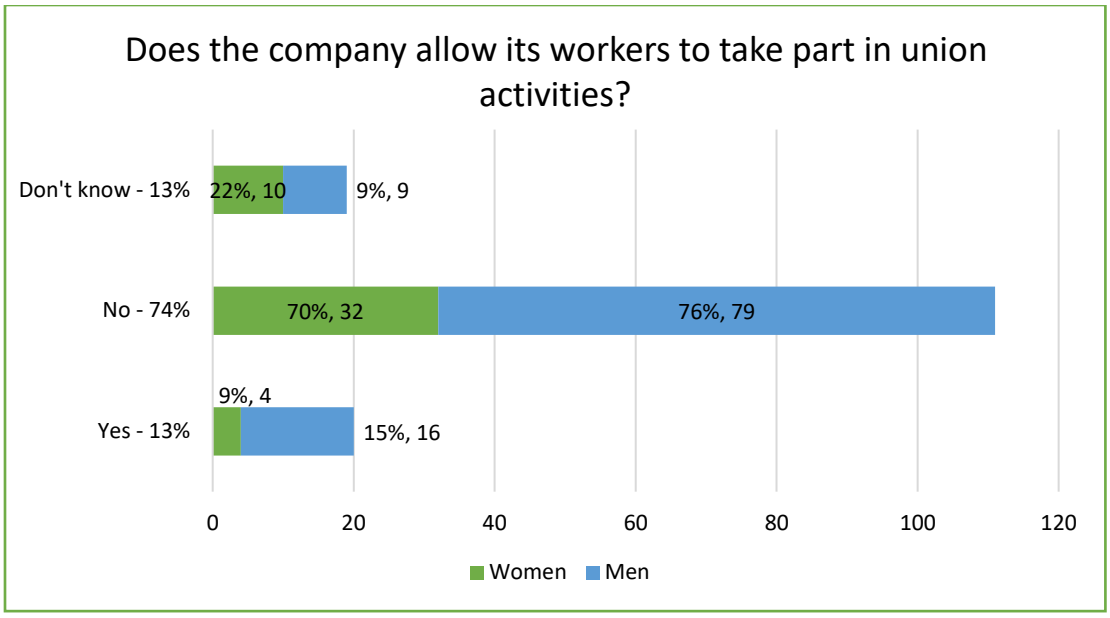


Graph 21 Familiarity with trade union representatives



Graph 22 Barriers to union membership

Meanwhile, 76% percent of the men and 70% of the women interviewed indicated that the banana plantations where they work do not allow workers to attend union activities.

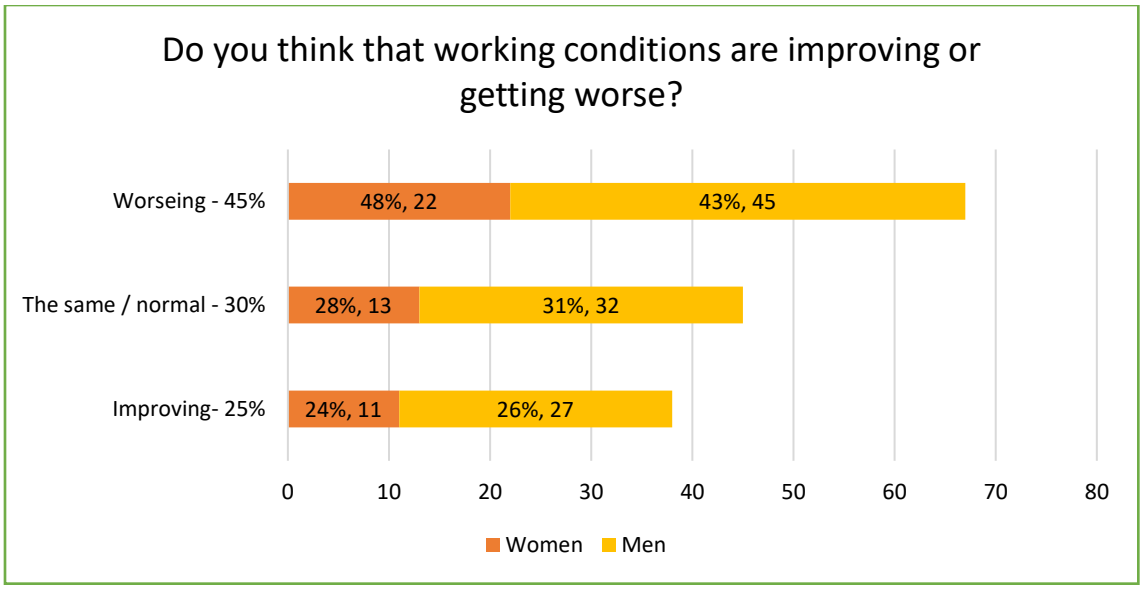


Graph 23 Ease of participation in union activities

Satisfaction with work in the banana sector

When asked whether they thought working conditions are improving or deteriorating,[39] 45% of the workers interviewed said that working conditions are getting worse, while 30% say that conditions are staying the same: bearing in mind the poor working and contractual conditions reported this is not necessarily an encouraging finding.

[39] '*¿Cree que se están mejorando o empeorando las condiciones de trabajo?*'



Graph 24 Assessment of working conditions

The main reasons that participants gave for saying that conditions are deteriorating included their sense of economic insecurity, the lack of a formal employment, and a reduction in banana sales. They also consider work on banana farms and plantations to be tiring, exhausting, stressful, heavy, poorly paid, and dangerous; and that it is an industry where the benefits granted by law - such as holiday pay and social security - are not respected.

Despite the negative evaluation that most workers made about their wages and working conditions, they feel they are obliged to continue working at the same farms and plantations because they are used to it, and "at least there is a place to work": alternative sources of employment in the region are non-existent. Despite being unhappy with their work, it is clear to them that without it, they could not survive.

When asked if there was an opportunity to do something else, the vast majority of respondents, male and female, mentioned to studying until they had a professional career, seeking work in a different trade, or establishing their own businesses.

Conclusions

Workers do not have a good knowledge of their labour rights. Regarding wages, the majority of the workers interviewed (71%) do not know that there is a minimum wage in Ecuador (the SBU) and 58% do not know what the term "living wage" means. In addition, a significant percentage (57% of the total sample) indicated that they do not have a contract or do not know if they have one. Among the workers who do have a contract, more than half of them (52%) said that they do not know the terms of the contract and do not have a copy of it. This indicates that, in reality, only a small minority of workers are aware of their contract terms.

The prevalence of opaque contractual conditions provides the basis for unequal access to contractual benefits for the workers interviewed. For example, only around half (53%) of the workers interviewed claim to be affiliated to social security, and recognition of seniority was only systematically acknowledged in the workplace by 29% of respondents. The rest of the workers will either not have access to health care or a pension when they retire, or they do not know if they will because the contractual conditions are not sufficiently clear.

The lack of clear contractual conditions is also linked to adverse working conditions for survey participants, as evidenced by the high proportion of survey participants (53%) who reported having to work compulsory overtime, and the high number of participants (57%) who reported that overtime is unpaid. Almost half of the workers surveyed (45%) consider that working conditions are getting worse, and the reasons they list include the lack of formal work and of reliable contractual conditions guaranteeing access to benefits such as health care and holiday pay.

The provision of PPE to workers in the sector lacks consistency and is sometimes only provided when the farm receives a visit, for example from an auditor. Almost half (49%) of the workers interviewed say that PPE is not provided at their workplace. In addition, almost half of the workers interviewed (71 in total) stated that they did not receive on-the-job training. The results indicate that many workers in the sector are concerned about safety in the workplace: 55% of the workers interviewed from the 140 banana plantations stated that they believe the workforce does not feel safe, that sometimes it does, sometimes it doesn’t, or they did not know. The main concern cited was the risk of being exposed to agrochemicals that could have serious adverse health consequences, and not having adequate PPE.

In the banana-growing region of El Oro, where the study was conducted, **there is a wage gap** that is seen as indicative of wider national trends. **31% of all workers interviewed earned bellow Net Living Wage, 39% of the women and 27% of the men respectively**. The perception of 83% of respondents is that **the wage they earn working on banana plantations is not enough to cover their family's needs.** Almost a fifth of

the workers interviewed (18 in total) stated that they earned less than $16.62 USD per day. It is noteworthy that among the lowest paid workers, the majority are women (12 in total), with the exception of 2 male field workers who reported earning as little as $9 USD per day.

Women are paid less and offered worse contractual conditions than men. There is a strong indication of gender disparity in relation to unclear contractual conditions: almost twice as many women (72% of respondents) responded that there are no contracts on their plantation compared to men (38% of respondents); indicating a more precarious work experience for women in the Ecuadorian banana industry than for men. In addition, more than three quarters (83%) of workers interviewed agreed that women earn less than men for the same activities, and a higher proportion of women respondents (39%) earn well below the Living Wage than men (27%).

The results also indicate that the work environment is experienced differently by male and female workers. Women appear to be under-represented in management positions, with 69% of workers responding that there were no women in management positions at their workplace, or that they did not know of any. More than a quarter of workers (31%) do not agree that the plantation is a safe place for women to work, but more research is needed to find out why. More shocking is the prevalence of gender discrimination against pregnant women: 94% of survey respondents say that pregnant women do not work on farms or plantations. Many interviewees commented that pregnancy is grounds for dismissal or suspension without pay.

While gender discrimination against pregnant women is extremely prevalent, other types of discrimination, violence and harassment seem to exist at relatively low levels. None of the survey participants reported discriminatory treatment on the basis of race, sex, religion, political opinion, nationality or class in the workplace. Although incidents of workplace violence and/or harassment appear to occur, the results indicate that these are at relatively low levels. Five per cent of survey participants reported knowing someone who had experienced some form of violence or harassment at work and 3% indicated that sexual harassment had occurred. However, this perception may be influenced by poor reporting mechanisms. According to 66% of respondents, the banana plantations where they work do not have a procedure for complaints, grievances or suggestions to improve working conditions.

There are obstacles to union organising. More than three quarters (76%) of the workers interviewed say that the company they work for does not allow workers to attend union activities, and almost one third of the workers interviewed (46 in total) say that they need permission from their employers to join a union association. Only three respondents reported having a collective bargaining agreement. The fact that all of these respondents were male workers also raises the possibility of gender disparities in relation to union membership and/or the actions of the unions themselves in defending labour rights, which may defend the rights of men more effectively than those of women workers. Finally, it appears that the information available to workers about unions operating at the local level

may be limited. The majority of workers (83%) do not know who the union representatives are.

Recommendations

In the face of the significant barriers to freedom of association described in this report, retailers sourcing fruit from Ecuador must ensure that they make clear their commitment to freedom of association and social dialogue as they work to establish living wages and decent work in their supply chains. In the longer term, this could be achieved by involving trade unions in the verification of living wage data, eventually moving to an industry-wide wage bargaining model. In the medium term, retailers should seek to work with producers, workers' associations and unions, civil society and government stakeholders to develop a roadmap for building a stable, healthy and skilled trade union movement in the country. The authors propose that the establishment of responsible purchasing practices and the payment of fair prices to producers cannot be excluded as necessary elements of this process.

Specifically, it is recommended that a national dialogue roundtable be formed to address the key issues for the industry as outlined in this report. The roundtable should include relevant local stakeholders, including workers' associations, producers' associations, key government institutions such as the Ministry of Labour, IESS, the Ministry of Women, and the governors of the three main banana producing regions, among others, with the participation of international observers, including supermarket-buyers from Germany, France, United Kingdom, GIZ, the Coordinadora Latinoamericana de Sindicatos Bananeros (COLSIBA), NGOs such as Banana Link and Oxfam Germany.

There is a need to update the living wage study in rural areas of the Ecuadorian coast. The data used in the most recent reports are from 2016-17 (published in 2020).[40] We recommend involving the sector's labour organisations in the elaboration of the study, as well as in the determination of the number of wage earners per household. In addition, as this report demonstrates, **it is necessary to include a specific study of the gender pay gap,** using the model of the study done in the banana sector in Colombia**.**[41]

The situation of women in the Ecuadorian banana industry requires further investigation, as discussed in the "Methodology" section. Our results indicate that women experience greater job insecurity than their male colleagues: they are less likely to have been given a contract, to work full-time or to earn as much as their male

[40] See: https://www.globallivingwage.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Update-report_Ecuador_Rural-Coastal-Region_2023_JUNE.pdf

[41] See: https://static1.squarespace.com/static/63e128dff6c16159094155ea/t/6564b8e6cd64f724ce9f75dc/1701099751106/ESTUDIO-DE-LA-BRECHA-SALARIAL-DE-GE%CC%81NERO-EN-EL-SECTOR-BANANERO-EXPORTADOR-DE-COLOMBIA-1.pdf

colleagues. In addition, almost a third of the respondents feel that the plantation is not a safe place for women to work. At the same time, the results show that there is a shift away from the traditional gender division of labour on plantations, with more women working in the fields, an area of work that was previously dominated by men. It would be important to carry out a more detailed analysis on these issues to unravel the causes and establish a clear understanding of the representativeness of our results for the industry as a whole, and on that basis define specific recommendations around improving gender equity in the Ecuadorian banana industry.

There is a need to improve workers' access to knowledge and information about their labour rights. Investment should be made in finding appropriate means to ensure that workers have clear and accessible information on issues related to national legislation on wages and working conditions on the one hand, and the European movement towards the implementation of the living wage on the other. Workers and their unions could also benefit from training on specific tools and methodologies used by retailers to define living wages. This would put them in a better position to collaborate in the multi-stakeholder work or in the proposed Round Table.

Employers must ensure that workers understand their contractual terms and conditions and receive a physical copy of their contract, including the length of working hours, the benefits to which they are entitled, the calculation of overtime, sick leave procedures and all other elements necessary for the best performance of their work. This includes temporary and part-time workers.

In addition to requiring copies of their contracts, workers should have a **documentary record of their salaries,** breaking down their base salary, deductions made and their reasons, and the employer's social security contribution.

On the other hand, each plantation, regardless of its size, must have an **Occupational Health and Safety Management System** that describes clear procedures for the recurrent delivery of PPE, as well as for conducting risk assessments with the active participation of the workforce; this system must include clear procedures for reporting accidents or harassment situations, complaints, claims and suggestions.

In light of the findings on occupational health and safety, as well as in other key areas such as freedom of association and gender equality, **retailers should consider the effectiveness of relying on external auditors to ensure that the workplace meets the required standards**

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