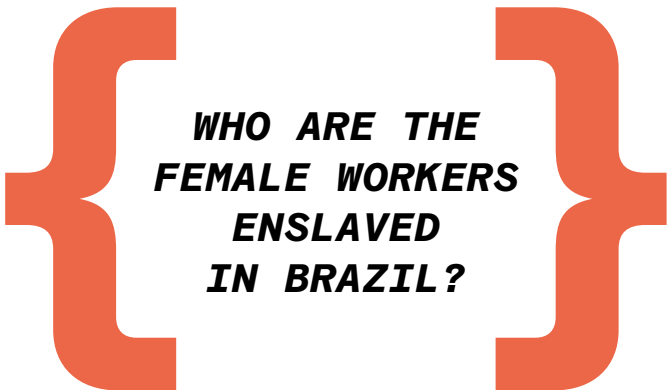


# ***SLAVE LABOR AND*** **gender**



***WHO ARE THE  
FEMALE WORKERS  
ENSLAVED  
IN BRAZIL?***

**WHO ARE THE FEMALE WORKERS ENSLAVED  
IN BRAZIL? WHERE DO THEY COME FROM?  
WHICH ACTIVITIES WERE THEY PERFORMING  
AT THE TIME OF THEIR RESCUE?**

**MOST OF THE 35,943 WORKERS  
RESCUED IN THE COUNTRY BETWEEN  
2003 AND 2018<sup>1</sup> WERE MEN (95%).  
AS A RESULT OF THIS UNEQUIVOCAL  
MAJORITY, THE OTHER 5% OF  
VICTIMS FREED FROM SLAVE LABOR  
- THAT IS, 1,889 WOMEN -  
HAVE BEEN OBSCURED.**



Lilo Clareto/Repórter Brasil (MG, 2016)

Since the creation of Brazil's policy to eradicate slave labor in 1995, we have paid little attention to gender issues related to that violation. In this publication<sup>2</sup>, we will present the profile of these women, highlighting their age groups, educational levels, and races. We will also discuss their origins and the jobs in which they are usually explored.

Furthermore, cases of enslaved women might be underreported, since many are not considered workers – not even by public

authorities – as is the case with domestic workers, caregivers and sex workers. Besides not being counted in official records, they are denied their labor rights and benefits, even when they have been victims of crimes.

Finally, the proportion of 95% men to 5% women is a national average. While this pattern applies to most Brazilian states, there are important exceptions, such as the state of São Paulo, where people rescued from slavery are 82% men and 18% women. In the next pages,

we will understand the reasons for this difference, especially in the city of São Paulo – the capital of the state – where a significant number of cases of slave labor refer to immigrant women working in sewing workshops.

Sexism, motherhood, domestic violence and informality in the world of labor should be considered when making policies to eradicate slave labor, so as to avoid mirroring gender-related inequalities in that context.

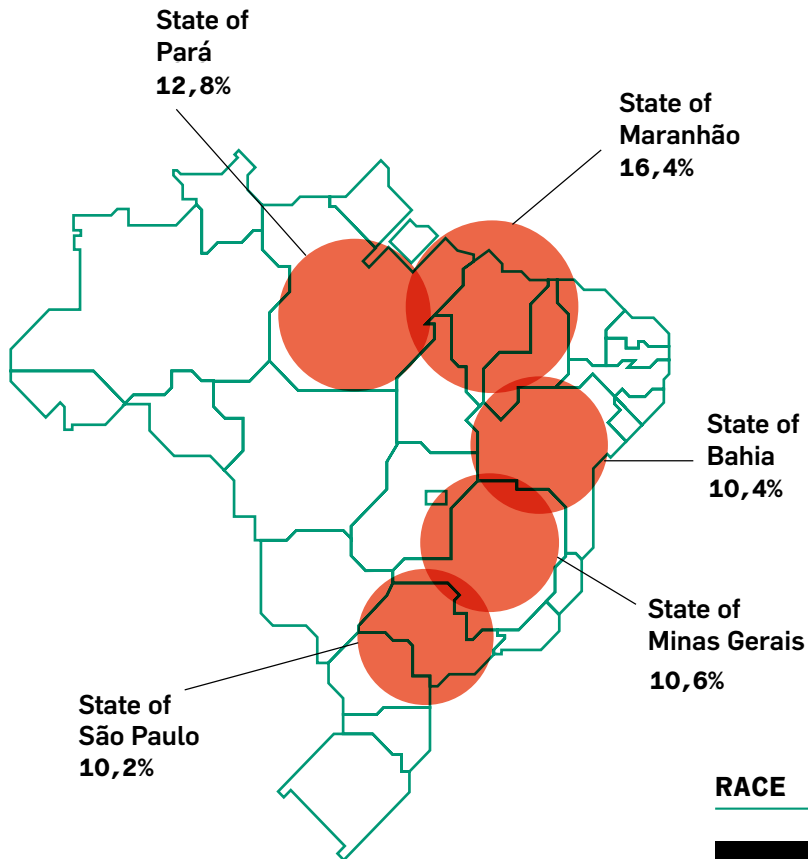
<sup>1</sup> From 1995 – when the Special Mobile Inspection Groups first started rescuing enslaved workers – until 2018, 50,106 people were freed from slave labor across the country. However, the data used in this publication starts in 2003, when rescued workers achieved the right to three months of unemployment insurance. In order to receive the benefit, documents are issued containing those workers' personal details. This information was systematized to create a database on rescued workers.

<sup>2</sup> This publication was based on the scientific article "Questão de gênero e trabalho escravo: Quem são as trabalhadoras escravizadas no Brasil?" ("Gender issue and slave labor: Who are the female workers enslaved in Brazil?") by Natália Suzuki and Thiago Casteli, presented at the XII Scientific Meeting on Contemporary Slave Labor and Related Issues at UFRJ, in October 2019.

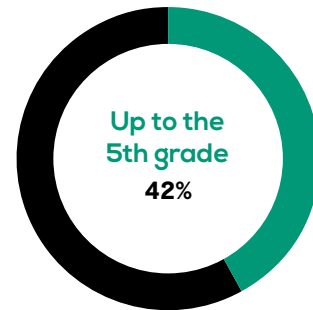
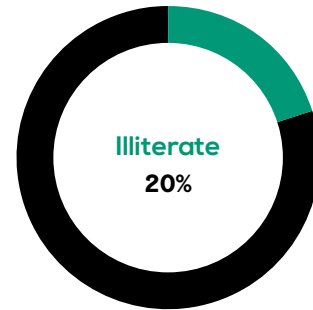


# X-RAY: WHO IS THE ENSLAVED FEMALE WORKER?

## BIRTHPLACE



## EDUCATION



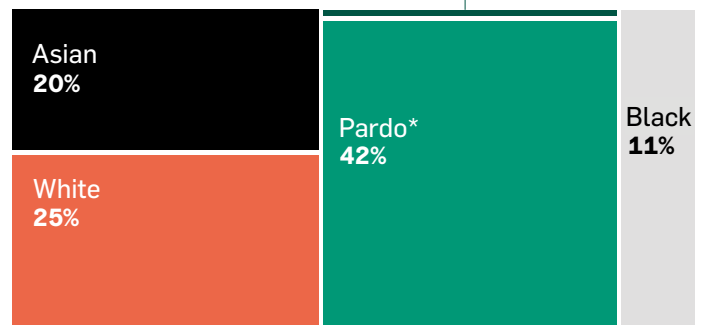
**62%**

of rescued women have not completed elementary school

**53%**

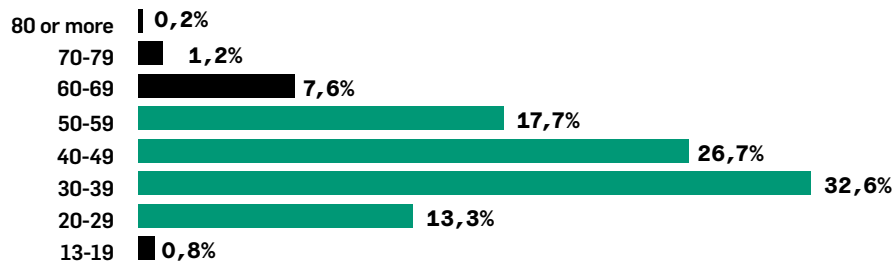
of rescued women were black (42% *pardo* + 11% black)

## RACE



\* *Pardo* is an official category on the Brazilian census to designate "mixed race".  
"Race" percentages refer to 770 women who reported it on their unemployment insurance registrations between 2003 and 2018.

## AGE



**SOURCE:** Data provided by the Ministry of Economy's Secretariat for Labor Inspection and systematized by Repórter Brasil (January 2003–June 2018)



## WHO IS THE ENSLAVED MAN?

### AGE

#### 30-39 YEARS

39%

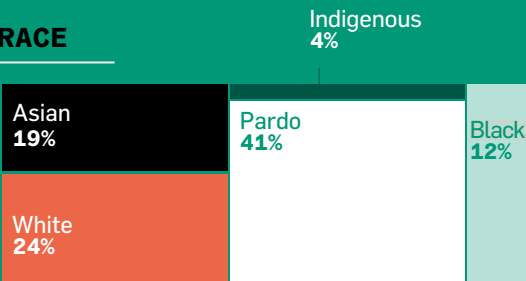
#### 40-49 YEARS

26%

### EDUCATION



### RACE



"Race" percentages refer to 11,969 men who reported it on their unemployment insurance registrations between 2003 and 2018.

**IN BRAZIL, "LABOR ANALOGOUS TO SLAVERY" – AS THE ARTICLE 149 OF THE BRAZILIAN PENAL CODE DEFINES THE CRIME OF "CONTEMPORARY FORMS OF SLAVERY" – IS NOT CHARACTERIZED BY MERE VIOLATIONS OF LABOR LEGISLATION. IT IS PRIMARILY A CRIME AGAINST HUMAN DIGNITY. ANY OF THE FOLLOWING FOUR ELEMENTS IS ENOUGH TO CHARACTERIZE EXPLOITATION OF SLAVE LABOR:**

#### **FORCED LABOR:**

The individual is subjected to exploitation and cannot leave the site because of debts or threats. In some cases, workers are found in remote, isolated places.

#### **EXHAUSTING WORKING**

**HOURS:** Strenuously long shifts that go beyond overtime and put workers' physical integrity at risk.

#### **DEBT BONDAGE:**

Illegal debts related to expenses on transportation, food, rent and work tools, which are imposed to "tie" people to their workplaces.

#### **DEGRADING CONDITIONS:**

A set of irregular elements that characterize workers' precarious labor and living conditions, such as poor accommodation, low quality food, mistreatment, and lack of medical care, basic sanitation and drinking water.







## THE STATE OF SÃO PAULO DESERVES ATTENTION:

### #1

AMONG BRAZILIAN STATES, SÃO PAULO IS ONE OF THE TOP FIVE SOURCES OF WOMEN RESCUED FROM SLAVE LABOR. THAT DOES NOT APPLY TO MEN. THE OTHER STATES (MARANHÃO, BAHIA, PARÁ AND MINAS GERAIS) ARE MAJOR SOURCES OF BOTH MALE AND FEMALE WORKERS.

### #2

SÃO PAULO IS ONE OF THE FOUR STATES WHERE THE (APPROXIMATE) PATTERN OF 95% MEN AND 5% WOMEN RESCUED FROM SLAVE LABOR DOES NOT HOLD<sup>3</sup>. THE PROPORTION IN THE STATE IS 82% AND 18% FOR MEN AND WOMEN, RESPECTIVELY. IN THE STATE'S CAPITAL, THE PROPORTION DEPARTS EVEN FURTHER FROM NATIONWIDE FIGURES: 30% ARE WOMEN AND 70% ARE MEN.

### WHY DOES IT HAPPEN?

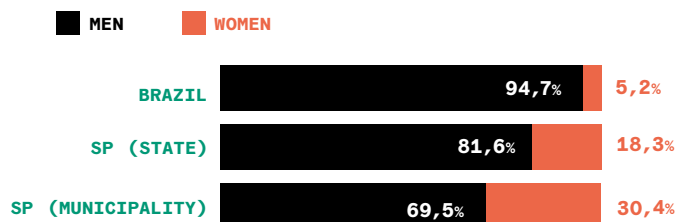


#### In São Paulo's capital city,

which accounts for the largest number of cases of slave labor in the state, most of the rescue operations take place in clandestine sewing workshops. They employ many women, mostly immigrants, who are registered as coming from the city where they were rescued, that is, São Paulo. That same procedure applies to immigrant men rescued from slavery because the unemployment insurance register has no field to specify victims' nationalities.

**IN THE CITY OF SÃO PAULO, 30% OF THE 430 WORKERS RESCUED WERE WOMEN. OF THESE, 93.1% WERE IMMIGRANTS.**

#### Proportion between women and men rescued from slave labor



<sup>3</sup> The other states are Amapá, Espírito Santo and Rio de Janeiro. The case of Amapá will not be examined because the number of people rescued is very low (six) and the presence of only one woman among them easily changes the proportion in question. In Espírito Santo, in turn, further investigations should be conducted for more consistent explanations about the state's data. Finally, in Rio de Janeiro, where the proportion is similar to that of São Paulo, it appears that the presence of women is due to rescues in sugar cane cutting, which include many women, but the case requires further investigations and analyses.

## ***SPECIFICS OF ENSLAVED WOMEN***



Bianca Pyl/ Repórter Brasil (SP, 2018)

The implications of gender issues in the world of labor have been the focus of discussion for a long time: women earn less than men, are more severely affected by unemployment in situations of economic crisis and, therefore, have to accept more precarious and poorly paid jobs. But when they are in a situation of exploitation, as in the case of slave labor, gender issues make these women even more susceptible to other violations.

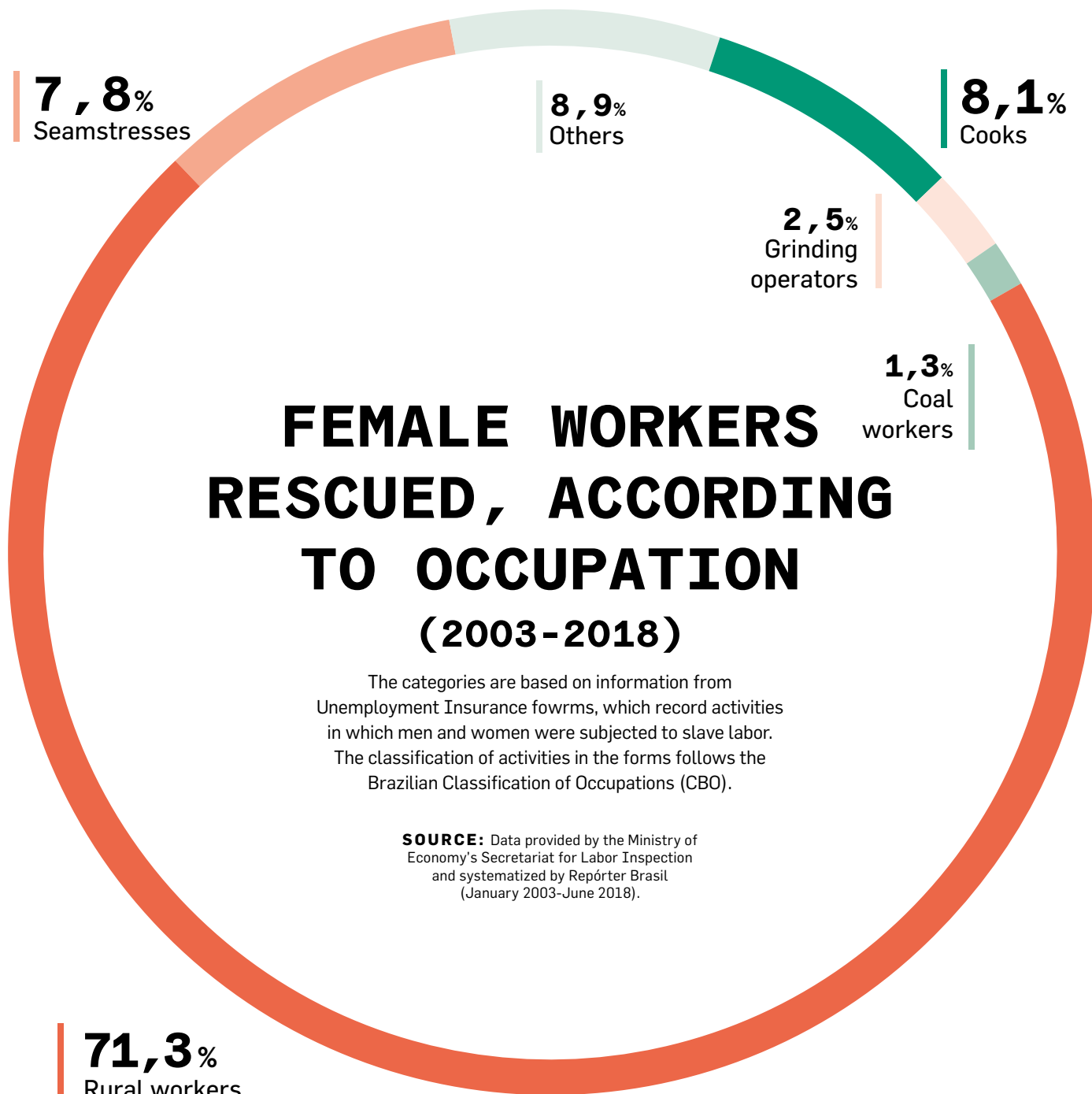
If work and home are the same place, as in sewing workshops, they become more vulnerable to domestic and sexual violence. Perpetrators may be family members, bosses or even male workers who are also being exploited. Reports of pregnant women who are prevented from leaving their workplaces for medical examinations and prenatal tests are common. If they already have children, they lack the time to exercise motherhood and care – a task that should not be exclusive to women but that ends up falling almost entirely on them.

In São Paulo's workshops, labor inspectors have found mothers who used to breastfeed newborn babies while sewing, and children locked in rooms so as not to disturb production or suffer accidents.









## SEAMSTRESSES:

**OF THE 1,889 FEMALE WORKERS RESCUED, 178 USED TO WORK AS SEAMSTRESSES, WHICH MAKES SEWING THE THIRD OCCUPATION IN NUMBER OF WOMEN RESCUED. THIS STAGE OF SÃO PAULO'S TEXTILE SUPPLY CHAIN CONCENTRATES A HIGH NUMBER OF FEMALE IMMIGRANT WORKERS, MAINLY FROM LATIN AMERICA.**

### > 2010

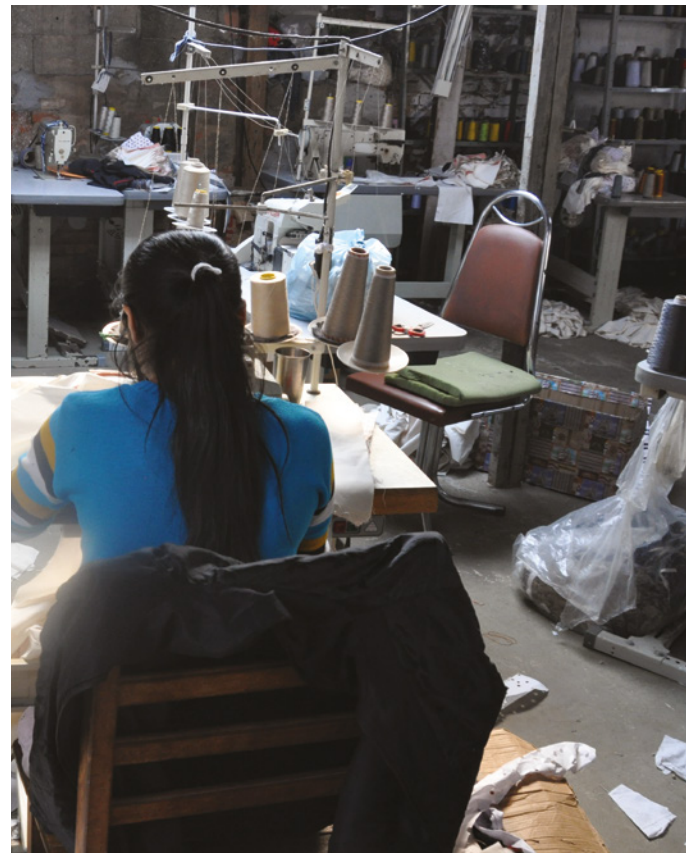
#### CITY OF SÃO PAULO, STATE OF SÃO PAULO

For the first time, the Brazilian State rescued victims of urban slave labor. Drawn by a tempting promise of good wages, two Bolivian women crossed the border and ended up being forced to face a routine of violations of their dignity, which included over-exploitation, degrading conditions, harassment, and threats.

### > 2013

#### CITY OF SÃO PAULO, STATE OF SÃO PAULO

A 21-year-old Bolivian woman was rescued from a sewing workshop in São Paulo. She used to sew every day, from 7 am to 10 pm, while her payment was withheld by her boyfriend who worked and lived in the same place. The young woman was five months pregnant and used to be physically and psychologically abused by the workshop's owner and by her boyfriend. She could not leave the workplace, not even for prenatal tests. The case came to light in 2013, after she reported the situation to a social worker at a Basic Health Unit.



## **COOKS:**

**IN RURAL AREAS,  
SEXUAL DIVISION  
OF LABOR IS  
COMMON: MEN DO  
HEAVIER MANUAL  
LABOR WHILE WOMEN  
PERFORM DOMESTIC  
TASKS, ESPECIALLY  
COOKING.**



## **2019**

**TOWN OF PIMENTA BUENO,  
STATE OF RONDÔNIA**

The Mobile Group rescued 17 slave workers who were clearing native forest and loading logs into trucks. They were all working in degrading conditions, risking their lives, sleeping on the ground or in tents and drinking water from a stream. The inspectors came to the work front after one of the workers was hit by a tree and died. The victim was the son of the only woman in the group – the cook – who continued to work even after the loss of her son because she “needed the job.”

**SOURCE:** Blog do Sakamoto (<https://bit.ly/2UIQKCE>)

## **UNDERREPORTING**

Women's domestic and sexual activities performed in slave-like situations are often not considered as work by the very authorities fighting this violation. In these cases, it is difficult for women to have their rights guaranteed – especially labor rights. According to authorities in charge of combating slave labor, there have been cases where all the men in an exploited

group received the severance payments they were entitled to, while the woman was not paid these benefits precisely because she was not considered a worker. Situations like this contribute to exclude women from national statistics on victims, which makes one wonder whether the low proportion of 5% of enslaved female workers is real.





Sérgio Carvalho/SIT/Ministério da Economia (MA, 1998)



SIT/Ministério da Economia (MS, 1995)

## **FEMALE RURAL WORKERS**

### **MOST OF THE ENSLAVED WOMEN – 1,212 – WERE REGISTERED AS FARM WORKERS.**

This category is quite comprehensive and does not tell us the precise tasks they were engaged in. It may include women who performed activities demanding great physical effort, such as cutting **sugar cane** and **making charcoal**, and those who did domestic tasks on rural work fronts.

## **> 1995**

### **TOWNS OF RIBAS DO RIO PARDO, ÁGUA CLARA AND BRASILÂNDIA, STATE OF MATO GROSSO DO SUL**

The first operation of the Special Mobile Inspection Group (GEFM) focused on charcoal production sites, and the first victims rescued in Brazil included men, women and children. However, the operation's documents account only for the 27 male workers. The names, origin or number of the women and children were not provided. Their presence is known only through photos taken during the operation, in which they are referred to as "the workers' family." In the only image showing a woman by herself, the information points to her mutilation: a finger severed at work. Without medical care, she kept doing her tasks on charcoal production.

**SOURCE:** Ministry of Economy and Sinait (<https://bit.ly/3e50kaf>)

## ➤ 2011

### **CITY OF CAMPOS DOS GOYTACAZES, STATE OF RIO DE JANEIRO**

The Mobile Group rescued six women, nine men and five teenagers from slave labor. They were found working on soil preparation, grass irrigation and planting, and sugar cane fields at the Lagoa Limpa Farm – all in degrading conditions. They had no access to drinking water, toilet or any place to eat or store food. In addition, they had no Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) or regular work documents. In 2016, the farm's owner and the managing partner in charge of the grass planting were sentenced to prison.

**SOURCE:** Repórter Brasil (<https://bit.ly/2Ju2y6M>) and Federal Prosecution Office (<https://bit.ly/2UOxy6K>)

### **FARMING IS THE TOP EMPLOYER OF SLAVE LABOR:**

- **77% OF RESCUED MEN**
- **71.3% OF RESCUED WOMEN**

## ➤ 2019

### **TOWN OF CÓRREGO DANTA, STATE OF MINAS GERAIS**

A woman and three men were rescued from slave labor in a coal production site in Córrego Danta, 236 km from the capital of Minas Gerais. All workers were found without food, they used to drink water from the well and sleep in tarpaulin shacks. With no time off or regular working papers, the group, including the woman, used to work ten hours a day and were paid according to what they were able to produce. The work involved cutting down trees, processing the wood, transporting, burning, bagging and loading coal that would be sold at a steel plant located in Pitangui (MG). In addition to the four people rescued, the 4-year-old granddaughter of the female worker lived on the site.

**SOURCE:** Ministry of Economy (<https://bit.ly/3j3LZit>) and Blog do Sakamoto (<https://bit.ly/3h38ceW>)

## **INVISIBLE FEMALE WORKERS**

**SEX WORKERS: IT IS NOT UNCOMMON FOR SEXUAL EXPLOITATION OF WOMEN – AND ALSO OF MEN – TO BE CONSIDERED SLAVE LABOR BY THE AUTHORITIES.**

Even so, no case was registered under “sex workers” on the Unemployment Insurance register from 2003 to 2018. This category appears in the Brazilian Classification of Occupations (CBO) and can be used to request the benefit, but sex workers have been often registered under other categories, such as “dancers.” Furthermore, the understanding that sexual activity is also a type of work and that people who perform it are workers whose rights must be recognized is not yet established, even among the authorities, especially when those people are victims of crimes such as slave labor.



### **2010**

**TOWN OF VÁRZEA GRANDE,  
STATE OF MATO GROSSO**

In this municipality, near Cuiabá (the capital of the state of Mato Grosso), 20 young women were found in a slave labor situation. Sexually exploited and prevented from leaving the Star Night nightclub, they had to be available 24 hours a day, were subjected to exhausting working hours and kept in precarious and overcrowded accommodation. Some women had even signed contracts preventing them from leaving the workplace until their debts were paid off. Four men were also rescued – a supervisor and three waiters. Despite not being accommodated at the nightclub, they were also subjected to degrading conditions and worked exhausting shifts at the place.

**SOURCE:** Repórter Brasil (<https://bit.ly/33WlMvg>)



### **2013**

**CITY OF ALTAMIRA,  
STATE OF PARÁ**

The case occurred near the Belo Monte Dam's construction site, where 15 women aged 18-20, coming from South Brazil, were found in slave labor conditions in a nightclub. Locked in small windowless rooms, with restricted food and without permission to leave, the victims said that the owner kept the clients' money and had a debt register for each of the women. The young women were available 24 hours a day and were forced to work whenever there was demand.

**SOURCE:** Repórter Brasil (<https://bit.ly/2JrIdz5>)





## > 2018

### CITY OF ITAITUBA, STATE OF PARÁ

The Special Mobile Inspection Group rescued eight women and 30 men from slave labor in illegal mining in the Amazon rainforest. With illegal debts to the woman who owned the mining site, all workers were in slave labor situations. While men removed gold from the ground, women cooked and worked as prostitutes. Dating was not allowed on the mining site – only sex work mediated by the employer. According to the worker, they were not forced to sell their bodies, but their situation of submission left no alternative. The owner of the business kept her male employees' wages and deducted their work expenses, including what they had spent on prostitutes, which was also written down on the debt register. When it was time to settle accounts, the employer would discount the men's debts and, if there was any money left, the women would be paid for their sex work. Under this circumstance, the mining site's owner exploited women both as cooks and sex workers.

**SOURCE:** Repórter Brasil (<https://bit.ly/3asnGpP>)



Sérgio Carvalho/Ministério da Economia (PI, 2008)

## **WOMEN WHO STAY THERE IS YET ANOTHER TYPE OF RELATION BETWEEN WOMEN AND SLAVE LABOR. THEY ARE CALLED THE WIDOWS OF LIVING HUSBANDS.**

These women remain at home, taking care of their children and other family members, while their male partners migrate in search of work to support the family, since jobs are scarce in their hometowns. Frequently, the money never arrives, and their family members never come back.

Finding themselves alone, they become the breadwinners. This is what happens in Codó, a 118,000-people city in the state of Maranhão that ranks second among hometowns of people rescued from slave labor, with 432 workers found between 2003 and 2018. The only source of income for women living in the urban area is the federal Welfare Program known as *Bolsa Família*.

**SOURCE:** Repórter Brasil (<https://bit.ly/3dFPLMh>)

## **IN SEARCH OF THE ENSLAVED SON**

The story of Pureza Lopes Loyola, from the state of Maranhão, is different from those of women who wait for their relatives to come back. In 1993, she decided to leave Bacabal (MA), where she lived, to look for her son Abel, deceitfully recruited to work on a farm in an unknown location. She traveled several municipalities in Maranhão and Pará. During her search, she came across workers doing slave labor in mining areas, charcoal production sites and farms. Loyola recorded the violations she witnessed and gave the information to the authorities, generating international repercussion. Her story ended in 1996, when Abel returned home.



Maurício Monteiro/Repórter Brasil (MA, 2018)

**Find out more about Loyola's story in the mini-doc "Pureza": A woman against slave labor," produced by program Slavery, no way!: <https://bit.ly/2RC3I4L>.**



## INVISIBLE FEMALE WORKERS

**DOMESTIC WORKERS:** HISTORICALLY, IN BRAZIL AND WORLDWIDE, DOMESTIC LABOR IS NOT RECOGNIZED AS WORK; IT IS NOT VALUED, AND IT IS PRONE TO INFORMALITY.



Ascom/MPT-RJ (MG, 2017)

### ➤ 2017

#### TOWN OF RUBIM, STATE OF MINAS GERAIS

In the town of Rubim, in the Jequitinhonha Valley, the Special Mobile Inspection Group rescued a 68-year-old Brazilian woman from slave labor. Found in debt bondage and doing housework, the elderly and illiterate victim was not paid for her work, and her social benefit money was retained by the employer who also made loans on behalf of the domestic worker.

**SOURCE:** MPT (<https://bit.ly/2X43Ugi>)

### ➤ 2017

#### CITY OF SÃO PAULO, STATE OF SÃO PAULO

Female Filipino immigrants were hired to work as babysitters and domestic workers in luxury gated communities in São Paulo. Upon arriving at family homes, they were forced to work without any break from 6 am until 10 pm. If their bosses had visitors, the working hours were extended. In addition to not being allowed to leave the houses and having their documents withheld, the women were threatened with deportation if they complained about their working conditions. In 2018, the year following the inspection operation, the Global Talent employment agency, responsible for recruiting them, was ordered to pay R\$ 2.8 million for human trafficking aimed at labor exploitation and failure to act regarding slave labor.

**SOURCE:** Repórter Brasil (<https://bit.ly/2UPa94X>)

### ➤ 2018

#### TOWN OF JUAZEIRO DO NORTE, STATE OF CEARÁ

A Venezuelan woman went to Brazil to escape the crisis in her country. Upon arriving in the state of Roraima, she was offered a job as a domestic worker in the state of Ceará, where her documents were retained and she was forced to work without any day off or a regular work contract. She started working at 6 am and, even after the end of the workday, she could not use the telephone, internet or any other form of communication.

**SOURCE:** iG (<https://bit.ly/3aAnXqE>)

### ➤ 2019

#### CITY OF SÃO JOSÉ DOS CAMPOS, STATE OF SÃO PAULO

A young indigenous woman left her tribe to work as a domestic worker at a family home in Manaus, the state capital of Amazonas, 865 km from the village. Then she went to a town in the state of São Paulo with her employers and spent a year working as a domestic worker, nanny and caregiver for an elderly woman. Living in isolation, without any time off or contact with her family, the woman was paid less than one third of a minimum wage. The couple of employers was arrested and signed a Conduct Adjustment Agreement (TAC) to settle wages and severance fees, and pay for the young woman's return to her village. They will also be charged with human trafficking.

**SOURCE:** G1 (<https://glo.bo/3bFLuGV>)



In Brazil, 1,889 women were rescued from slave labor between 2003 and 2018. These figures provide a national overview but say little about specific contexts, such as the city of São Paulo, where 30% of the victims are female. Slave labor is also a violation that affects women; therefore, gender issues cannot be ignored if we want to eradicate it.

This publication seeks to shed light on the context of women in slave labor in order to inform and improve more efficient public policies and, thus, interrupt cycles of discrimination and reiteration of gender vulnerabilities and inequalities.

Therefore, we should ask who the female enslaved workers are. What do we know about them? Do we have information? Is it possible to draw a profile? In this publication, program Slavery, no way! answers these questions with new data, which were processed and systematized by the program's team based on information from the Ministry of Economy's Unemployment Insurance Register.

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**SLAVE LABOR AND GENDER: WHO ARE THE FEMALE WORKERS ENSLAVED IN BRAZIL?**

**RESEARCH AND TEXT:** Natália Suzuki, Thiago Casteli and Maira Costa **EDITOR:** Natália Suzuki

**GRAPHIC DESIGN:** Datadot **TRANSLATION:** Roberto Cataldo

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