PICUM
For undocumented migrants, for social justice.

DIGNITY FIRM

PAR Cross-Country Report

Participatory Action Research (PAR) with migrant workers in farm to fork sectors in Amsterdam, Seville and Wroclaw

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1. Introduction

DignityFIRM is a European project focused on promoting **dignity for migrant workers facing multiple forms of irregularity in the Farm-to-Fork sectors**. These workers are essential to agriculture, food processing, hospitality, and delivery services, yet their contributions are often met with exclusion and precarious conditions. At a time when the EU is pursuing major transitions toward sustainability and resilience, the project seeks to understand the challenges they face and the gap between policy goals and everyday realities. Through context-specific research, DignityFIRM aims to inform strategies and policy measures that uphold migrant workers' rights while supporting the wellbeing of the communities in which they live and work.

One innovative aspect of DignityFIRM is the integration of a dedicated Work Package on **Participatory Action Research (PAR)**. This reflects both a methodological commitment and a political stance: migrants draw on forms of agency, knowledge, and expertise rooted in lived experience that must be incorporated at every stage of policy design and implementation. Treating migrant workers merely as "subjects" of research reinforces extractive practices and entrenches knowledge hierarchies; recognising them as co-researchers, by contrast, asserts their rightful role as political actors capable of producing theory, formulating demands, and shaping interventions.

As Stefano Piemontese explains[1], *insider researchers* possess a unique epistemic advantage or epistemic capital within asymmetric research settings, which is particularly evident among **peer researchers** in Participatory Action Research. This advantage appears in two ways. First, their *experiential knowledge* allows them to share social positions, vulnerabilities, and everyday realities with research participants, giving them access and trust that external researchers cannot achieve. Second, their *para-ethnographic awareness* provides a reflexive, situated understanding of their own world, making them "experts by experience" who can not only document social conditions but also actively shape the theoretical and analytical direction of the research.

Piemontese's concept of epistemic advantage highlights the **instrumental value** of migrant peer-researchers. However, for PICUM, the coordinators of the PAR project, commitment to the approach is not merely pragmatic; it is a **political positioning**. Both civil society organisations (CSOs) and migrants themselves have long expressed fatigue with being continuously studied while rarely seeing their analyses or demands incorporated into policy or academic outputs. PAR is far from

[1] These ideas will be further elaborated in Piemontese's forthcoming article All That Glitters Is Not Gold. Positionality, Collaboration and Trust within Asymmetric Epistemic Groups (Ethnic and Racial Studies, Special Issue on The Ethics and Politics of Researching Irregular Migration, 2026).

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perfect and raises a series of ethical concerns (Legarda et al., 2026), but as an approach it challenges this extractive dynamic by foregrounding lived experience, collective analysis, and the capacity of communities to generate strategies for structural change. Crucially, PAR is **action-oriented**: it not only documents and analyses social conditions but also empowers grassroots organisations and migrants to take concrete steps, implement solutions, and influence ongoing struggles for rights, justice, and dignity. In this sense, research becomes a participatory and transformative process rather than a unidirectional extraction of information.

Because of this perspective, DignityFIRM established a work package dedicated to PAR, implemented through **three national case studies** led by grassroots organisations in the Netherlands, Spain, and Poland. Each organisation contracted and trained a peer researcher, each a formerly undocumented migrant with direct experience in Farm-to-Fork sectors. These peer researchers facilitated focus groups with workers in similar situations to identify problems, analyse working and living conditions, and explore individual and collective strategies for resistance. The findings gathered during these processes form the empirical foundation for the project's action phase, during which concrete initiatives were designed and implemented at the local level.

This comparative cross-country report brings together the insights emerging from three markedly different contexts: Spain, Poland, and the Netherlands. It seeks to identify the structural elements that shape migrant workers' precariousness across these settings, while also highlighting the specific national and local dynamics that influence how exploitation, agency, and resistance unfold. By examining these convergences and divergences, the report aims to illuminate the broader European patterns that reproduce status-based inequalities, as well as the grounded knowledge migrant workers contribute toward imagining new pathways for dignity and rights in the food supply chain.

The individual case study reports[2] are the main source of this cross-country report:

- *Participatory Action Research Case Study: Amsterdam, The Netherlands*, Here to Support – Salhein, H., & Van der Vooren, F. (2026).
- *Participatory Action Research Case Study: Seville, Spain*, Mujeres Supervivientes – Rincón Barón, L. M., & Ávalos Torres, A. (2026).
- *Participatory Action Research Case Study: Wrocław, Poland*, NOMADA Association – Flores, R., & Bauer, T. (2026).

This report is organized to take the reader step by step through the research process and its findings. After this introduction, Section 2 explains the methodology, including the work of the grassroots organisations, the peer researchers, and the design of the focus groups in the Farm-to-Fork sectors. Section 3 describes the territorial context in

[2] Case study reports will be available in 2026 at https://www.dignityfirm.eu/publications/

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Amsterdam, Seville, and Wrocław, covering national laws, labour conditions, and sector-specific challenges. Sections 4 to 6 present the main findings: the problems migrant workers identified, the ways they resist and organize collectively, and the intersectional factors that shape both vulnerability and agency. Section 7 looks at how the actions identified through PAR were designed and implemented, and Section 8 concludes with policy recommendations by each of the case studies for their correspondent context.

2. Methodology

2.a) PAR guidelines and local partners

The methodology of this work package was grounded in the *DignityFIRM Guidelines on Participatory Action Research (PAR) with undocumented migrants*[3], developed to ensure ethical, effective, and empowering research practices. In 2023, PICUM organised a workshop bringing together CSOs, migrant-led groups, and academics with prior experience in applying PAR with undocumented migrants. The workshop aimed to draft practical guidelines for conducting PAR in ways that respect the agency, knowledge, and safety of participants, while promoting collective reflection and action.

Eight PICUM member organisations contributed to this process: Association for Integration and Migration (Czech Republic), Ban Ying (Germany), Confédération des Syndicats Chrétiens (Belgium), Generation 2.0 for Rights, Equality and Diversity (Greece), Fairwork (The Netherlands), Mujeres Supervivientes, Rumiñahui (Spain) and the European Sex Workers Alliance. Their combined expertise informed principles covering ethical engagement of participants, participatory analysis, and the design of action-oriented outputs. These guidelines formed the foundation for the design and implementation of the three national case studies presented in this report.

Trust was recognised as a central prerequisite for PAR: Many of the CSOs who participated in the guidelines shared the same frustration regarding their prior interactions with traditional academic actors. They considered that when being approached to act as a bridge to what academia considers *"hard-to-reach"* populations, the effort and time that these organisations required to build these connections often goes unrecognised. This concern was also shared by CSOs across Europe and migrant workers in Spain, as collected in PICUM's report on migrant-led initiatives in Andalucía (PICUM, 2025)[4].

[3] The guidelines were drafted in 2023 for internal use. The final public version of the guidelines will be published as part of the *DignityFIRM Research Handbook* in 2026,incorporating reflections from the field and feedback from peer researchers involved in the case studies.

[4] Migrant-led initiatives in Andalucía, Spain Learnings from the self-organization of migrant workers (PICUM, 2025) https://picum.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/Migrant-led-initiatives-in-Andalucia-EN.pdf

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Building on the guidelines, PICUM launched an open call in the Netherlands, Spain, and Poland to identify grassroots organisations to lead the national case studies. Selection criteria emphasised either being **migrant-led** or having **well-established trust networks** within communities of undocumented migrant workers. Because of the action-oriented nature of PAR, pre-existing **advocacy work on migrant labour rights** was also essential. The subcontracting needed to align with ongoing efforts where DignityFIRM could provide meaningful support. At the same time, this PAR Work Package complemented the more traditional academic components of the project, allowing for a comparison between analyses and conclusions generated by more formal research methods and those produced directly by migrants themselves. In order to be able to have this comparison, **smaller grass-roots organisations were prioritised** over more institutionalised proposals with pre-existing connections with universities. Finally, given the increasing difficulty grassroots civil society organisations face in accessing funding, the **positive impact of subcontracting** for both the organisations and the peer researchers was an additional consideration in the selection process.

Three organisations were selected amongst 34 proposals to lead the case studies, each reflecting both local expertise and strong ties to the migrant communities they serve (and in some cases, are part of):

Here to Support – Amsterdam, The Netherlands

Here to Support facilitates the Amsterdam City Rights coalition, bringing together both documented and undocumented residents to collectively address human rights challenges in the city. Many coalition members work in the food supply chain, and the organisation has long-standing relationships across diverse communities from Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Through initiatives such as Shared Visions and the City Rights App, Here to Support has developed experience in engaging participants in critical reflection, advocacy, and co-creation of practical solutions. This existing network and experience provided a strong foundation for the PAR process, ensuring that participants could safely share their experiences and co-produce knowledge grounded in their everyday realities.

Mujeres Supervivientes – Seville, Spain

Mujeres Supervivientes (MMSS) is a migrant women-led organisation founded to support survivors of gender-based violence. Its work extends to addressing precarious labour conditions, exclusion, and food insecurity, rooted in a community kitchen that doubles as a space for reflection, collective care, and feminist activism. MMSS approaches PAR from an intersectional feminist perspective, recognising systemic inequalities and privileging lived experience as a source of knowledge. This framework enabled a horizontal and collaborative research environment, where participants' voices were central in identifying challenges and designing strategies for change in Seville's hospitality sectors.

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NOMADA Association – Wrocław, Poland

NOMADA focuses on protecting migrant workers from exploitation, particularly those employed by temporary work agencies. The organisation has developed a comprehensive support system for individuals who do not qualify as victims of trafficking, providing accommodation, legal aid, financial support, and advocacy. Through initiatives such as the Latin American Workers' Union in Poland, NOMADA fosters peer-led empowerment and engages in awareness-raising with both migrant communities and state institutions. This combination of direct support, advocacy, and community mobilisation positioned NOMADA to lead the Polish PAR case study effectively, allowing participants to critically examine working conditions, share experiences safely, and co-create actionable solutions.

2.b) Peer-researchers and engaging migrant workers

Each subcontracted organisation engaged[5] a peer researcher who was a formerly undocumented migrant with prior experience in one or more sectors of the food supply chain. This selection criterion ensured that the peer researcher could draw on firsthand knowledge of the working and living conditions of their peers, creating a foundation of trust and shared understanding that is central to Participatory Action Research.

Traditionally, personal information regarding research participants is anonymised for safeguarding reasons. However, in this work package, the three peer-researchers became the main authors of their own case-study reports and chose to share their stories publicly. Acknowledging them by name is therefore an act of epistemic justice, allowing us to recognise their authorship and understand the positionality from which the case studies were produced.

Amsterdam

Peer researcher: Hamo Salheim

Sudanese peer researcher (he/him).

He used to advocate for human rights in Sudan until he began to feel unsafe. He arrived in the Netherlands in 2018, had his asylum application rejected in 2020, and became undocumented. In 2022, he obtained a residence permit. He worked in hospitality.

Seville

Peer researcher: Lina Marcela Rincón Barón

Colombian peer-researcher (she/her).

She arrived in Spain in 2022 with a student visa. She started the process for the recognition of her bachelors degree in Psychology in 2023, by the end of 2025 her degree is still not recognised. She worked in hospitality.

Wroclaw

Peer researcher: Rocío Flores Torres

Colombian peer-researcher (she/her).

She arrived in Poland in 2023 with a working visa through a temporary work agency. She became undocumented after denouncing labour exploitation and created the Latin American Workers' Union in Poland. She worked in a poultry plant.

[5] *Although the term "recruitment" is commonly used, the work package on PAR working group decided not to use it due to its utilitarian connotations and military origins.*

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Once onboard, the peer researchers received **training** to equip them with the skills needed to facilitate focus groups and engage ethically with participants. Training included both online sessions and an in-person workshop in Brussels and Wroclaw coordinated by PICUM, which brought together the peer researchers and the coordinators from the three countries. The workshops incorporated lessons from prior PAR experiences implemented by organisations such as FLEX[6] and ESWA[7], included a session with a former migrant peer researcher with prior similar research experience, and covered key ethical considerations and safeguarding procedures, as well as learning opportunities from the other case studies. This combination of practical guidance and peer-to-peer learning strengthened the ability of each researcher to lead participatory sessions effectively while ensuring the safety and dignity of participants.

Following training, each organisation invited a **group of 14–18 migrants** currently or formerly working irregularly in Farm-to-Fork sectors to participate in the research. These participants took part in a series of **five focus group sessions**, designed to capture the complexity of their experiences and to identify the main problems and potential strategies for resistance regarding their working and living conditions, but flexible enough for each group to identify the specific framings of the discussion. The first four sessions were split into two thematic cycles with separate groups (1.1 and 1.2 with one group, 2.1 and 2.2 with the second group), while the fifth session brought together participants from both groups for a collaborative, action-oriented discussion. The results of these focus groups formed the basis for the **design and implementation of local actions**, enabling participants to transform insights from discussion into concrete initiatives to address the challenges identified in their workplaces and communities.

Across all three contexts, the process highlighted the essential role of trust, peer knowledge, and community connections in enabling meaningful participation, and the peer researcher's credibility and personal networks were decisive in forming functional groups. All three organisations relied heavily on their own and the peer researchers' knowledge of the communities and personal connections to invite participants, emphasizing comfort, familiarity, and credibility over formal engagement processes. In Spain, this relied on WhatsApp contacts and a snowball approach, while in the Netherlands it leveraged community networks, cultural and savings groups[8], and

[6] Experts by Experience: *Conducting Feminist Participatory Action Research with Workers in High-Risk Sectors* (Focus on Labour Exploitation, 2021) https://labourexploitation.org/publications/experts-by-experience-conducting-feminist-participatory-action-research-with-workers-in-high-risk-sectors.

[7] *Gold Standard Guidelines for Safe and Ethical Sex Work Research in Europe* (European Sex Workers Alliance, 2025) https://assets.nationbuilder.com/eswa/pages/2602/attachments/original/1756816379/ESWA_Gold_Standard_Guidelines_for_Safe_and_Ethical_Sex_Work_Research_in_Europe_2025_final.pdf?1756816379.

[8] In the Netherlands, some participants were reached through **community savings groups**,

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informal gatherings such as an Iftar dinner[9]. In Poland, networks were built around trade union contacts, community leadership, and personal referrals, especially given the higher barriers to participation due to distrust and the complex legal environment.

Despite these commonalities, the **contexts shaped the approach and challenges**. In Spain, logistical coordination, scheduling and organizing groups were the main challenges, with occasional misunderstandings about the nature of participation. There was a particular effort to incorporate diversity in countries of origin, even if the final group was almost exclusively Latin American. On the other hand, the team in the Netherlands addressed their inability to engage Latin American workers, and their groups were exclusively formed by African and Asian workers. The pre-existing relations of the organisations and the peer researchers played a key factor in shaping these groups, a factor that was expected. In the Netherlands, the team initially sought balanced representation across employment sectors, countries of origin, and gender, but ultimately prioritized diversity and motivation over strict quotas. In Poland, legal and systemic barriers, coupled with distrust toward both CSOs and authorities, made accessing participants outside Latin American communities more difficult. The initial design of the Polish case study foresaw the creation of an all-female group in the first thematic focus groups, but practical obstacles made the linguistic division a more suitable option.

informal networks where members—often migrants organised based on the region of origin—pool resources, lend to one another, and provide mutual support. These groups not only foster financial solidarity but also serve as trusted social spaces, making them effective channels for connecting with potential participants for the PAR project.

[9] **Iftar** is the meal that Muslims eat to break their daily fast during Ramadan, the Islamic holy month of fasting. It usually takes place at sunset and often involves a communal gathering with family, friends, or the wider community.

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2.c) Focus groups

Case study	Sector	Division of groups	Group A (1.1 and 1.2)	Group B (2.1 and 2.2)
Amsterdam	Mostly[10] hospitality	Based on language	Group with interpretation (Arabic/English) 7 male Sudan (3), Eritrea, Ghana, Uganda, Etiopia	English speakers 6 Male, 3 Female Kenya (2), Nigeria (2), Uganda (2) Ghana, India, Indonesia
Seville	Hospitality	Based on availability	Total 15 participants Colombia (4), Venezuela (3), Argentina (2), Honduras, Uruguay, Senegal, Perú, Nicaragua, Mexico	
			5 female and 3 male	4 female and 3 male
Wroclaw	Multi-sector with focus on temporary work agencies	Based on language	*Colombians* (Spanish speakers) 6 male, 4 female Colombia (10) Irregular employment through temporary work agencies	*International* (English speakers) 3 male, 3 female Morocco (2), Turkey, Ukraine, Angola, Zimbabwe Irregular employment, not always via employment agencies

[10] 3 exceptions: agriculture, food processing and cargo ship fish

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Across the three case studies, the thematic structure of the focus groups followed a shared initial design: each country was invited to organise two sessions per group, with the first centred on labour disputes with employers and the second on the strategies workers develop in response. This structure was intentionally flexible, reflecting the principle that participants themselves should define the issues they considered most urgent and decide how to address them.

In every context, a significant portion of the early meetings was dedicated to collectively establishing rules for working together, which helped build trust and create a safe space for discussion. In the Netherlands, this framework was followed quite closely, with the first session dedicated to conflicts and abuses at work, and the second focusing on solutions and strategies for claiming rights. In Spain, the groups began with a broader exploration of labour contexts and everyday realities in hospitality, before moving in the second session to disputes and possible responses.

Poland required the greatest adaptation: the Colombian group, already cohesive and partly unionised, naturally gravitated toward an in-depth exploration of problems in the first session and a more structured, goal-oriented discussion of strategies in the second. In contrast, the international group faced challenges of trust, availability, and language diversity, making it impossible to convene all participants together. As a result, the Polish team replaced the two-group format with a combination of smaller group meetings and individual sessions, sometimes merging the identification of problems and strategies into a single extended encounter.

Some sessions required almost no moderation. Once initial guiding questions were posed, conversations unfolded naturally and researchers mainly observed. Other sessions were more structured, sometimes influenced by participants' previous experience in organising or union-related activities (particularly in the case of Colombians in Poland), which contributed to a more goal-oriented dynamic.

In the Netherlands, the peer researcher chose to begin each session by sharing a personal experience. This approach helped initiate the conversation and encouraged participants to recognise commonalities in their own stories.

In the case of Spain, the peer researcher noted that participants tended to broaden the discussion beyond work-related issues, expressing a need to explore themes they considered central to their overall living and working conditions.

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"For the participants, it was essential to also talk about their migratory processes, motivations, emotions, bonds, relationships and other personal experiences. This allowed us to understand that the vulnerabilities they face in their workplaces are much more complex than we could imagine from an individual perspective, and can only be fully understood from a collective and contextualized perspective, mediated in this case by labor relations."

- Seville case study

For some participants, the meetings were **emotionally intense**, yet they also expressed a need to continue exploring the issues in depth. The three case studies therefore had to remain flexible, adapting to these emotional responses, particularly by adjusting timing and creating space for participants to share traumatic experiences and to recover from the process of reliving them.

We work from a comprehensive perspective that articulates body, emotion and thought, building intersubjective relationships between participants, as a way of resisting the fragmentation caused by suffering and racism. We incorporate practices such as conscious breathing, biodanza and self-care as political dimensions of affections, necessary to create a safe environment, of trust and collective belonging.

The recovery of the experiences lived was carried out through personal narratives, framed in labor, human and migratory rights. This process allowed us to resignify our experiences, politicize them and transform them into a collective force. ***It was a liberating path that took us from the personal to the collective, and from anger and frustration to political power****.*

- Seville case study

In the Polish case, the peer-researcher noticed that some topics were not raised during the group meetings of the Colombian group, even though they had come up in individual conversations. It is possible that the strong interpersonal ties within the group influenced a desire to maintain a certain image in front of others.

Across all three case studies, researchers observed that participating in a project of this kind can give people a greater **sense of agency**.

"We also observed that participating in a project like this one gives people a sense of agency over their lives. Coming together to discuss challenges, share information about rights, and collectively explore solutions helped participants ***feel more in control.*** *Many feel that their lives are governed by immigration services rather than by themselves - especially within asylum procedures.* ***Taking collective action helped shift that sense of powerlessness.****"*

- Amsterdam case study

For the action-oriented last session, the idea was to mix selected participants from the previous groups A and B based on their engagement and willingness to participate in the action phase. In the case of Wroclaw and Seville this took place similarly to the focus

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groups hosted before, however the case study in Amsterdam decided to adapt this final session to a full day more in-depth full day activity, which they called the ***Hackathon***. After discussing existing campaigns and trust building, the core of the session involved collectively imagining long-term goals and then identifying concrete actions that could be taken within the next six months. Participants brainstormed campaign ideas, considered target audiences and strategies, and discussed key elements of effective action: community building, visibility, and political advocacy.

3 . Territorial context

3.a) Amsterdam, The Netherlands

The Netherlands has historically positioned itself, and continues to do so, as opposed to broad regularisation policies within the European political landscape. Opportunities for regularisation of status remain largely restricted to marriage or cohabitation with a regularly resident individual, or through an asylum application (Siruno and Leerks, 2024[11]). Even if limited case-by-case options exist within the Dutch legal framework such as a humanitarian based residence permit[12] or the *Buiten Schuld*[13] for cases of voluntary return in which the country of origin did not cooperate, there were no real options for the undocumented migrant workers in the case-study to regularize their situation. Therefore, as highlighted in the analysis, despite the formal existence of these limited mechanisms, it was considered that in practice the Netherlands offers virtually no avenues for regularisation of undocumented migrant workers.

The Dutch case is also shaped by a highly restrictive legal framework for undocumented people, largely defined by the 1998 *Linkage Act*, which ties nearly all social rights and services to possession of a residence permit and BSN number - the personal citizen identification number assigned to everyone registered in the Dutch population database. As a result, undocumented workers cannot legally rent housing, hold formal employment, open bank accounts, or register with the municipality, pushing them into informal and highly exploitative labour sectors (such as hospitality, delivery or agriculture). This shows a trend of near full exclusion of migrants without residence permits in the Netherlands (Hajer, van Liempt, 2024[14]). The progressive shift to cashless payments, especially in public transport, has further

[11] MIrreM Netherlands Country Brief on Irregular MigrationPolicy Context https://irregularmigration.eu/netherlands/

[12] Residence permit humanitarian non-temporary: https://ind.nl/en/replace-extend-renew-and-change/change/residence-permit-humanitarian-non-temporary

[13] *Buiten Schuld:* https://www.dienstterugkeerenvertrek.nl/het-terugkeerproces/bijzondere-omstandigheden/buiten-schuld

[14] The Linking Act: Dutch Pioneering work of Welfare State Bordering https://i-claim.eu/the-legal-and-policy-infrastructure-of-irregularity-the-netherlands/

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constrained mobility and increased exposure to detention.

In theory, healthcare is accessible by law through the CAK (*Centraal Administratie Kantoor*) reimbursement system[15], yet in practice, both migrants and health providers often lack information, leading to refusal of care, discrimination, and administrative obstacles. Reporting crimes is theoretically protected under the "*free in, free out*" principle, but inconsistent implementation and racial profiling discourage victims from approaching the police (Timmerman, Leerkes, Staring, & Delvino, 2020)[16].

This context produces a setting where undocumented migrants rely heavily on civil society actors to access information, pursue unpaid wages, and navigate essential services.

3.b) Seville, Spain

Spain's migration regime has historically contributed to irregular migration by limiting regular labour channels despite high demand for foreign workers. Irregular migrants in Spain typically include overstayers, rejected asylum seekers, migrants unable to renew permits, and irregular entries, while certain groups as unaccompanied or accompanied children, victims of trafficking or gender-based violence, and long-term residents have provisional or regularisation pathways. Pathways into irregularity include visa overstays, permit lapses, and asylum rejections, while regularisation remains the main pathway out (Finotelli, Cassain and Echeverria, 2024[17]).

Seville's context is shaped by the centrality of hospitality and tourism in the local economy, sectors where migrants, especially from Latin America and Africa, are overrepresented in low-wage, precarious, and often irregular jobs. Official statistics underrepresent migrant labour and provide little information on working conditions, but a broad social perception recognises migrants as essential to the functioning of these sectors.

The research unfolds in a setting marked by structural inequalities, a persistent colonial social imaginary, and a labour market characterised by temporality, weak enforcement of labour rights, and frequent irregular employment. In Andalusia, historical patterns of inequality, land concentration, and religious conservatism coexist with a strong tradition of popular resistance and grassroots organising, especially around gentrification and migrant rights.

Spain's migration system links most rights to administrative status and produces dependency and invisibility for irregular workers. One key mechanism is the *arraigo*,

[15] Rijksfinanciën. (2021). Memorie van toelichting bij de rijksbegroting 2021, OW XVI, Beleidsartikel 2 Curatieve zorg. Ministerie van Financiën. https://www.rijksfinancien.nl/memorie-van-toelichting/2021/OWB/XVI/onderdeel/634718

[16] Timmerman, R. I., Leerkes, A., Staring, R., & Delvino, N. (2020). 'Free In, Free Out': Exploring Dutch Firewall Protections for Irregular Migrant Victims of Crime. European Journal of Migration and Law, 22(3), 427–455. https://doi.org/10.1163/15718166-12340082

[17] MIrreM Spain Country Brief on Irregular Migration Policy Context https://irregularmigration.eu/spain/

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which allows irregular migrants to regularise their residence if they can demonstrate social, labour, or family ties in Spain. Access to an arraigo often depends on proof of work or integration, leaving migrants vulnerable to labour exploitation, underpayment, and precarious contracts.

Civil society organisations[18] acknowledge some positive changes in Spain's newly reformed Immigration Regulation but emphasise that it still has significant shortcomings. While the reform relaxes certain requirements and allows some people in irregular administrative situations to regularise their status (for example, reducing the residence requirement for *arraigo social* and allowing limited work during *arraigo socioformativo*), it still forces many people to live in irregularity for at least two years, with all the negative consequences this entails. It can be particularly harmful for thousands of asylum seekers whose applications are rejected, as their waiting time under the procedures will no longer count towards *arraigo*.[19]

Access to justice for undocumented people in Spain remains a challenge: Only 1 in 9 migrants victims of a crime dare to report it[20]. Spain has a legal framework that recognises and protects the rights of victims who report a crime. Article 24.1 of the Constitution guarantees effective judicial protection for all people, regardless of nationality. The 2015 Statute of the Crime Victim sets out rights and safeguards for anyone who has suffered a crime, regardless of administrative status. The 2022 Law on Equal Treatment and Non-Discrimination also requires public authorities to eliminate prejudice and ensure there is no discrimination in the administration of justice.

However, these guarantees are not always upheld. Although irregular migrants should be protected as victims under the Constitution and the Victim Statute, in practice they may be subject to migration law instead, facing possible sanctions or expulsion for lacking a residence permit. Migration law creates differences in rights based on administrative status, putting undocumented migrants at a disadvantage and discouraging them from reporting crimes for fear of consequences.

3.c) Wroclaw, Poland

Wroclaw is the third largest city in Poland. Migration to Poland is a relatively new phenomenon, as in recent decades Poland has transitioned from being a country of transit to a destination for migrant labour. Nonetheless, its administrative and labour

[18] Andalucía Acoge, Cáritas, CEAR, Red Acoge and the Jesuit Migrant Service – Press release: Las entidades sociales insisten en que el Reglamento de Extranjería tiene margen de mejora (20 May 2025) https://redacoge.org/las-entidades-sociales-insisten-en-que-el-reglamento-de-extranjeria-tiene-margen-de-mejora/.

[19] Kit de recursos sobre el nuevo reglamento de extranjería, Andalucía Acoge (2025) https://acoge.org/eventos/kit-de-recursos-sobre-el-nuevo-reglamento-de-extranjeria/.

[20] Red Acoge: Informe Denuncia IN-SEGURA (2025) Herramientas para el acompañamiento a personas migrantes ante las barreras en el acceso a la justicia https://f.mtr.cool/UDFBMCGNLH

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oversight systems lag behind, resulting in chronic understaffing, slow procedures, and widespread misinformation.

Poland manages irregular migration through a mix of flexible labour policies and strict border controls, including pushbacks and a 200km wall with Belarus. Labour market and employment irregularities are the main source of irregular migration in Poland, and semi regular-employment is common (migrants with a regular status breaching their conditions of stay due to violations of employment regulations).

This situation partly stems from Poland's overall approach to immigration since the 2010s. Relaxed penalties for companies issuing fictitious job offers or violating labour regulations have contributed to the growth of semi-regular statuses among foreign workers. At the same time, visa policies have remained relatively liberal, even as post-2015 political discourse became more security-focused (Adamczyk, 2019; Klaus, 2020). The country lacks a unified migration strategy, leading to fragmented responses. Political polarisation, weak coordination, and high staff turnover remain challenges, but Poland balances security concerns with economic reliance on foreign workers (Yeliseyeu, Fihel, Rakowska and Kaczmarczyk, 2024[21]).

Within this landscape, temporary work agencies play a central role in recruitment and labour exploitation. They form multi-layered chains of dependency that often begin in the country of origin, involve illegal fees (temporary work agencies frequently charge fees for supposed administrative services and deduct taxes and health contributions, yet fail to initiate any formal procedures), and frequently result in migrants unknowingly falling into irregular status due to the agencies' failure to process permits.

Workers face long hours, unsafe conditions, withheld wages, and accommodation tied to employment, leading to immediate eviction if they lose their job. Agencies use migrants' irregular status as a tool of coercion, discouraging complaints due to fear of deportation. The National Labour Inspectorate's obligation[22] to report irregular work to the Border Guard reinforces this fear.

Restrictions on permit holders changing employer, as well as on visa-free work and employment for students increase precarity and risks of irregularity.

[21] MIrreM Poland Country Brief on Irregular Migration Policy Context https://irregularmigration.eu/poland/

[22] The National Labour Inspectorate lists a formal cooperation agreement with the Border Guard (Porozumienie Głównego Inspektora Pracy i Komendanta Głównego Straży Granicznej, 10 Dec 2018). The agreement frames joint inspections and information exchange on the legality of foreigners' employment. https://www.pip.gov.pl/files/203/Porozumienia-krajowe-z-urzdami-i-instytucjami/159/Stra-Graniczna.pdf

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4. Migrant workers' precariousness dimensions

In all three case studies an identification of the main problems suffered by the workers in these sectors was conducted in order to identify the challenges the actions should offer an answer to.

The key elements identified are presented using the analytical framing of **migrant workers' precariousness and its dimensions**, based on the WP5 framework. Building on Kreshpaj et al. (2020), which defines five central dimensions of precariousness, this study applies a framework with five key dimensions of migrant work precarity.

- **migration status** (including semi-compliance with residence and work permits),
employment insecurity (contract type, temporariness, part-time/full-time status, and multiple jobs),
- **income inadequacy** (sufficiency, stability, and sources of earnings),
- **lack of rights and protection** (coverage by unions, social security, labour standards, and practical enforcement of workplace rights),
- and **working and living conditions** (psychosocial and physical work factors, such as long hours, lack of control, and hazardous environments).

Methodological note:
It should be noted that the comparison presented below is a compilation of the issues identified by focus group participants and analyzed by peer researchers according to the dimensions outlined above. These findings reflect the lived experiences of specific migrant workers and the contextual knowledge of coordinating CSOs, rather than representing absolute or universal conditions.

Patterns observed are influenced by the composition of the focus groups, including participants' nationalities, languages, and length of stay, and summarizing their testimony captures individual realities rather than definitive trends.

Nevertheless, the value of Participatory Action Research lies precisely in contextualized qualitative insights: this section provides a window into the realities of particular people living under precarious conditions in the three case study settings.

"The problem, in my view, is, for as long as there is this undocumented thing hovering above us, it will be like pouring water or whatever into a bottomless pit. They will always be taking advantage of somebody for as long as there is that undocumented hovering over them."

- Participant of Amsterdam case

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4.a Migratory status

Administrative status as a core source of vulnerability: Participants in the focus groups suggested that migratory status plays a central role in shaping precarity, influencing access to rights, everyday security, and various aspects of work and social life.

In Seville, several participants noted that migration status often acts as both a goal and a source of division within migrant communities. Undocumented individuals reported feeling compelled to accept exploitative conditions as part of the long process toward regularisation, for example through mechanisms like the *arraigo* regularisation.

In Wrocław, focus group participants described a fragmented and confusing system of visas and temporary permits, which creates uncertainty even for those who believe they are complying with the rules.

In Amsterdam, the groups emphasized that the lack of any formal pathway leaves undocumented migrants largely outside institutional protection.

Taken together, the experiences reported highlight different dynamics across the three case studies:

- **temporary irregularity** tied to hopes of future recognition in Seville;
- **legal ambiguity** within a restrictive framework in Wrocław;
- **chronic irregularity** with few avenues for regularisation in Amsterdam.

Work–regularisation link as a mechanism of control: Work-based regularisation can offer a pathway toward a less precarious migration status, providing migrants with an important opportunity to stabilise their situation and access rights. However, work-based regularisation and the aspirations towards it can also create conditions of labour exploitation and reinforce dependency on employers if safeguards are insufficient [23].

In Seville, participants described employment-based regularisation as functioning simultaneously as a **tool of control**, with many migrants choosing to remain silent about exploitative practices fearing any reporting could have an impact on their ongoing administrative processes towards *arraigo* regularisation, and pointing out at the minimum waiting time of 2 years in which they remain undocumented and with no option of a regular employment as one of the sources for their vulnerable situation against labour exploitation.

> *"But that man was kind of manipulative a bit, who made you think like he was doing you a favor "I've done your papers so work more hours" and you also accept because they say "in a year I'm going to renew the papers" then I think I'm going to put up with it and... in two years if I go out here... You have in your mind only that*

[23] Regularisation mechanisms and programmes: Why they matter and how to design them (PICUM, 2022): https://picum.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/Regularisation-mechanisms-and-programmes_Why-they-matter-and-how-to-design-them_EN.pdf .

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I have to endure, I have to endure, I have to endure"

- Participant of Seville case

In Wrocław, participants reported that intermediaries and private agencies can give the impression that formal employment will secure migration status, sometimes providing misleading information and leaving workers irregular even after months of labour.

"I trusted the company that invited me to Poland (from Colombia), but they didn't do anything. They never started the process. I worked for three months before someone told me that nothing had been done."

"I was here on the 90-day visa-free stay. I started working, but I had no documents. Then I found out the company hadn't sent anything to the office. I didn't even know they were supposed to."

- Participants of Wroclaw case

This idea was not present In Amsterdam, where participants emphasized that none of the informal work they undertake can lead to any permit.

Bureaucratic opacity and misinformation: The Seville case describes how the lack of clear, reliable information creates inequalities: some migrants were unaware of their rights or the steps needed for regularisation, while others, fully aware of the system, felt forced to endure long waits and economic pressures. This is also the case regarding accessing justice or exercising existing rights within the law (*see section 4.c*).

In Wrocław, participants recounted situations where migrants struggled to track their applications, rarely received updates, and sometimes discovered too late that intermediaries or agencies had mishandled or falsified their documents. Even the participants who were regularly employed according to labour law were not sure about their residence status, creating what they called an "administrative limbo". This "limbo" was further deepened by the lack of information about foreign nationals' rights and the overall opacity of the system - especially in cases involving agency mediation or frequent changes of address.

The case was different amongst participants of the Amsterdam case study, although they clearly understood their irregular status, fear and invisibility blocked access to legal and institutional guidance.

Employer and intermediary power: Focus group participants across the three cities described employer power as a central feature of their precarity, though it manifests differently in each context. In Seville, several participants reported that employers sometimes use migrants' undocumented status to impose long hours, unpaid labour, or informal arrangements framed as opportunities or favors. This often was understood by a moral narrative of owing something back to the employer, even in the cases of exploitation, as a moral debt.

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"And although my boss at that time did not pay me everything, I kind of say, he is also risking it" as if I say "among all that, he is gambling because he could be fined".

- Participant of Seville case

In Wrocław, participants stated that it was not only the employers, but also the intermediaries who exercise considerable influence by leveraging migrants' dependence on legal procedures, for example through promises like *"I'll take care of your papers,"* which can tie workers to exploitative jobs and discourage them from seeking alternatives. The idea is similar to the one reported by the Seville case, but the dependency in the examples from Wroclaw seemed higher due to particularly opaque processes described in the previous section.

In Amsterdam, the general absence of any formal contract and labour oversight amongst participants made them feel that the employers' power was absolute: in their case work is typically paid in cash, conditions are negotiated individually, and accountability is limited.

Fear, insecurity, and mental health consequences: The profound emotional and psychological toll of irregular status was present in all case studies. In Seville, several migrants described how the long waits involved in regularisation processes fuel chronic stress, frustration, and a gradual erosion of self-worth, leaving them suspended between hope and stagnation. In Wrocław, participants spoke of the anxiety generated by prolonged bureaucratic limbo, combined with the looming threat or experience of detention, creating a persistent sense of being trapped by forces beyond their control. In Amsterdam, fear emerged as the predominant emotional experience: the constant risk of police detection and deportation created isolation, enforced silence, and exhaustion, making everyday life mentally taxing and burdensome.

"And what affected me more than anything else was the way I dealt with people. You know? Because here people, there are times when they are very despotic. I mean, for example, today they called me like a dog. So, I felt horrible. That's what has affected me the most. Also physical and mental exhaustion. That has affected me a lot"

- Participant of Seville case

Detention, immobility, and territorial entrapment: Focus group participants described different forms of immobility across the three cities, with some having particularly difficult experiences. Two participants from Morocco in Wroclaw crossed the border irregularly through the Poland–Belarus route, which - according to their testimonies - was marked by systemic abuses by the Polish Border Guard.

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"They took our shoes, our money. Left us with nothing. We had to hide in the water so they wouldn't catch us."
"It was cold, we had nothing. It was a game to break you."

- Participants of Wroclaw case

One of them had additionally been returned from Germany under the so-called Dublin Regulations, the EU rules determining which member state is responsible for examining an asylum application. Both individuals were placed in a detention centre, where they stayed for six months. At the end of this period, they applied for international protection, which allowed them to leave the centre and stay, for a while, with regular status, but with low real chances of being granted refugee status and with the feeling that going back to irregularity was unavoidable.

Fear of detention was also very present in the case of Amsterdam. There, however, participants reported that it was fear itself that shaped their mobility, more than formal constraints: many deliberately limit their movements, avoiding public spaces or transport where police checks are likely.

In a broader sense, territorial entrapment was also perceived due to different factors. Long delays in receiving residence cards was also considered a form of state-imposed immobility by other participants in Wroclaw, restricting movement both within and beyond the city. In the Seville case study detention was rarely a central concern; instead, irregularity often translated into economic constraints that limit mobility and opportunities.

Systemic production of irregularity: Participants across the three cities concluded that irregularity is not the result of individual failure, but emerges from structural features of migration and labour regimes. In some cases individuals shared this idea clearly, in others participants reached this conclusion after realising that their individual cases were shaped by systemic issues that affected them all, after sharing personal experiences with peers.

4.b) Employment insecurity and income inadequacy

All participants described experiencing high levels of job insecurity and precarity, shaped by contract types, employment practices, and sectoral norms.

Across all three contexts, **temporariness and underemployment** combined to generate systemic instability. Short-term contracts, on-demand scheduling, and artificially low recorded hours created a structural mismatch between formal employment conditions and actual labour needs. Migrants may be formally full-time yet work excessive overtime without pay, hold part-time contracts while performing full-time tasks, or receive insufficient hours to survive. This unpredictability led to constant availability, discourages refusal of exploitative conditions, and increases dependence on employers or intermediaries.

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In Wrocław, the use of *umowa zlecenie* (civil law contracts[24]) appeared widespread, placing workers **outside core labour protections**. The case study explained that these contracts allow employers or agencies to terminate work at will, deny benefits such as sick or maternity leave, and evade oversight from labour inspectors. Many migrants shared that they signed contracts they did not fully understand, as translations were often unavailable, which added to confusion and vulnerability. Even those considered directly employed reported encountering informal arrangements, especially among undocumented workers or migrants with unstable residence status. Participants also noted that agency employment can intensify insecurity, with incomplete paperwork, missing social security registration, and arbitrary control over tasks, hours, and schedules.

In Amsterdam, participants described job insecurity as often taking the form of on-demand work and dependence on intermediaries. Those with precarious or undocumented status feel compelled to accept last-minute assignments to maintain access to future opportunities. Some participants observed that refusing shifts can lead to exclusion from the labour market, creating a situation governed more by fear. Cash payments, the absence of formal contracts, and limited oversight was also considered to further intensify precarity, leaving workers vulnerable to sudden termination or non-payment.

> *"And it was always uncertain. Like, they would call me at the last minute. (...) Because I didn't have documents, most of the time, I was afraid to say no. (...) You don't want to say no, because once you say no... Yeah, the next day, she will not call you and you're available.*
>
> - Participant of Amsterdam case

In Seville, participants showed a dual dynamic in employment conditions. Those with permits reported often receiving temporary, hourly, or incomplete contracts that omit important details such as working hours, leaving employers with substantial control over schedules. Participants without permits shared that they typically work entirely outside formal frameworks, relying on verbal agreements that are frequently renegotiated, with irregular pay or extended shifts. Several also noted that in hospitality and domestic sectors, under-contracting of hours is common, leading some workers to hold multiple jobs or supplement their income with informal work just to cover basic costs.

Combining multiple jobs was a common survival strategy across all case studies, shaped by local legal and administrative conditions. The Wroclaw case study noted that legal requirements for separate work permits often pushed migrants into informal secondary jobs. In Seville, participants described how under-recorded hours in

[24] Ludera-Ruszel, A. (2019). Employment under civil law contracts – selected issues. Acta Universitatis Lodziensis. Folia Iuridica, 88, 25–33. https://doi.org/10.18778/0208-6069.88.03

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primary employment frequently necessitate informal work to make ends meet. In Amsterdam, participants reflected that while on-demand scheduling can make secondary employment difficult, inconsistent income still compels many to seek additional work.

Inadequate payment was another recurring theme. Across all three cities, migrants shared experiences of earning below minimum wages, receiving delayed or partial payments, or not being paid at all. The case studies connected wage inadequacy to temporary contracts, agency-mediated work, undocumented or partially documented status, and limited avenues to enforce rights.

In Wrocław, participants described low base wages, irregular monthly income, and volatility in agency employment, including piecework (where workers are paid based on the amount of work they complete rather than a fixed hourly or monthly wage), deductions, and delayed payments—even under formal contracts like *umowa zlecenie*. In Amsterdam, some participants recounted extreme cases of non-payment, with workers going days, weeks, or months without pay, sometimes finding employers unreachable.

> *"I worked for another agent and I worked with warehouses for almost 8 months or something like this. (...) one year I wait for my money. He does not pay me. (...) I try my best to get my money, but he does not respond to me."*
>
> - Participant of Amsterdam case

4.c) Lack of rights and protection

Limited access to social protection: Most focus group participants described facing significant obstacles in accessing social protection, though the pathways leading to this exclusion differ.

In Seville, some participants mentioned that even when they held formal contracts, they later discovered they had not been registered with Social Security. This situation limited their access to unemployment benefits, medical leave, and future pension rights. Others remarked that staffing shortages and increasingly demanding workloads intensified the effects of being left outside the social protection system.

In Wrocław, participants frequently pointed out that civil law contracts (*umowa zlecenie*) or informal arrangements kept them from accessing paid leave, health insurance, or other benefits. Some also recalled that agencies sometimes advised against pension contributions, which they felt would expose them to long-term insecurity.

> *"I didn't know I was entitled to anything. The agency just said if I don't come - they'll fire me."*
>
> - Participant of Wroclaw case

The Amsterdam case study pointed to the *Linkage Act* as the main source of migrant vulnerability placing them outside most public services. While certain rights—such as access to medically necessary healthcare—exist on

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paper, many said that actually obtaining such services required navigating complex bureaucratic steps, often only possible with the support of CSOs. As a result, participants described relying heavily on informal networks for essential needs.

Institutional and bureaucratic barriers: Participants frequently described encountering substantial obstacles when trying to access institutional protection and legal remedies. In Seville, the issue of qualifications emerged as a central topic, as the ineffectiveness in the recognition of foreign university-level degrees in Spain has a great impact on the working conditions of migrant people (Gandoy Valle, 2024). The system of recognition has been criticized due to lengthy delays, the number of requirements, exclusions and incompatibilities of restrictive character that are established. Participants of the case study in Seville indicated that this challenge in particular limited their ability to move into safer or better-paid roles.

In Wrocław, reliance on a single employer during residence procedures was identified as the main issue to obtain institutional support, in parallel with language barriers, and what they perceived as the limited scope of labour inspections. None of the participants had used institutional protection mechanisms - such as the national labour inspectorate. The main barriers reported in Wroclaw included:

- fear of losing residence status,
- lack of awareness of rights,
- lack of Polish language skills,
- the fact that civil law contracts fall outside the scope of labour inspections.

Participants in Amsterdam reported a dependency on NGOs as their way to overcome these barriers, but as Here to Support highlights:

"It's important to note that most undocumented people are not in contact with NGOs or community groups at all. The individuals NGOs or community groups reach tend to be people in legal limbo—those whose asylum claims have been rejected or who are actively seeking shelter or legal advice. If there is already a knowledge gap among people who have regular access to NGOs, that gap is likely even wider among those who are completely disconnected from support organizations."

- Amsterdam case study

Facing exploitation and discrimination, all three case studies described **knowledge gaps and limited awareness of rights** as a critical factor.

Exploitation and discrimination in the workplace: All case studies described various forms of workplace exploitation and discriminatory practices. The case study in Seville reported a common progressive change in working conditions over time. At the beginning of the employment relationship, many migrants received promises of having an adequate work team, for occupational safety that protects against accidents and workplace accidents, regular breaks and fair remuneration for the hours

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worked. In practice, however, these conditions often changed quickly. Over time, employers reduced staff and kept services operational with as few workers as possible, which significantly increased the workload. This dynamic ends up physically and mentally exhausting those who work, generating sustained wear and tear that affects not only their health, but also their emotional well-being and their ability to sustain a life outside the workplace.

Frequent experiences of dismissals without just cause were also reported in Seville. Migrants shared having to report to work even when they were sick, injured or after accidents – whether in the workplace or on the road – under constant threat of dismissal if they did not. All the participants in Seville shared similar situations, even in cases where they had formal contracts. In those cases employers used strategies to avoid taking legal responsibility, such as turning colleagues against the affected worker in order to justify dismissals and thus avoid paying the corresponding sick days.

While **complaint mechanisms and legal firewalls** exist in Spain, participants suggested that undocumented workers often do not know about them or lack trust in their effectiveness. This indicates room for improvement for existing mechanisms, a feeling also shared by the other case studies. PICUM (2020) includes practical recommendations to make complaints mechanisms accessible and effective, in particular for migrant workers.

4.d) Working and living conditions

Physical work environment and safety: In Wrocław, several migrants reported exposure to extreme temperatures, insufficient protective equipment, and limited training for machinery or physically demanding tasks. They shared experiences of long hours on their feet in cold warehouses, lifting heavy loads with minimal breaks, and fearing reprimands if they slowed down. These conditions, participants noted, increased the likelihood of accidents and potential long-term health impacts.

In Seville, participants in service and hospitality sectors described overcrowded or poorly ventilated workspaces, insufficient equipment, prolonged standing, and repetitive tasks. Many linked these conditions to fatigue and physical strain, which were compounded by emotional stress from customer abuse and competition with colleagues.

In Amsterdam, participants highlighted similar physical risks, often intensified by the lack of employer accountability. Several recounted injuries—such as cuts, falls, and musculoskeletal strain—that went untreated because workers feared deportation or penalties for their employers. Participants noted that medical attention, compensation, sick leave, and follow-up care were largely unavailable.

Housing and living conditions: In Wrocław, several migrants reported living in employer-provided or agency-linked accommodations, which were often

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overcrowded, isolated, and of low quality. Participants shared experiences of multiple people sharing a single room or bathroom, high rent deductions, and living close to workplaces but cut off from urban infrastructure, which increased stress and limited autonomy. Those with more secure status sometimes rented independently but noted facing high costs and discrimination.

"Seven people in one room. If you don't go to work - you have to move out."

"They deducted 800 PLN (188€ aprox.) for a room shared with five other people."

"I lost my job and had to move out the same day."

"We were in the middle of nowhere. No shop, nothing."

"No bus, no pharmacy. Only forest and factory."

"I didn't know anyone, no phone signal. Like in prison."

- Participants of Wroclaw case

In Seville, participants linked housing difficulties to low-income employment and informal arrangements. Many described living in shared flats or temporary accommodations, coping with noise, limited privacy, and ongoing pressure from landlords or employers. Participants noted that these conditions, combined with demanding work schedules, restricted social interaction, integration, and rest, contributing to feelings of isolation and exhaustion. In the hospitality sector, participants mentioned that employer-provided rooms can sometimes be shared by multiple workers, although this particular practice was only reported by one participant of this case study, and was prior to moving to Andalucía (in Ibiza).

In Amsterdam, participants described extreme housing precarity, often relying on temporary stays in shelters, asylum centres, or informal networks. Several highlighted that rent is often high relative to their lack of legal protection, leaving them vulnerable to exploitation by landlords or recruiters seeking cheap labour. Some participants also noted that shelters could implement exploitative recruitment practices.

5. Identification of resistance and response strategies

5.a) Individual and collective strategies

The shared experiences of migrant workers in all three contexts describe a complex mix of individual and collective strategies they use to navigate exploitative work conditions, safeguard their well-being, and respond to systemic injustices. These strategies appeared to be shaped by participants' immediate material circumstances, their social networks, and their understanding—or

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sometimes lack of knowledge—of labour rights and institutional protections.

Resignation: Several participants identified resignation as a key strategy, which they sometimes framed as both an exercise of personal agency and a form of self-protection. While leaving a job might seem like a passive response, some participants in Seville and Amsterdam described it as a deliberate decision to regain control over their work conditions, preserve dignity, and protect mental and physical health. For many, resignation appeared to function as a way to step out of exploitative situations when opportunities for structural change seemed limited.

"Well, I left and exploded and I didn't take care of myself in any way, until it was already affecting my mental health. I was already noticing that I was... I was losing my mental health, so I resigned."

- Participant of Seville case

Resignation was also described as a strategy to safeguard physical health and maintain the ability to keep working. In Amsterdam, several migrants explained that they needed to carefully navigate labour and health risks due to limited access to healthcare or sick leave. Some shared that by avoiding overexertion or tasks they considered physically dangerous, they were able to continue working over time, even in precarious roles. Stepping away from particularly demanding or unsafe conditions, participants noted, helped them preserve their health while protecting their capacity to earn income in other positions.

In Wrocław, participants mentioned that formal union support could offer additional avenues for leaving exploitative situations safely. For instance, some Latin American migrants described relying on unions for legal and informational guidance when deciding whether to resign.

Well-being as a form of resistance: Participants described strategies to preserve well-being as an important form of resistance, enabling them to reclaim autonomy and dignity within a system that often limits both. While maintaining well-being might not typically be framed as resistance, participants in all three case studies emphasized it as essential in the context of exploitative work environments and the ongoing dehumanization faced by undocumented migrants.

In Seville and Amsterdam, several participants highlighted practices aimed at sustaining mental, emotional, and physical health outside the workplace. These included nurturing social networks, engaging in physical exercise, and pursuing leisure activities such as reading, listening to music, or enjoying public spaces. Participants explained that these practices not only offered relief from exhausting labour but also helped build support networks that strengthened resilience and a sense of agency.

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Surprisingly, some participants described **material purchases** as a strategy linked to well-being, blending practical needs with symbolic meaning. Some explained that investing in durable shoes, tools, or clothing helped them cope with physically demanding work while also supporting a sense of self-worth and emotional recovery. Participants framed this strategy as serving a dual purpose: addressing immediate survival needs while asserting personal agency within exploitative labour systems.

At the same time, some reflected on the ambivalence of this approach, noting that the income used for these purchases often comes from jobs that simultaneously take a toll on their physical and mental health.

> *"I have the feeling that these are jobs that we feel so denigrated. And it's like we're selling our being. So, when we get home, what we want is to feel divine."*
>
> - Participant of Seville case

Well-being strategies shared also took collective forms. Some noted that shared leisure activities or informal community gatherings offered spaces for emotional support, knowledge exchange, and the development of mutual aid strategies. In Wrocław, participants highlighted that informal networks and union involvement served similar purposes, providing guidance, practical advice on housing and work, and support in navigating legal or social resources.

Several participants emphasized that reclaiming dignity involved asserting their value beyond being treated as a replaceable, low-cost worker in exploitative environments. Activities that affirmed personal worth, whether through leisure, social connections, or self-care, were seen as ways to resist the systemic pressures of precarious work. Many also noted that this **assertion of dignity became particularly meaningful when practiced collectively: shared spaces**, including these focus groups, grassroots networks, or informal gatherings, allowed participants to receive mutual recognition, emotional support, and engage in collective strategizing, turning individual acts of self-affirmation into a form of social and political resistance.

> *"The spaces where we can talk about different topics, the collective spaces, help us break from the alienation caused by daily work" – Lina Marcela Rincón Barón, peer researcher in Seville*
>
> *"They don't realize due to lack of information that they're all living the same thing- And that's what we want to achieve, to tell them "we're in this together, let's work together"* – Rocío Flores Torres, peer researcher in Wroclaw [25]

[25] Quotes from the video: *The voices of migrant researchers: Participatory Action Research in DignityFIRM* https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hlM78kSYlqA&feature=youtu.be

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Confrontation with employers: Some participants described engaging directly with employers as a strategy to negotiate conditions, assert rights, or protect personal dignity. The forms and intensity of these confrontation strategies varied, but participants consistently emphasized the importance of **knowledge of the labour context**.

Several participants noted that **de-escalation** was often a necessary precondition for effective confrontation. In Amsterdam, for example, some workers explained that maintaining calm, respectful, and strategic interactions was essential to avoid losing their job or drawing attention that could lead to exposure.

Support from colleagues was depicted as a critical factor in amplifying the impact of confrontation. Migrants shared the strategy of bringing trusted peers into discussions with employers, creating a collective presence that mitigates the risk of retaliation and increases the likelihood of achieving small concessions, such as additional rest days, partial payment, or adjusted workloads.

5.b) Forms of self-organization and mobilisation

Self-organization and mobilisation: Strategies were shaped by structural constraints, social networks, and perceived risks, with clear differences between contexts.

In Seville, several participants noted that forms of self-organization were often emergent and fragile. For some, the PAR focus groups functioned as a quasi-organizational space, providing opportunities to share experiences, build trust, and collectively reflect on strategies for navigating exploitation. Participants also highlighted that fear of reprisals, precarious work conditions, and exhaustion limited the development of more formal collective actions, such as strikes. One participant recalled a proposal for a cross-sector strike amongst migrant workers, that colleagues were hesitant to support due to concerns about retaliation:

"He proposed to strike, also to organize to accept minimum working conditions, communicate between the sectors and stand firm... because being in a collective is learning to be with the other, to fight... to move forward and horizontality too, I think."

- Participant of Seville case

However, the peer-researcher in the Amsterdam case study noted that ideas involving strikes led to a realisation that *currently* undocumented workers felt that the idea of striking only comes up from already regularised workers, raising the question of representativeness of *former* undocumented speaking on behalf of those who were currently undocumented.

Legal actions were rare and typically reserved for severe incidents such as physical aggression. Observing peers engage in legal action, however, fostered collective

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satisfaction and solidarity, illustrating the affective dimension of mobilisation even when institutional mechanisms were limited:

> *"It was seeing the exploiter there, with his wife who also exploited us... because we were supporting each other, it felt good, at least solidarity."*
>
> - Participant of Seville case

Overall, self-organization in Spain remained constrained by systemic precarity, fear, and institutional distrust, but participatory spaces like the community kitchen coordinated by Mujeres Supervivientes or the PAR itself enabled initial steps toward collective reflection and mutual support.

In the Netherlands, self-organization was more structured and widespread amongst participants of the focus groups. Migrants relied heavily on **word-of-mouth** referrals for jobs in the informal economy, as formal job advertising was inaccessible. Informal agencies offered a layer of protection, mediating between undocumented workers and employers. **Grassroots collectives** facilitated access to shelter, healthcare, and collective advocacy, while unions organized political campaigns, creative protests, and sector-wide solidarity actions. **Community savings** schemes further strengthened collective resilience. Participants emphasized that these practices were not only practical but also strategic, enabling undocumented migrants to mitigate risks, develop shared knowledge, and engage in political action.

In Poland, **informal self-organization** predominated. Networks provided ad hoc support for housing, jobs, and navigation of bureaucratic processes, but offered limited protection from exploitation. **Trade unions** provided a more structured form of mobilization for Latin American migrants, offering legal guidance, language support, and collective advocacy. The stark contrast between formal union access and reliance on informal networks highlighted inequities in the ability to organize effectively.

5.c) Community or institutional support and external factors

The presence or absence of institutional and community support strongly influenced the strategies and capacity to resist exploitation of migrant workers across all three cases. Many described **formal state institutions** as difficult to access, ineffective, or even risky to approach. **Limited trust in labour inspections, fear of reprisals, and informal employer networks that penalize those who report abuses** contributed to a sense that pursuing legal action was dangerous and unlikely to bring meaningful change. Several participants noted that they would only consider legal remedies in extreme cases, reinforcing the perception that **institutional channels were insufficient for addressing everyday forms of exploitation.**

Against this backdrop, participants emphasized the **importance of community-based structures**, **both formal and informal,** as critical sources of protection, knowledge, and collective

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empowerment. **Grassroots networks, migrant-led organizations, and unions** were reported to provide practical support such as workshops, information on rights, guidance on documenting wage disputes, and advice on navigating the labour market. Participants also described these spaces as opportunities to share experiences collectively and articulate demands, framing such practices as forms of resistance in their own right.

Where community infrastructures were stronger, participants indicated they felt more confident negotiating with employers, asserting rights, or imagining broader systemic change. Conversely, when institutional or community support was limited, participants relied heavily on informal peer networks, exchanging advice through friendship circles, co-workers, or other local connections. Across all three cities, structural factors including migration status, labour market segmentation, and the strength of social ties shaped both the possibilities for collective action and the boundaries of what undocumented workers felt able to risk.

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Migration story and origin of the Latin American Workers' Union in Poland

By Rocío Flores Torres

I arrived in Poland in 2023 seeking stability for myself and my children. My first job was in a poultry plant, where I experienced firsthand the reality faced by many migrant workers: demanding shifts, extreme cold, constant pressure, and total dependence on temporary agencies for housing, contracts, and basic information. That experience made clear the structural vulnerability faced by anyone who arrives without language skills, support networks, or knowledge of their rights.

Around the same time, the case that led to the creation of the union took place. A group of Latin American workers and I were forced to work 12 to 16 hours per day under threats of losing our jobs and housing. When we collectively refused to continue, the agency responded with immediate dismissal, eviction from the accommodation, non-payment of wages, and the presence of an armed individual sent to intimidate us. Instead of dispersing, we chose to organise, document what had happened, and seek support.

With the help of the Nomada Association and Inicjatywa Pracownicza, this process evolved into a formal structure. On November 11, 2023, the Latin American Workers' Union in Poland was founded, directly stemming from the lived experiences of labour exploitation and systemic precarity. Since then, we have supported cases of labour abuse, residency issues, and workplace accidents, and have organised workshops, public actions, and dialogues with national institutions.

The history of the union is closely tied to my own trajectory. My early experiences and collective work with my colleagues led me to take on the role of president. Our purpose has always been the same: using organisation, information, and community as tools for labour dignity.

The DignityFIRM project has been essential in expanding our impact. Through this collaboration, we have been able to highlight the migrant situation across the country, receive more cases, reach regions where we previously had no presence, and establish contact with authorities, Polish citizens, foreign residents, NGOs, and institutions interested in supporting the fight for fairer conditions for migrants in Poland. Their support has ensured that the voice of the Latin American community is not only heard but is increasingly influencing spaces that were previously out of reach.

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6 . Intersectional analysis

The intersectional reading of the PAR material draws on the Intersectionality Guidelines by Hanane Darhour and Siham Marroune[26], which defined four main markers of discrimination as central to understanding how exploitation functions in the farm to fork sectors:

(1) gender and race

(2) nationality and ethnicity

(3) work permit

(4) residence permit

However, the case studies developed through the PAR process did not directly frame their narratives around these predefined categories. Instead, participants articulated their own understandings of what shaped their vulnerability, resilience, and opportunities. The analysis therefore follows the identity markers as they were expressed by the participants themselves, allowing the intersections to expand beyond the initial analytical framework and reflect what each group considered most relevant in their lived experiences.

Across the three case studies, participants most often linked labour precarity to combinations of:

- **Migration status / permits;**
- **Country of origin / ethnicity / race;**
- **Gender;**
- **Language and literacy;**
- **Social class / recognition of qualifications;**
- **Physical health / age.**

How these markers interacted, and which ones came to the fore, varied between the case studies and between groups within each study.

Across the three case studies, gender, race, and ethnicity were frequently mentioned, but their significance was often intertwined with other dimensions such as language proficiency, migration experience, social networks, and caregiving responsibilities. Participants described how these markers shaped not only access to employment, wages, and workplace treatment, but also exposure to discrimination, harassment, and social isolation.

6.a) Migration status and permit to work

As noted in section 4.a, migration status and permit to work continued to be central, but participants emphasized that these administrative markers were inseparable from other intersecting factors. For example, women with insecure residence or work permits faced compounded risks due to childcare responsibilities, physically demanding tasks, or harassment, while racialized migrants without documentation were often subjected to intensified suspicion or stereotyping in both employment and everyday life.

[26] DignityFIRM Intersectionality Guidelines: https://www.dignityfirm.eu/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/IntersectGuideline-24.07-1.pdf.

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6.b) Country of origin, ethnicity and race

Ethnic or racialised assumptions were present in all three studies and sometimes shaped inspection practices, employer expectations, or social treatment.

Some participants (particularly black migrants) in Wroclaw and Seville described explicit racialised suspicion and differential checking at work; at the same time, others noted that speaking Polish could alter how they were perceived. Similarly, in the Netherlands participants from African backgrounds described more frequent assumptions of undocumented status and a higher presence in detention. Both in Wroclaw and in Amsterdam, participants reported that ethnic networks often determined access to information and employment.

Some participants also described intra-ethnic exploitation (employers or intermediaries from the same nationality taking advantage of compatriots) and the perceived privileged position of certain nationalities, for example Ukrainians in Poland compared to African migrants. However, the practices described in the groups often could fall into what is understood as a labor hierarchy reinforced through a co-opted intermediary, which can function as a mechanism that fosters mistrust and animosity between workers, deliberately undermining solidarity and collective consciousness, and thereby weakening the potential for collective organization or resistance.

In the case of hospitality in Spain similar tensions were analysed as a tool to foster competition and mistrust, creating a division between Spanish and migrant workers that leads to lack of camaraderie. Participants emphasised colonial and classist readings of Latin American migrants (hypersexualisation, devaluation of skills), and gave examples of overt racist rejection in workplaces.

6.c) Gender

Gender was one of the most frequently mentioned, particularly in relation to care responsibilities, workplace tasks, and exposure to harassment or hypersexualization. Migrant women in Seville and Wroclaw described the difficulty of balancing work with childcare, often in contexts where their labour was undervalued or exploited. In Amsterdam, women were more present in domestic and care sectors, which were generally perceived as safer but still exposed them to isolation and risk of abuse. Men, in contrast, were more frequently engaged in physically demanding jobs, including construction, agriculture, and logistics, and sometimes faced stereotyping related to strength, reliability, or ethnic background.

Regarding the labour disputes with employers, participants shared a perceived hierarchy within the workplace, which reinforced divisions along gender lines:

"We also recognize that in this sector, employers tend to prioritize work done by men. When demanding labour rights,

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women express higher levels of fear: those who said they directly confronted their employers were mostly men, while women tended to remain silent or resign, as strategies to avoid reprisals or job loss." -

- Seville case study

Gender-based sexualization and discrimination appeared as a notable theme across the case studies. Women were particularly vulnerable to hypersexualization, harassment, and unwanted comments or proposals, often influenced by stereotypes associated with their origin. This affected women disproportionately, however, it is worth mentioning that many men also reported experiencing sexualized comments, objectification, or assumptions about their sexuality in ways linked to their ethnic or racial background.

6.d) Language skills and literacy

Language skills emerged as a recurring marker of both vulnerability and protection across the three case studies. Migrants with limited proficiency in the local language often had to rely on co-ethnic intermediaries for work, which could increase dependence and exposure to exploitation, whereas those with stronger language skills were better able to negotiate conditions and expand their support networks. In Wroclaw, knowledge of Polish was particularly protective, helping migrants avoid exploitation and gain the employer's trust, while a lack of Polish sometimes confined people to closed-language communities, such as Arabic or Turkish networks, that could be exploitative. Spanish or English helped some Latin American participants but did not substitute for Polish in many institutional interactions. In Amsterdam, fluency in Dutch or English facilitated broader networks and greater job mobility, whereas reliance on other languages, including Arabic or Javanese, or illiteracy, often limited employment options and increased precarity. In Seville, Spanish fluency sometimes eased initial access to work but did not prevent the devaluation of professional qualifications or racialised treatment, with non-recognition of credentials emerging as an additional barrier.

6.e) Social class/recognition of qualifications

Social class and the recognition of qualifications emerged as an important marker of vulnerability, though its salience varied across the three case studies. In Seville, it was particularly prominent, with participants frequently highlighting the non-recognition of degrees and professional credentials, which contributed to a pervasive sense of "wasted talent" and reinforced feelings of sub-citizenship. This devaluation of skills shaped both the types of work migrants could access and their overall sense of dignity, limiting opportunities for upward mobility. In Wroclaw, social class was also evident, often in relation to the limited prospects available in participants' countries of origin; for many, returning home was not a feasible alternative to exploitative work abroad, which reinforced dependence on

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precarious employment. In Amsterdam, while social class and qualifications were less directly discussed, they surfaced indirectly through patterns of access to networks and types of employment, with migrants from more privileged backgrounds sometimes able to leverage contacts or experience to find better work, whereas others faced constraints that reinforced existing inequalities.

6.f) Health, injuries and age

Health, injuries, and age emerged as significant, though context-specific, markers of vulnerability across the three case studies. In Wroclaw, participants highlighted the impact of pregnancy and reproductive health on employment security, with women sometimes losing jobs due to pregnancy or being pushed into more precarious arrangements. Harsh working conditions, including exposure to cold, heavy lifting, and physically demanding tasks, compounded these vulnerabilities, particularly for those lacking health coverage or insurance. In the Netherlands, chronic health conditions and work-related injuries were central concerns, with participants reporting that physical strain, accidents, or ongoing ailments could lead to loss of income, housing, or job security in the absence of robust social protections. In Seville, age intersected closely with gender, shaping access to opportunities and perceptions of employability. Older workers, and especially older women, were often pressured to accept lower-quality or more precarious work, while younger migrants sometimes faced different forms of exploitation linked to inexperience or informal employment networks.

6.g) Sexual orientation and gender identity

Sexual orientation and gender identity was not a central topic across the case studies, but it came up both in the Spanish and in the Dutch reporting. In Spain, sexual orientation was noted as one of several intersecting factors that heightened vulnerability, whereas in the Netherlands many LGBTQIA+ people felt discriminated against in big homeless shelters, shelters for undocumented people or in asylum seekers' centers. Some shelters now have separate LGBTQIA+ floors - which creates safer spaces for people.

7. Action design and implementation

Building on the process of the focus groups conducted in each case study, a fifth session was organized in each location. These sessions brought together participants from the two earlier focus groups previously hosted in each country. The aim of this combined session was to identify and prioritize the key problems experienced by migrants and discussed in the preceding groups, as well as to explore potential ways to address them. Through this collaborative reflection, participants were able to collectively articulate the main challenges affecting their lives and work.

As a preliminary joint action, the PAR coordination team decided to record a video

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during the second in-person PAR training workshop in Wroclaw. The project was invited to share the insights of the PAR at the IMISCOE annual conference in Paris in July 2025, but the impossibility for the peer-researchers to attend due to timeframes, restrictions of movement and excessive participation fees became a challenge. The idea that a non-migrant researcher was going to present the benefits of PAR when working alongside with migrant peer-researchers felt particularly absurd, so the reflections of the three peer-researchers were collected and presented in Paris in the form of the video.

The voices of migrant researchers: Participatory Action Research in DignityFIRM

The voices of migrant researchers: Participatory Action Research in DignityFIRM

Horizon Europe Research on Irregular Migration
118 suscriptores

7.a) Amsterdam

Between July and November 2025, the participatory action research in Amsterdam focused on understanding and addressing the challenges faced by undocumented migrants. Participants prioritise the following key problems:

- fears of deportation
- precarious employment
- limited knowledge of rights
- dependence on informal networks.

After the action-oriented *Hackathon* (see section 2.c) the group decided that a **community-driven campaign to advocate for a regularisation** was their chosen way to address the problems.

Capacity-building activities included support desks offering guidance on legal, housing, and work rights, outreach to LGBTQIA+ asylum seekers, and collaboration with Fairwork to organize community dinners.

Advocacy efforts involved working wit hFNV Migrant Domestic Workers, and with the Hospitality Union of the FNV, while a network was developed to engage companies and the Amsterdam municipality.

A **strategic dissemination** plan for media outreach was developed, with a best-practice video documenting participant involvement and a strategic media outreach plan. During this period, multiple actions were taken. **Public awareness** was raised through interviews in Dwarskrant and Z-Krant newspapers and a series of cooking videos were produced with Studio HER to share personal experiences. The team also presented findings at the INTER.SECT symposium in Bielefeld.

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7.b Seville

The PAR initiative in Seville was implemented in two phases. The first phase explored the potential for autonomous migrant unionism in the hospitality sector. This phase examined life and labour conditions, disputes, coping strategies, and migrant agency.

Phase two centered on action and political engagement, beginning with a **conference** at Casa Palacio Pumarejo on 26 September, called ***"Is autonomous unionism among migrant workers in the hospitality sector possible?"*** addressing vital and labor issues, with a focus on the hospitality sector. The Seville case study report *"Condiciones de vida y laborales de personas migrantes en el sector de la hostelería y la restauración"* was presented. Key contributors included Lina Rincón, who discussed mental health, gender perspectives, and trust-building; Ruth Ledezma, who emphasized migrant agency and humanizing support; Silvana Cabrera, who highlighted anti-racist and anticolonial activism; Roberto Cruz, who shared personal experiences of labour abuse; and Pastora Filigrana, who provided legal and labour expertise. The conference debates covered structural barriers, discrimination, rights violations, recognition, education, innovation, and the role of organization and alliances in defending labour rights.

Follow-up actions included **immediate advisory support** on documentation, contracts, housing, healthcare, education, and self-care. **Community-building activities** were a central component, including workshops on political participation, care and political resistance, and sharing meals and mutual care. These activities addressed challenges such as uprootedness, longing, structural violence, lack of legal and safe housing, support for depression, homelessness, being asked to leave one's room with no alternative, and the inability to say goodbye to a deceased loved one. These spaces provided **emotional support**, strengthened solidarity, and allowed participants to collectively confront the precarity and structural pressures they faced.

Follow-up actions included immediate **advisory support** on documentation, contracts, housing, healthcare, education, and self-care, alongside community-building and mutual aid initiatives. Advocacy activities were complemented by media and creative outputs, including the video *"Personas Migrantes del Sector de la Hostelería, Dignidad contra explotación laboral"* and a photographic project. A "*fanzine*" informative brochure is being produced to raise awareness about the reality of hospitality work in Spain, targeted at foreigner workers thinking about moving to Spain.

7.c Wroclaw

In Wrocław, the PAR process unfolded in three main phases. The first phase, conducted between August and September 2025, involved **mapping migrant communities** and establishing an Action Group composed of eight participants (six from Colombia, one from Ukraine, and one from Türkiye). The Action Group members functioned as **local leaders, disseminating**

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knowledge, supporting communities, and advocating for labour rights. A WhatsApp group was created for coordination, and outreach included informal conversations at workplaces, sharing project and training information, and identifying urgent issues for intervention. Informational leaflets were distributed in workplaces, community spaces, service points, and online channels to map areas with high concentrations of precarious migrant workers.

The second phase, from September to October 2025, focused on **training**. The Action Group participated in closed sessions on qualitative research practices, ethical interviewing, documenting labour rights violations, and creating video narratives. Open online trainings, branded as the "*Community Support Academy*," were delivered in English and Spanish, attracting 50–75 participants per session, mostly Latin American migrants. Topics included tenants' rights, taxes and health insurance, residence legalisation, and labour law.

The third phase, from October to December 2025, emphasized **advocacy and dissemination.** Participants produced informational materials and short videos highlighting solidarity and unionization, while peer researchers documented labour rights violations through interviews and structured archiving.

Media cooperation included podcasts such as Abusos laborales en Polonia – conversación con Vanessa Ruggiero y Rocío Flores at "Cuéntame algo" on 25 August and La migración no es como la pintan – conversación entre Carmen Ramirez Boscan y Rocío Flores on "Otra TV" on 26 August, In Poland, migrant workers from Latin America report abuse, exploitation press coverage in Al Jazeera on 1 October and Polskie piekło Kolumbijczyków on Polityka on 6 November, and Exposing forced labor: Trafficking crisis in Poland a TVP World segment in September.

Engagement with public authorities included a meeting with the Deputy Marshal of the Senate to discuss labour inspection and migrant protection, and a petition from the Latin American Trade Union prepared with support from the Workers' Initiative (OZZ IP).

Finally, **community and intercultural events** included a *Día de Muertos* celebration on 31 October, and a final intercultural event is planned for March 2026.

7.d Evaluation and reflections

The action phase of the project allowed participants across Amsterdam, Seville and Wroclaw to engage with their rights and explore practical tools for self-organization. Peer networks were reinforced, and participants generally took part in trainings, panels, and advocacy activities. The project contributed to raising awareness of labour exploitation and the vulnerabilities faced by undocumented migrants in public discussions and media coverage.

At the same time, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of what small-scale actions can achieve in the face of deeply rooted systemic oppressions. The

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structural conditions that shape labour exploitation and marginalization cannot be resolved through isolated interventions. What can be observed, however, is that the process itself already constitutes an impact: by participating, individuals experienced recognition, trust, and opportunities for self-expression and agency. The real, long-term effects of these actions and interactions are not measurable in the short term, but the experiences may influence participants' capacities, confidence, and future engagement.

It is also important to consider the differences in actors involved in each case study when assessing the structure of the actions and their impact. In Wroclaw, the pre-existence of the Latin American workers' union allowed the project to reinforce and expand a growing structure, extending its reach beyond the Colombian community and strengthening long-term networks. In Amsterdam, the coalition Amsterdam City Rights already provided a collaborative advocacy space where migrants and non-migrants work together to defend the rights of undocumented people. This context, built on years of prior work by Here to Support and supported by established municipal alliances, enabled the project to carry out actions, although the main focus on the elections did not produce the expected results. In contrast, the Spanish case was led by the only migrant-led organization among the three and had the fewest resources. Here, the project contributed to consolidating ties among existing organizations and actors and securing a budget to continue reinforcing the local community. Together, these cases illustrate how the pre-existing capacity, organizational structure, and resources of local actors shape both the implementation and potential impact of participatory actions.

In Amsterdam, participants faced fear of criminalisation, language barriers, and delays due to elections, which initially limited the reach of the project. Some positive developments emerged: the Dutch trade union FNV engaged proactively, and media attention increased, helping to amplify issues related to migrant labour. Progress relied on steady participant engagement, trust within networks, and creative collaborations. Lessons learned include the need to balance long-term advocacy objectives with participants' immediate needs and to recognize that sustaining advocacy requires both public engagement and policy-level efforts.

In Seville, participants contended with fear, vulnerability, limited knowledge of rights, and structural and institutional discrimination. Despite these constraints, informal community networks formed, and peer-led support strengthened collective engagement. Participatory methods, trust-building, and integration of lived experiences were key factors in fostering involvement. Lessons from the Spanish context underscore that self-organization is crucial for political agency, and that empathetic, humanized support can have meaningful effects on both individual participants and their broader communities.

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In Wroclaw, participants faced challenges similar to those elsewhere: limited availability due to work commitments, difficulty maintaining motivation over a long project life span, and ethical sensitivities in discussing experiences of exploitation. Nevertheless, participants developed practical skills in documentation, communication, and advocacy, which allowed them to engage with authorities and the public in meaningful ways. The project also helped increase visibility of labour exploitation in public discourse and within migrant communities. Success in Wroclaw depended on trust-building within the Action Group, steady participant engagement, and supportive mentorship. Lessons highlight that capacity-building for peer-led documentation and advocacy can strengthen both individual confidence and collective agency, even under conditions of vulnerability.

Coordinating the three case studies also presented challenges. Ethical tensions and internal power imbalances persisted, and the project coordination had to navigate the delicate balance between granting each case-study team the freedom necessary for authentic participatory action research and providing sufficient guidance to situate the work within the broader objectives of the DignityFIRM project. It is noteworthy, however, that a research initiative at the scale of DG Research and Innovation (RTD) Horizon Europe was able to incorporate a PAR work package, demonstrating that such approaches can be integrated into large, multi-country research projects.

Overall, the action phase suggests that participatory approaches can support modest improvements in agency, resilience, and public visibility for undocumented migrants. While systemic issues remain beyond the reach of individual projects, the process itself, the relationships formed, and the skills developed represent meaningful forms of impact that may unfold over the longer term.

PAR is a process that, in itself, is an action that changes reality. It allows us to meet, to get to know one another, and, by seeing ourselves as active subjects with dignity, to do something that changes the realities we wish to change—and in the way we wish to change them.

– Lina Marcelo, peer-researcher in Spain

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8 . Policy recommendations

Case study participants have elaborated the following key policy recommendations for each of the local and national contexts they are based in:

8.a) Amsterdam

1. Dismantle structural exclusion

- Reform Koppelingswet: Decouple access to healthcare, housing, and education from residence status.

- **Enable safe access to protections:** Allow undocumented workers to receive basic rights without fear of detection.

- **Introduce work-based regularisation:** Create transparent pathways for long-term residents, community-tied individuals, and essential-sector workers (domestic, care, agriculture, hospitality).

2. Protect labour rights for all workers

- Enforce minimum wage for all: Labour inspections should be carried out in high-risk sectors without reporting immigration status.

- **Guarantee safe complaints mechanisms:** Firewalls between labour, police, healthcare, and immigration.

- **Expand union and NGO support:** Fund unions/NGOs to assist undocumented workers with wage recovery and rights education.

3. Reverse harmful criminalisation

- End criminalisation of undocumented status: Reject laws penalising presence; protect humanitarian actors from prosecution.

4. Improve rights awareness andprofessional training

- Launch multilingual rights campaigns: Focus on labour rights, minimum wage, occupational safety, healthcare access, and wage recovery.

- **Train frontline professionals:** Mandatory sessions for police, healthcare, labour inspectors, and municipal staff on rights, non-discrimination, and confidentiality standards.

5. Strengthen access to justice

- Ensure wage recovery pre-deportation: Inform workers of back-pay rights; prohibit coercion in detention.

- **Enable legal support in detention:** Guarantee lawyers, interpreters, and suspend removal until claims are resolved.

6. Enable progressive local action

- **Support municipal pilots:** Allow Amsterdam to provide shelter, healthcare, and worker protection; run inclusion-focused programs.

- **National fund for local protection:** Compensate municipalities for inclusive services.

7. Align with EU and ILO standards

- **Implement the rights provisions in EU Employer Sanctions Directive:** Protect wage claims from immigration repercussions.

- **Ratify ILO Convention 189:** Extend labour law protections for domestic workers.

- Promote EU labour rights awareness: Integrate EU protections into outreach for migrant workers and employers.

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8.b) Seville

1. Ensure safe reporting and access to remedies

- Provide secure, effective mechanisms for victims of labour violations and violence to report abuses.
- Protect migrants from retaliation or deportation during - or as a result of - complaints.
- Include external support from NGOs, unions, and community organizations.
- Strengthen practical implementation of "firewalls" in inspections, social services, and justice systems to guarantee safe access to reporting and remedy.

2. Expand and simplify regularisation pathways

Strengthen existing pathways, including work-based, community, and family-based options, including the following reforms in the *Reglamento de Extranjería*:

- Count time spent in the processing of international protection applications towards eligibility for *"arraigo."*
- Adapt "*arraigo*" requirements to reflect all existing realities, including those currently excluded under the system.
- Simplify procedures and eliminate bureaucratic barriers for workers in precarious sectors.

3. Guarantee access to basic rights

- Ensure legal and practical access to healthcare, education, and housing.
- Enforce municipal duty to register migrants in the "*padrón*," ensuring full access to public services.
- Address obstacles such as difficulty obtaining appointments with social services or immigration offices.
- Recognize foreign studies and qualifications to facilitate integration and labour market access.

4. Strengthen access to justice and social services

- Ensure all migrants, especially women in irregular situations, can access social services and justice mechanisms.
- Guarantee compliance with due diligence obligations by authorities in practice.
- Create clear complaint channels and protective measures in labour inspections and municipal services.

5. Support community empowerment

- Provide accessible funding for grassroots organizations.
- Create spaces for community education, activism, and collective empowerment.
- Promote initiatives that combat discrimination and foster social inclusion.

8.c) Wroclaw

1. Strengthen state protection for migrant workers

- Ensure that state institutions proactively protect people working in sectors and agencies that employ migrants.
- Increase penalties for temporary work agencies that violate labour law.

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- Strengthen supervision and control mechanisms over all employment agencies to prevent abuse and exploitation.

2. Improve enforcement of labour law through institutional cooperation

- Reinforce cooperation between the state labour inspectorate and trade unions and other civil society organisations supporting migrant workers, to monitor working conditions and support affected workers.
- Support NGOs in developing regional referral networks that can assist migrant workers with legal, social, and labour-related issues.

3. Remove language barriers

- Provide official public services in languages commonly spoken by migrants, such as English, Spanish, and Arabic.
- Translate official forms, procedures, and instructions into the most widely used migrant languages.
- Ensure access to free and accessible language courses for migrant workers.

4. Strengthen knowledge and public awareness

- Encourage academic institutions to conduct research on the situation of migrant workers and on patterns of exploitation.
- Collaborate with the media sector to raise public awareness about migrant workers' rights, contributions, and the challenges they face.

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Deliverable information

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PAR Cross-Country Report

Participatory Action Research (PAR) with migrant workers in farm to fork sectors in Amsterdam, Seville and Wroclaw

About DignityFIRM

Towards becoming sustainable and resilient societies we must address the structural contradictions between our societies' exclusion of migrant workers and their substantive role in producing our food.

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