Florida – Undocumented Women: Hell is there

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They are immigrant women who lack documentation or it is incomplete.

They come, among other places, from Central America and Mexico, often alone but also accompanied by their children and husbands.

Suffocated by misery they try to soften it by doing hard farm works, which many North Americans avoided before the beginning of the current economic crisis.

Frequently, press and TV reports showed many of them almost as slaves of powerful landowners.

And not only this, an investigation made in 2010 revealed that 80 percent of those farmworkers experienced some type of sexual harassment.

More recently, a survey by Florida International University (FIU) and the community organization We Count! produced a no less worrying balance.

What did it consist in? 24 percent of the respondents affirmed to have suffered the same situation at their workplace.

Defenders of these female workers from Florida's farm fields told EFE that the said harassment is one of the most important sufferings they confront.

Being accompanied by their immediate family, explained those spokespersons, adds a feeling of guilt among the victims.

A great part of them, they added, keeps silent because of shame or fear to lose their jobs or to be deported.

Although one in every four women has been sexually harassed in the ornamental plant nurseries, in southern Miami, that practice has spread to all agricultural works.

Levis Torres, We Count! labor rights coordinator, specified that those attacks (harassments) take place in both the fields and inside the packing and cultivation houses.

“The victims, once again, are the most vulnerable and defenseless, the undocumented workers”, Torres said.

“A woman faces the dilemma of telling or not telling her partner about sexual harassment or workplace assaults, fearing the man might get angry and accuse her of teasing the boss or supervisor, who are often the ones harassing female workers”, he added.

“Likewise, they are afraid to tell their husbands about the harassment because they might believe they are the ones who are flirting with the harasser”, Torres affirmed.

He explained that their actions could go from “verbal harassment or groping to rape”.

At the end, according to the experience of officials and victims, silence prevails and harassment becomes “taboo subject”, which they accept with painful resignation.

According to activists and press versions, in many cases the possible petitioners receive money and a work contract so that they do not talk about it.

Over 560,000 women, official documents indicate, work in the collection and storage of fresh products in the US farm sector.

Experts recall that around 75 percent of them are undocumented immigrants.

"Sexual harassment has been like the daily bread”, said Lucas Benitez, farm worker and activist with the Coalition of Immokalee Workers, in Collier County, Florida.

Should this does not reflect a sustained and brutal case of human rights violation, it would be necessary to appeal to the skies in order to rule.

Pope Francisco will travel to Cuba next September. Nobody doubts that this situation, taking place 90 miles from the island’s coats, will arouse his interest.

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