



# Internal Migration in Peru

by *Christina Jones*

The situation of migrants in Peru is quite complicated as there are all sorts of problems to be faced such as unemployment, hunger, poverty and disease. Women with children come to sparsely settled populated sectors of a town in search of shelter and food. They then venture to join forces and take a plot of land on which to live with their children. They sleep in the open, build mat huts as shelters from the cold or live a hand-to-mouth existence, living by the grace of God, knowing at any moment that they could be kicked out by the police on government orders. They are arrested and imprisoned simply for wanting to have a piece of land.



Marie Terese Guerrero

Another group of migrant workers are the street peddlers, most of whom are women, who have to sit on the streets from dawn until eleven or twelve at night with their children tied on their backs, in order to earn the day's bread for their children. Sometimes they do not sell anything and have nothing for lunch.

The other glaring problem facing migrant women is prostitution. When they cannot find work elsewhere, many young women will start working as prostitutes without a medical check-up. In time they contract a whole series of incurable diseases.





The 1981 census shows that there are in Peru 470,000 domestic workers. Most are based in Lima, Peru's capital; others migrate to the provincial capitals where wages and conditions are far worse. This migratory movement is because of the economic crisis which is hitting the major economic sector (agriculture, cattle-raising, cottage industry) and because of the badly organised educational system in which schools are concentrated in Lima and along parts of the coast.

Our lot as migrants prevents us from having our own cultural identity as expressed in the Quechua language, typical customs and style of dress. Instead, we imitate the customs of our employers which are alien to ours and we are slowly but surely losing sight of our heritage.

Our working conditions are deplorable. We do not have a minimum wage. Wages are set by the employer. We have no fixed hours of work.

We, therefore, work 12, 14 or 16 hours a day. We do everything: cleaning, cooking, shopping, washing, ironing, care for the children and even our employers' pets! A large percentage of our *compañeras* work for no wages, no time off, no schooling on the pretext that they are 'protégées'. They are led to believe that they are like members of the family and will not be equated with other servants. These workers are between 8 and 15 years of age and are subjected to a type of slavery. As they often have no contact with other domestic employees or relatives, they remain 25 to 30 years in the same job. These workers are frequently taken advantage of by employers and their

sons get them pregnant, and they are then thrown out in the street.

Jobs are found through agencies, personal contacts, advertisements, newspapers. There is only one employment agency run by the Ministry of Labour, which uses a very complicated system. Various requirements have to be met for the employer's benefit: medical certificate, domicile, health, work certificate, etc. Yet no mention is made of our rights and we are sold at a discount. This is even more true of

the private agencies which make good money out of us. If the mistress is not happy with the maid she chose, she returns her to the agency and gets another. In the process, the former forfeits the days worked. This is so because *there are no employment agencies run by the workers themselves*. Relations between our mistresses and us are similar to those between master and serf, hence the word servant. Some women work a given number

of hours and days instead of living in. In this case, they have to pay their fares, food, lodging, etc. The working day is 10 or more hours. Most are women with children who work to make ends meet at home since their companions do not earn enough or more often than not are unemployed. Those who live in usually do not have families. Circumstances force them to accept longer working hours. They represent 97% of domestic workers.

**Source:** *Coordinacion de Sindicatos de Trabajadoras del Hogar de Lima-Metropolitana*, Av. Alfonso Ugarte 425-106, Apartado 43 89, Lima 1, Peru

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