

Testimonial: Paty Betancourt



My name is Paty Betancourt and I am a trans woman from Guadalajara, Mexico. I am the founder of the RedLACTrans Network, a trans network in Latin America and the Caribbean. We are currently present in over 17 countries in Latin America, and I am the founder and current Director of the Mexican Network of Trans Women (Red Mexicana de Mujeres Trans), a civil association in Mexico.

The work of the Mexican Network of Trans Women and the RedLACTrans Network is focused on HIV issues and human rights. We have a HIV Prevention project to encourage trans women practicing prostitution and sex work to use condoms. We provide advisory services, carry out HIV testing and, in cases where they are HIV positive, we transfer them directly to hospitals for proper treatment. In Mexico, we are present in 18 states and we coordinate prevention activities with our peers in all of them. At the regional level, the RedLACTrans Network is currently completing a Global Fund project with our partners across Latin America and the Caribbean, primarily focused on Human Rights and HIV issues.

The realities of being a trans woman in Mexico is very hard. There is lack of cultural acceptance and respect towards the trans population, and we struggle against stigma and discrimination. Consequently, over 95% of trans people engage in prostitution, and I wouldn't call it sex work because mostly people are 'informal' sex workers. This means that the government has marginalized us to the point where we have no other choice but to do this type of work to survive, due to lack of inclusive public labor policies. Because of this, many feel unworthy, and this is reinforced by denial of their rights to proper housing and access to healthcare. Public acceptance is still very difficult, which leads to high levels of social discrimination. Mexico has the second highest murder rate for trans people in the world. Although we have rights to protection under law, the government and the police continue turn their backs on our community. However, some things are slowly changing. There are now 7 states with a gender identity law where trans people can change their name, although this still does not translate into a change in our reality.

I was fascinated throughout the GATE and IRGT TRANSIT Smart Guide workshop. The most important lesson I learned was how to share my knowledge of implementing this Guide with other trans community leaders. This Guide is an essential tool for doing advocacy work with governments, public services and health systems. I also think it's an ideal tool to use when trying to change public perception and raising awareness with governments about the issues facing trans communities. I will be sharing this guide with my peers at RedLACTrans and with government and healthcare system agents.

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ACTIVITY: TRANSIT Smart Guide Workshop, Mexico City