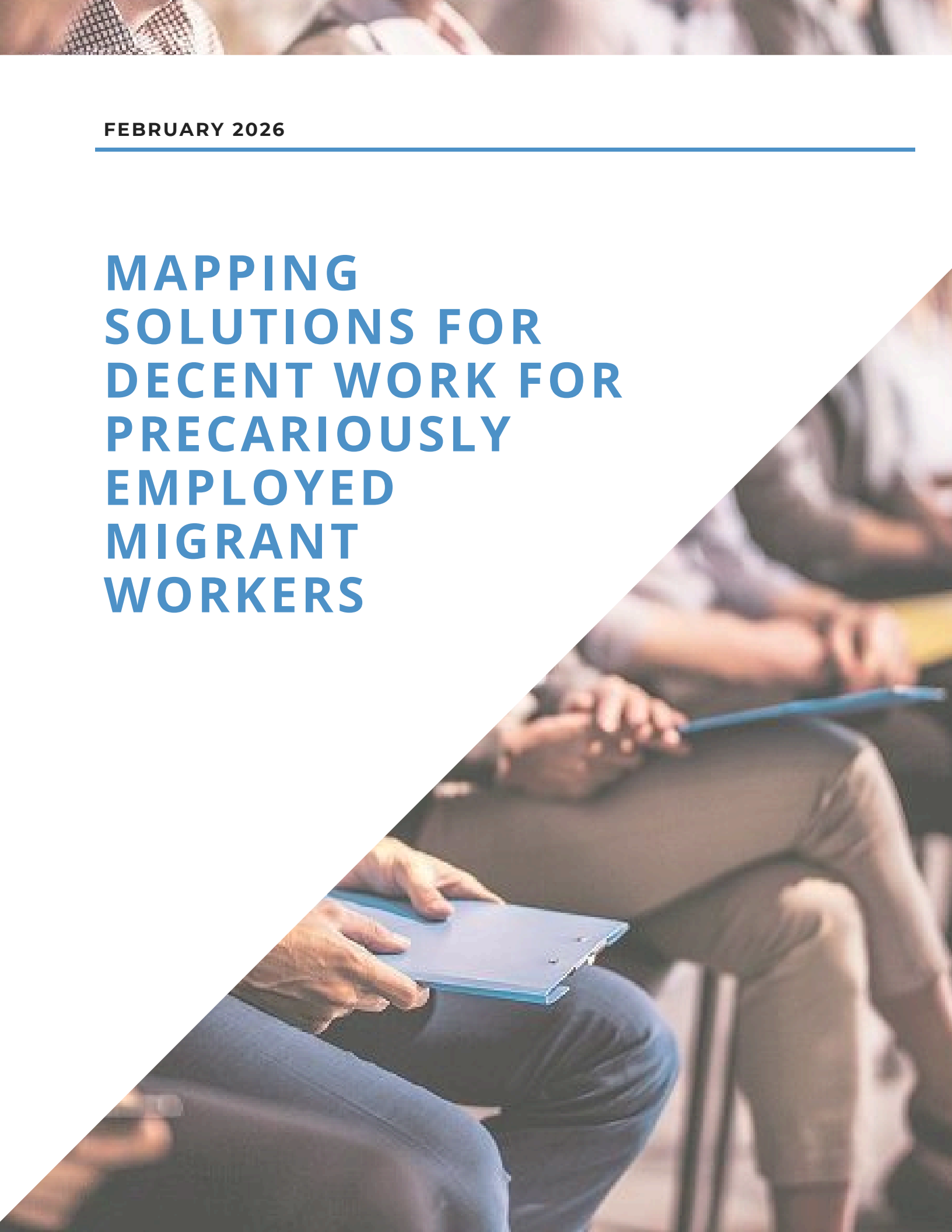


FEBRUARY 2026

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# MAPPING SOLUTIONS FOR DECENT WORK FOR PRECARIOUSLY EMPLOYED MIGRANT WORKERS



# WHAT DID WE DO?

The Mapping Solutions for Decent Work study was conducted to develop a conceptual framework for improving employment quality for precariously employed migrant workers. We engaged multiple interest groups—including migrant workers, precariously employed workers, advocates, researchers, and policymakers across several continents—to ensure diverse perspectives through the use of concept mapping methodology. This mixed-methods approach was designed to collect and synthesize multiple viewpoints on a complex issue.

Participants were recruited through multiple channels, including attendees at the Creating Sustainable Work 2026 Conference in Stockholm, Sweden (May 2026), as well as through organizational networks and committee contacts.

For this report, we focus on the interest groups' perspectives on employer- and policy-level solutions to improve employment quality for migrant workers.

Seven key concepts emerged: (1) holding employers responsible, (2) targeted support for migrant workers, (3) pay equity, (4) workplace policies addressing diversity, (5) workplace policies addressing safety, including occupational health and safety, (6) worker empowerment, and (7) national and global regulation. Groups generally aligned on which solutions were most important for advancing equity but differed in their views on which were most effective and most likely to receive government support. Perceptions of feasibility also varied across political and economic contexts.

Ultimately, the conceptual framework that emerged from this process suggests that increasing workers' labour power should be a central focus of the multipronged solutions needed to address workers' safety, equity, and well-being. Policies that aim to address one dimension of employment at a time (e.g., minimum wage), may not be enough. The values and priorities that groups expressed were also informative. Researchers' priorities differed from workers' and advocates', suggesting that aspects of lived experience may be overlooked in researchers' own agendas. Interest groups also highlighted a misalignment between legislative progress, government resource allocations, and the needs of migrant workers. To address these gaps, researchers must therefore seek to build up systems and resources to support workers and advocates in their organizing and advocacy efforts both in the short and long-term.

# WHY DID WE DO IT?

Precarious employment (PE)—characterized by job insecurity, inadequate protections, and financial instability—has increased globally due to labor market deregulation, globalization, and the rise of gig economies.<sup>1-4</sup> The COVID-19 pandemic further intensified these challenges, leaving many workers vulnerable to health risks, income loss, and exclusion from social benefits.<sup>5</sup>

Migrant workers are disproportionately affected by PE, with legal status being a key driver of vulnerability.<sup>8,9</sup> Many hold temporary visas tied to their employment, creating an exploitable labor force less likely to report violations such as wage theft or unsafe conditions for fear of termination and loss of status. At the same time, many possess high-level skills that are devalued in host labor markets.<sup>10</sup> As a result, professionals such as doctors, engineers, and teachers are often pushed into “survival jobs” (e.g., delivery, cleaning, warehouse work) due to non-recognition of foreign credentials. Migrant workers may also be excluded from protections that mitigate precarity because of their temporary status.<sup>11</sup> Over time, participation in low-skilled, insecure work can entrench cycles of precarity.

While existing research documents the health and financial harms of PE, there is limited conceptual guidance on how to improve employment quality. This study aimed to:

- Identify policies, programs, and resources to enhance job security and equity
- Elevate the voices of precarious workers and stakeholders in solution-building
- Inform recommendations for researchers, policymakers, employers, and advocacy groups

We examined how diverse stakeholders conceptualize solutions to precarious employment, with particular attention to migrant workers. Findings highlight the need for solutions that hold employers and the state accountable for structural power imbalances, operate across multiple levels (from workplaces to supranational regulation), and address intersecting forms of vulnerability among those most affected.

# HOW DID WE DO IT?

We used concept mapping, an approach for building consensus on a particular issue. It combines participants' qualitative input (e.g., brainstormed ideas, group discussions) with quantitative analysis (e.g., cluster analysis, multidimensional scaling).<sup>1,2</sup> Concept mapping “enables a group of people to articulate and depict a coherent conceptual framework or model.”<sup>3</sup>

The study proceeded in four key phases:

**Phase 1: Brainstorming** We mapped solutions from recommendations published by organizations working with precarious workers, including WIEGO (Women in Informal Employment Globalizing & Organizing), SEWA (Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA)), and the Global Labour University. We also solicited ideas from experts, service providers, and precarious workers (n=59) in response to the prompt: “One program, policy, resource, or change that would improve employment quality for precarious workers is \_\_\_\_\_.”

**Phase 2: Sorting** We asked participants (n=12) to sort the items into categories to create and label solution clusters from the items generated from the brainstorming phase. We analyzed these data using multidimensional scaling and hierarchical Cluster Analysis.

**Phase 3: Rating** We examined participants' perspectives about the potential equity impacts and feasibility of the brainstormed solutions (n=54).

Participants rated each item according to the two questions below using a 5-point Likert-type scale:

1. How much will this resource or initiative improve precarious employment conditions for immigrants?
2. How much would governments in your region support action on this solution in the next 5 years?

**Phase 4: Mapping** Findings were used to create concept maps, which were refined through group discussions with participants (n=4). The mapping sessions were facilitated by experienced members of the research team. During the sessions, facilitators engaged the group in a discussion about whether the clusters had face validity. Participants jointly created final clusters by confirming the location of each item in a cluster and moving items as needed to create clusters that represent the group's perspective, and discussing ratings.

# STUDY FINDINGS:

**Study Participants:** We recruited participants from the Creating Sustainable Work 2026 Conference in Stockholm Sweden, through organizational networks, and through committee contacts. To understand who took part in the study, participants were asked to complete a short demographic survey at each stage. The survey captured information on interest group (researcher, activist, worker), self-reported work sector, gender identity, what continent they reside on, and immigration status.

**The Concept Map:** The brainstorming phase resulted in 39 unique items that represent solutions to precarious employment. Using participant data from the sorting phase, the finalized list of items was compiled into seven clusters, labelled using participants' own descriptions of these clusters. These clusters reflect themes related to legislation and accountability, worker-centred support, and equity and inclusion (see Table 1):

1. Holding Employers Responsible
2. Policies to Support Migrant Workers
3. Pay Equity
4. Workplace Policies - Workers' Diverse Needs
5. Workplace Policies - Safe Work Conditions
6. Worker Empowerment
7. National and Global Legislation

Figure 1 depicts the items and their clusters in a concept map. Their spatial arrangement represents participants' ideas about the conceptual relationships between different workplace and advocacy priorities. The size and spread of each cluster reflects the number of specific ideas contained within it, as well as its conceptual cohesion or complexity with larger clusters suggesting broader ideas and more complex concepts.

The broadest clusters are "Workplace Policies - Safe Work Conditions" and "National and Global Legislation", indicating wide-ranging and complex sets of solutions that cross multiple sectors, levels of governance, and issues. Compact clusters like "Pay Equity" and "Holding Employers Responsible" indicate highly specific, focused action areas. As a centrally placed cluster, items in the "Worker Empowerment" cluster represent a conceptual bridge between solutions focused on structural policy, employer responsibility, and workers' diverse needs.

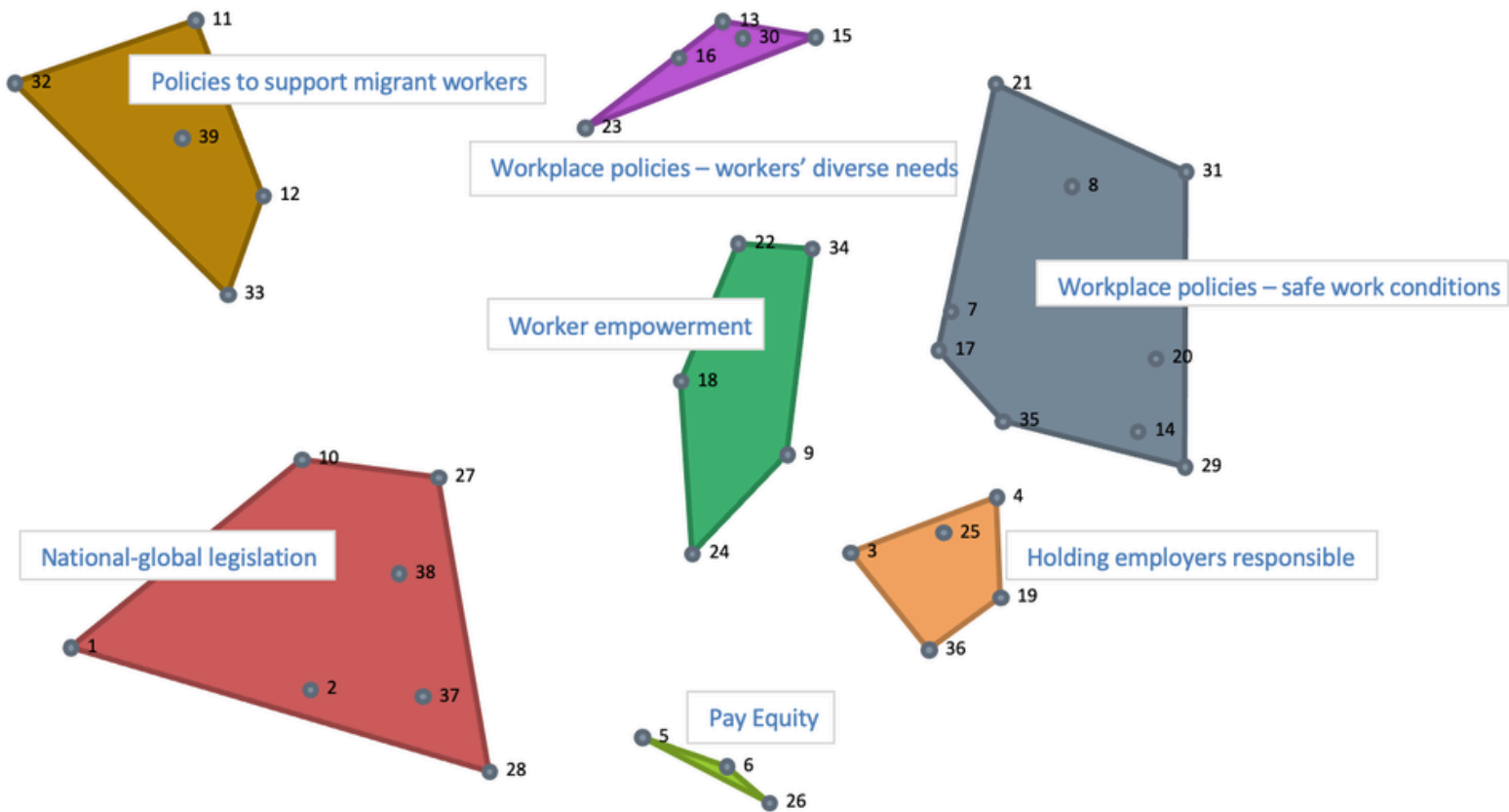


Figure 1: Cluster map generated for policies supporting migrant workers.

Table 1: Compiled list of clusters and their respective solution items.

Cluster	Cluster Items
<b>1.Holding Employers Responsible</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3.Adopting and enforcing labour legislation to hold companies accountable for violations of collective agreements and employment contracts.</li> <li>4.Adopting and enforcing employer policies protecting workers from arbitrary dismissal.</li> <li>19.Adopting and enforcing workplace policies that mandate minimum days of paid illness, injury, or sick leave, and paid family responsibility leave annually for all workers without eligibility requirements to access these leaves.</li> <li>25.Adopting and enforcing legislation to mandate employers to uphold employment obligations to workers (e.g., not penalizing workers for taking leave, being sick).</li> <li>36.Adopting and enforcing policies that mandate the provision of adequate wage replacement for working days lost due to work-related injury or illness, irrespective of type of contract.</li> </ul>

<p><b>2.Targeted Support for Migrant Workers</b></p>	<p>11. Adopting and enforcing government policies ensuring that migrant workers are not at risk of deportation when using health and social services.</p> <p>12. Adopting and enforcing government policies ensuring that undocumented migrant workers are not at risk of deportation when disclosing personal experiences of human trafficking.</p> <p>32. Grant permanent resident status to temporary workers and undocumented workers (e.g., ending the requirement for trial work period, regularizing undocumented workers, and removing caps on number of permanent residency applications accepted).</p> <p>33. Sustainable government funding for community-based services that support workers with intersecting needs to uphold their labour rights: immigration, legal support, social support, and advocacy.</p> <p>39. Adopting and enforcing trade policies upholding labor rights of undocumented migrants to prevent human trafficking and indentured labor.</p>
<p><b>3.Pay Equity</b></p>	<p>5. Adopting and enforcing regional policies that guarantee equal pay for equal work.</p> <p>6. Policies to ensure a fair living wage.</p> <p>26. Establishing universal access to a minimum level of pensions that ensure decent levels of living standards.</p>
<p><b>4.Workplace Policies - Workers' diverse needs</b></p>	<p>13. Adopting and enforcing occupational health and safety policies and procedures that integrate considerations for the unique needs of all genders.</p> <p>15. Adopting and enforcing workplace policies that support the safety of women and gender diverse workers (e.g., access to gender neutral washrooms, shower areas, change rooms, support when pregnant/nursing/menopause, and anti-harassment campaigns, employer training on gender inclusivity and paid leave for gender-affirming medical treatment and care).</p> <p>16. Adopting and enforcing workplace policies that mandate the provision of financially accessible vocational training for workers, tailored to their needs (e.g., workers with disabilities, older workers, etc.) to improve employability.</p> <p>23. Public education campaigns to inform workers about workplace rights and their right to organize.</p> <p>30. Implementing and acting upon workplace diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) audits to ensure that the rights of all populations are upheld (e.g., pay-equity audits to reduce gender-based wage disparities; equity audits to ensure that Black, Indigenous, and other people of colour (BIPOC) are represented at senior organizational levels).</p>

<p><b>5.Workplace Policies - Safe work conditions</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>7. Adopting and enforcing workplace policies to combat discriminatory hiring practices.</li> <li>8. Adopting and enforcing workplace policies to combat sexual harassment.</li> <li>14. Adopting and implementing routine inspections to ensure that all workers' working conditions are safe.</li> <li>17. Multiple services not linked to the workplace that promote and support workers' rights (e.g., advocacy to fight unfair treatment or unsafe workplaces).</li> <li>20. Adopting and enforcing mandates for safe and predictable working hours (i.e., regulate long working hours, policies that prevent last minute schedule notice).</li> <li>21. Adopting and enforcing policies that allow caretakers to make work time and schedule accommodations to attend to care responsibilities without penalties.</li> <li>29. Establishing a public web-based registry that verifies the safety and stability of employers.</li> <li>31. Adapt health and safety policies, compensation systems, and resources to be inclusive of mental health needs of workers</li> <li>35. Adopting and enforcing policies that guarantee the ability for workers to organize (i.e., guarantee freedom of association).</li> </ul>
<p><b>6.Worker Empowerment</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>9. Labour legislation that promotes union collaboration for sectoral and cross-sectoral bargaining.</li> <li>18. Adopting and enforcing workplace policies ensuring that survivors of sexual and/or intimate partner violence have adequate access to paid leave.</li> <li>22. Adopting and enforcing policies that require employers to support people with disabilities to attain and maintain stable employment.</li> <li>24. Adopting and enforcing a job guarantee program (e.g., government, state or public sector subsidize programs providing work to unemployed workers or new graduates).</li> <li>34. Adopting and enforcing policies and initiatives that support representation of marginalized workers, particularly women and gender minorities, racialized workers, and differently abled workers in decision-making (e.g., via collective organization).</li> </ul>

<p><b>7.National Global Legislation</b></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Global frameworks (e.g., OECD job strategy) encouraging all levels of government to shift policies and approaches toward prioritizing human values (e.g., the economy for the common good) and away values and norms for growth, capital and profit maximization.</li> <li>2. Commitment and accountability from national-level governments to global standards for working conditions (e.g., ratify ILO Convention on Domestic Workers C-189).</li> <li>10. Adopting and enforcing policies that ensure the eligibility of temporary workers for social protections such as income support in case of job loss and injury.</li> <li>27. Establishing universal affordable access to child and family care as a means to promote quality employment for all.</li> <li>28. Establishing universal basic income to ensure financial stability while creating protections from one form of insecurity among precarious workers.</li> <li>37. Adopting and enforcing policies that mandate the provision of unemployment compensation for all, irrespective of type of contract.</li> <li>38. Adopting and enforcing tax reforms lowering costs for firms with the goal of promoting labor formalization for informal workers.</li> </ol>
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**Priorities for Improving Conditions for Migrant Workers**

The ladder graph below compares the ways that solutions are differently valued according to group rating data. Specifically, we compare the workers' and advocates' average cluster ratings with researchers' ratings on the question "How much will this resource or initiative improve precarious employment conditions for immigrants?" (Figure 2).

The agreement between cluster ratings between groups was high ( $r=0.80$ ). On average, items in the "Holding Employers Responsible" and "Pay Equity" clusters were the highest-rated priorities for both workers/advocates and researchers. Both groups agreed that "Workplace policies-Workers' Diverse Needs" were less of a priority among the items listed; "National and Global Legislation" occupies a similar mid-tier position across both groups.

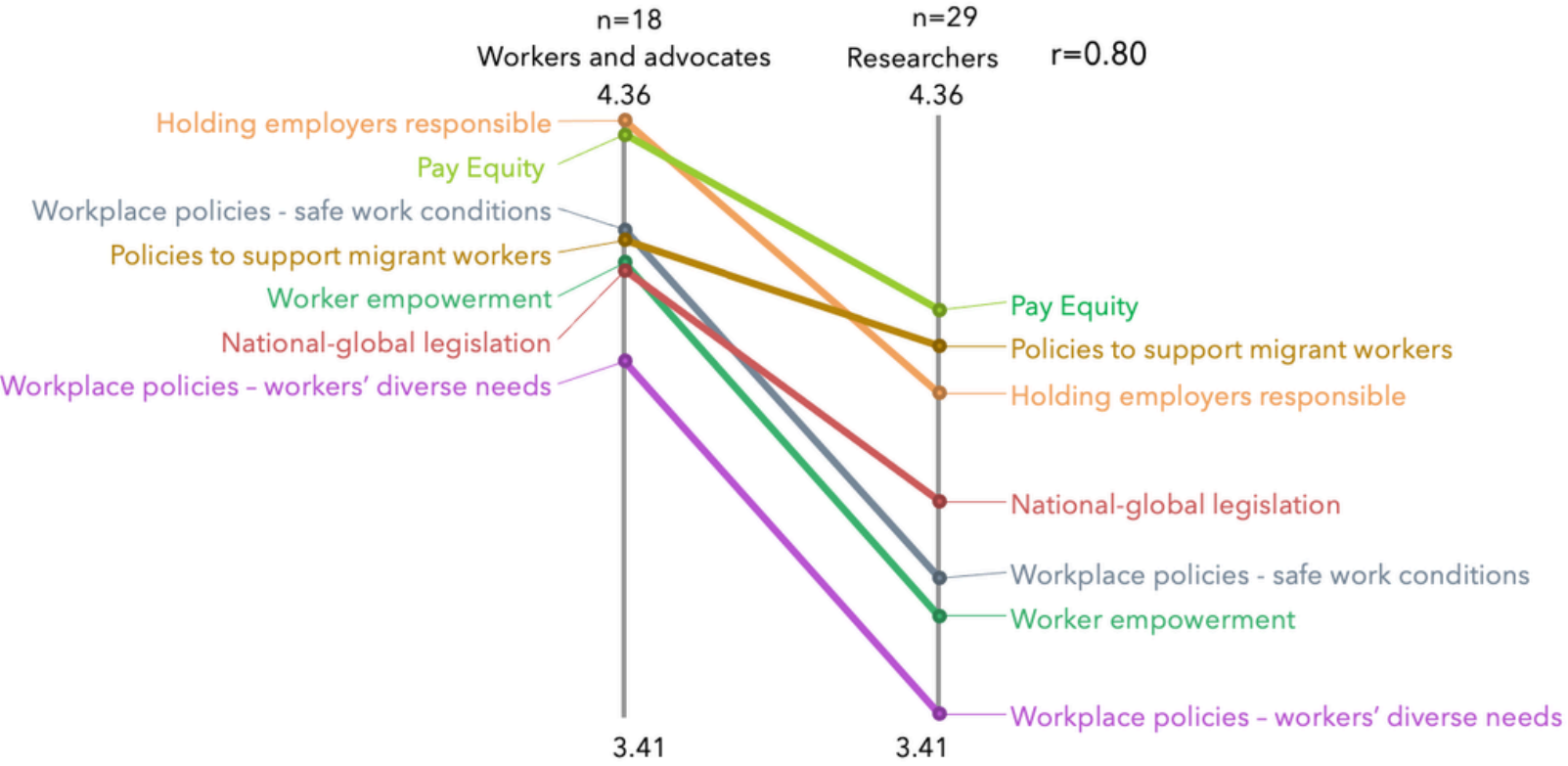


Figure 2: Ladder graph comparing workers/advocates' (left) and researchers' (right) ratings on the perceived effectiveness of solutions to advance decent work for migrant workers. Item ratings were averaged at the cluster level.

The scatterplot below compares the workers' and advocates' average item ratings with researchers' ratings on the same question (Figure 3). Workers/advocates, and researchers only moderately agreed on item-level ratings ( $r=0.53$ ). The "Go-Zone" (top-right quadrant) captures areas of high consensus. Statements in this quadrant are rated above average by both workers/advocates and researchers. The highest rated items in these quadrants included:

**Item 6.** "Policies to ensure a fair living wage",

**Item 19.** "Adopting and enforcing workplace policies that mandate minimum days of paid illness, injury, or sick leave, and paid family responsibility leave annually for all workers without eligibility requirements to access these leaves"

**Item 27.** "Establishing universal affordable access to child and family care as a means to promote quality employment for all".

$r = 0.53$

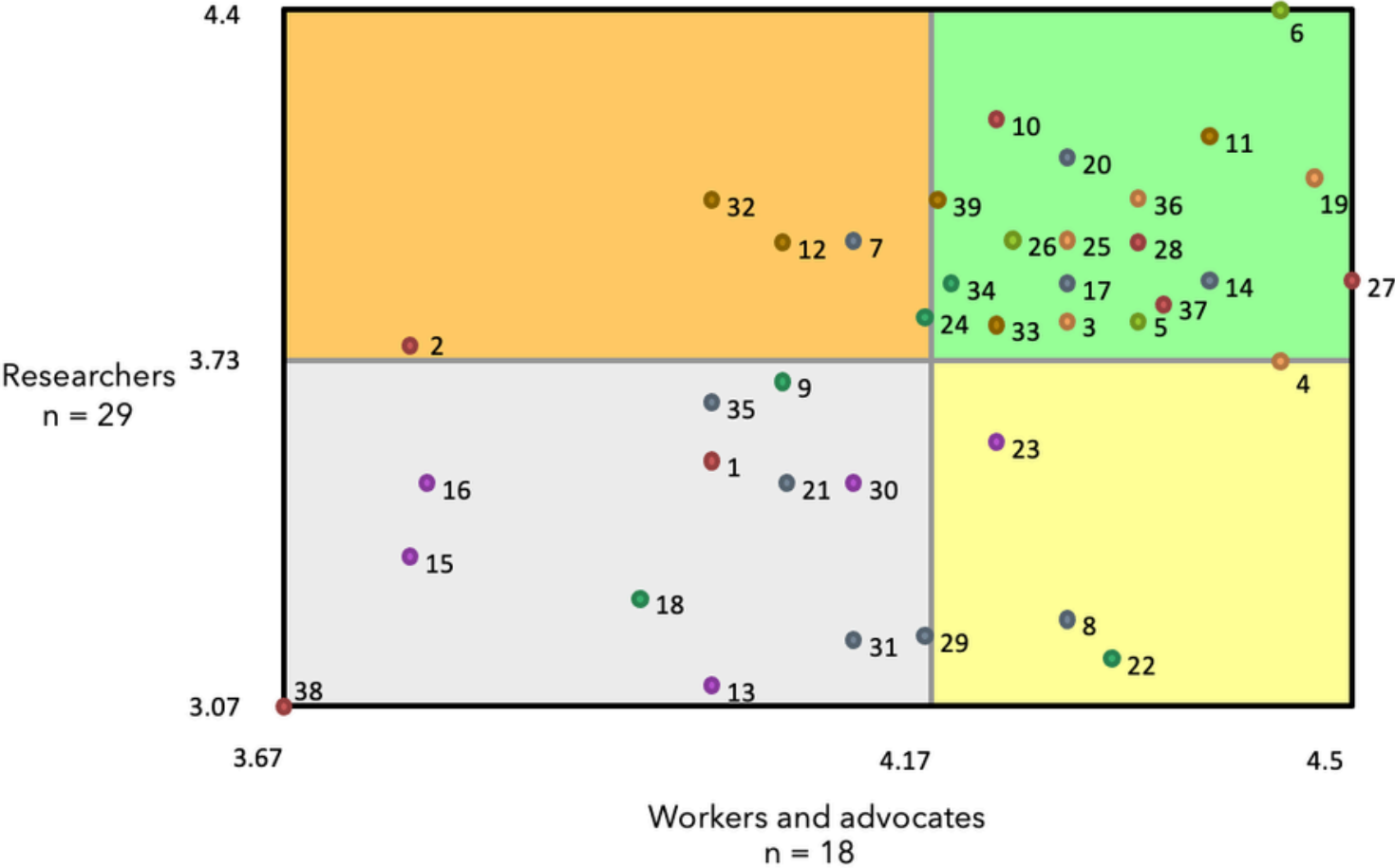


Figure 3: Scatter plot and "Go-Zone" analysis comparing researchers' and workers/advocates' ratings on the perceived effectiveness of solutions to advance decent work for migrant workers.

Items in the bottom-left quadrant were agreed by both workers/advocates and researchers to be the least effective, including: Item "38. Adopting and enforcing tax reforms lowering costs for firms with the goal of promoting labor formalization for informal workers."

The bottom-right quadrant represents solutions rated above average by workers and advocates but received lower ratings from researchers. Items in this area may suggest workers' needs that might be overlooked in academic or even high-level decision-making, and include: "8. Adopting and enforcing workplace policies to combat sexual harassment, and "22. Adopting and enforcing policies that require employers to support people with disabilities to attain and maintain stable employment".

This divergence aligns with growing calls in the literature for researcher-community coproduction approaches that center the lived-experience of affected populations.<sup>4</sup>

## Government Support for Change

The ladder graph below compares participants' average ratings of effectiveness across items in a cluster with their ratings on the question, "How much would governments in your region support action on this solution in the next 5 years?"

Ratings on effectiveness and government support moderately disagreed across participant groups ( $r=-0.50$ ). While participants collectively rated the items in the clusters "Pay Equity" and "Migrant Worker Support" to be most effective, they suggested that items in these clusters would currently receive the least government support. This finding resonates with recent analyses showing that despite rhetorical commitments, national-level policy action on migrant worker protections has stalled in several high-income countries.<sup>5,6</sup>

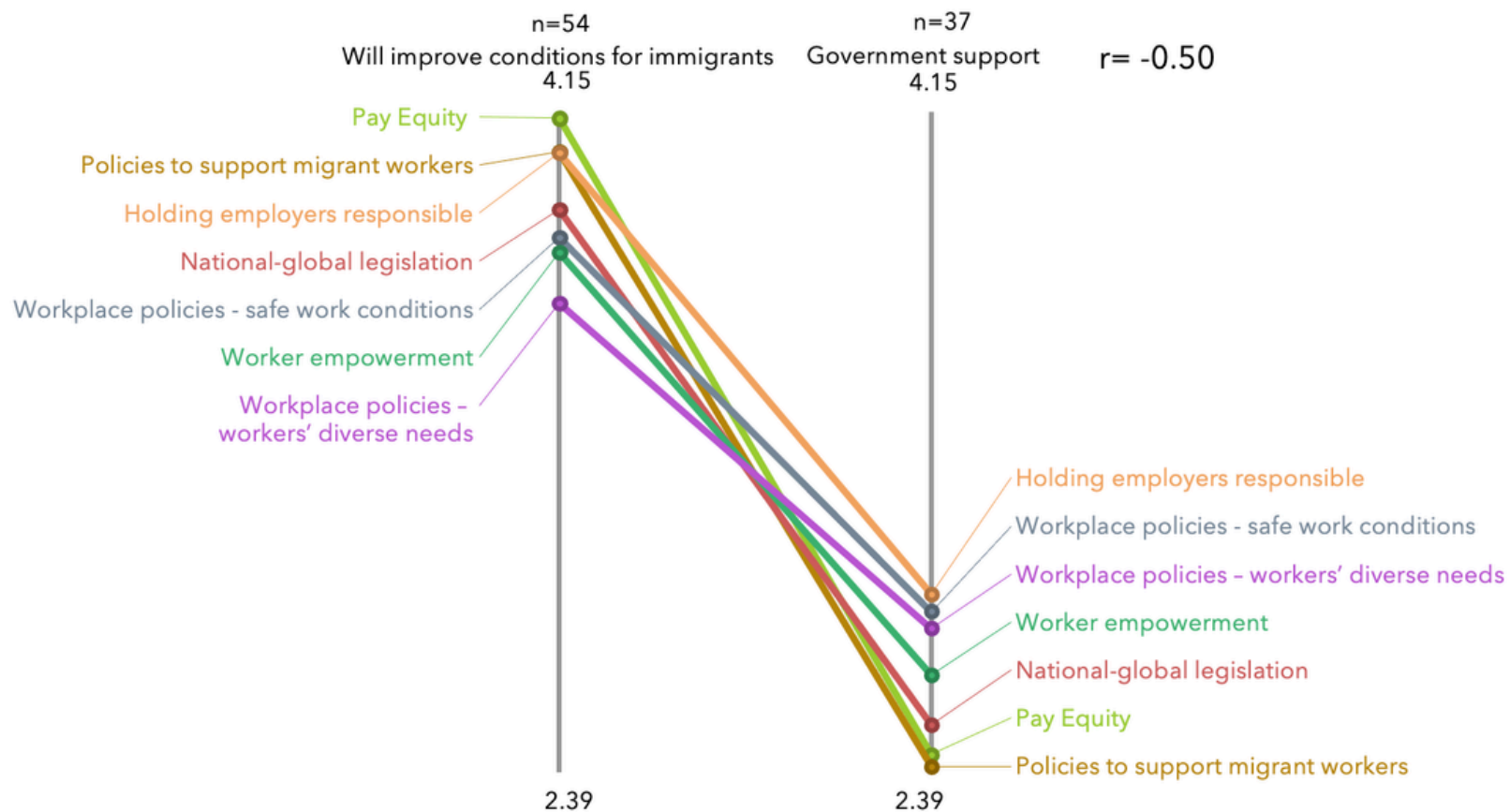


Figure 4: Ladder graph comparing stakeholders' ratings on the perceived effectiveness of solutions to advance decent work for migrant workers (left) and the perceived likelihood of receiving government support (right). Item ratings were averaged at the cluster level.

The scatterplot below compares' participant' ratings on effectiveness with their ratings on government support for each of these solutions among North American respondents only (n=40). Ratings on effectiveness and government support had a low negative correlation ( $r=-0.23$ ).

In Figure 5, items in the “Go-Zone” quadrant represent high-value priorities that may also be relatively easier to implement. The following items stand out as perceived to be both highly effective and more likely to receive government support:

**Item 19.** “Adopting and enforcing workplace policies that mandate minimum days of paid illness, injury, or sick leave, and paid family responsibility leave annually for all workers without eligibility requirements to access these leaves”

**Item 27.** “Establishing universal affordable access to child and family care as a means to promote quality employment for all”.

Items in this quadrant may represent “quick wins” — actionable policy targets where political will and stakeholder consensus already converge.

Items in the bottom right quadrant represent vital goals that may come with significant barriers for mobilization. This is a crowded quadrant, suggesting that many important goals may be currently difficult to achieve.

**Item 28.** “Establishing universal basic income to ensure financial stability while creating protections from one form of insecurity among precarious workers” was identified as particularly effective but least likely to receive government support.

The following items were rated above average on effectiveness and just below average on likelihood of government support:

**Item 36.** “Adopting and enforcing policies that mandate the provision of adequate wage replacement for working days lost due to work-related injury or illness, irrespective of type of contract”

**Item 14.** “Adopting and implementing routine inspections to ensure that all workers' working conditions are safe”

**Item 6.** “Policies to ensure a fair living wage”

**Item 11.** “Adopting and enforcing government policies ensuring that migrant workers are not at risk of deportation when using health and social services”.

Items in this quadrant may therefore indicate areas for political advocacy over the long-term.

r = -0.23

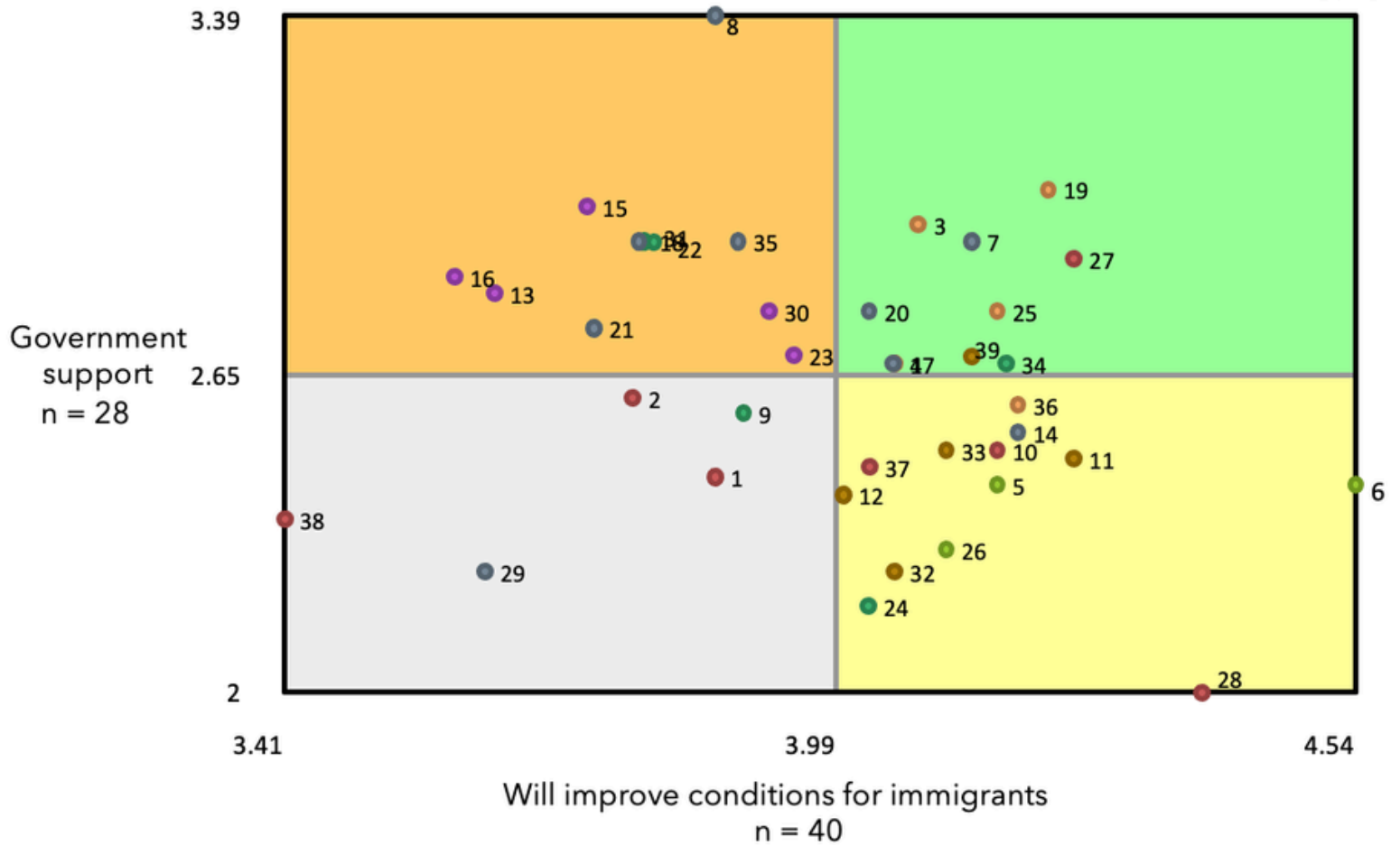


Figure 5: Scatter plot and "Go-Zone" analysis comparing stakeholders' ratings on the perceived effectiveness of solutions to advance decent work for migrant workers (x-axis) and the perceived likelihood of receiving government support (y-axis).

## CONCLUSIONS

What are the ways that workplaces and governments can better address the threats to safety and employment or financial security facing precariously employed migrant workers? This study examined how workers, advocates, and researchers conceptualized and prioritized strategies for workplace and legislative action using a participatory, community-based approach. Through this process, we produced an interest-group-informed concept map—a conceptual framework for solutions to precarious employment—encompassing broad efforts for legislation and safety, as well as targeted, specific campaigns for pay equity and employer accountability.

This study has limitations that should be kept in mind when interpreting the study's findings. We had a small sample, which means that we may be missing opinions from researchers, workers, and advocates that may have changed or altered key items, concepts, and their rankings. We had fewer voices and opinions from migrant workers, advocates, policy makers, particularly from outside of the North American context. Yet, several important findings emerged. Rather than offer next steps, study findings should be considered recommendations for future agendas in research and policy.

This framework differs from the dominant conceptual frameworks of precarious employment in the public health research literature which describe the conditions of precarity (financial insecurity, employment instability, and limited access to workers' rights and protections) and potential solutions.<sup>7,8</sup> Instead, interest groups clustered solutions in ways that highlight the need for strategies that address these conditions separately and together. Small, tight clusters such as for "Pay Equity" point to well-defined suites of interventions with narrow objectives.<sup>9</sup> Meanwhile, large dispersed concepts such as "Workplace policies - Safe work conditions" and "National Global Legislation" suggest a need for complex, multidimensional strategies spanning multiple experiences of precarity. At the centre of this map, lies the concept of "Worker Empowerment", indicating the importance of collective bargaining as a bridge connecting structural solutions, with employer responsibilities, and workers' needs.<sup>10</sup> This central placement is consistent with recent evidence showing that unionization and collective organizing remain among the strongest predictors of improved working conditions and reduced inequality.<sup>10-12</sup> What this conceptual framework suggests is that interest groups collectively view workers' safety, equity, and well-being as concepts linked to multi-pronged solutions that increase workers' labour power, rather than as concepts narrowly improved by policies that aim to address one dimension of employment at a time (e.g., minimum wage).<sup>9</sup>

For public health researchers interested in supporting the advocacy efforts of workers and advocates, an understanding of the values and priorities shaping this conceptual framework can help to align resources for capacity building. Findings from this study suggest a strong consensus on research and advocacy priorities, particularly on well-defined issues such as pay equity, employer responsibility for paid leave, and access to child and family care. However, there were key gaps in academic recognition of workers' and advocates' priorities around sexual harassment and disability in the labor market. Such gaps between research and community priorities may be driven by a lack of investment in interpersonal relationships between interest groups.<sup>13,14</sup> Institutional resource allocation should therefore focus on developing mutual capacity for advancing policies around the above shared priorities, while working to meaningfully engage workers' and advocates' expertise in highlighting overlooked issues.<sup>15,16</sup>

Importantly, interest groups in this study all pointed to a misalignment between legislative progress and government resource allocation and the primary needs of the migrant workforce. In particular, this study suggests that solutions to address pay equity and direct protections for migrant populations may be areas where governments fall furthest behind. This gap potentially reflects a systems issue where multiple barriers, including racism, sexism, and classism, get in the way of efforts to bridge scientific research with workers' needs, and decision-making.<sup>17</sup> Translating evidence into equitable labor policy requires not only robust data but also sustained partnerships with affected communities and intermediary organizations that can navigate political barriers.<sup>18</sup> To address this gap, researchers must therefore seek to build up systems and processes that support workers and advocates in their organizing and advocacy efforts both in the short and long-term.<sup>19</sup>

Effective knowledge translation for migrant worker advocacy may include a number of strategies.<sup>20,21</sup> For example, supporting community interest groups to lead and coproduce knowledge may include processes and resources for colearning as a way to address potential power dynamics and produce robust partnerships that can respond effectively across the policy landscapes.<sup>19,22</sup> Recent participatory governance models have demonstrated the value of embedding migrant workers' voices directly within policy consultation processes, rather than relying solely on proxy representation.<sup>23,24</sup>

Furthermore, this study suggests that while there may be short-term opportunities for research-community advocacy to advance those solutions that governments may already be amenable to, communities require research support and resources over longer-time frames to address barriers to progress on solutions considered to be less politically palatable. These policy goals are pivotal to the creation of decent work, but they require concerted collaborative effort to champion the protections and equity that stakeholders have identified as both most vital and most neglected. As the global policy landscape continues to shift—shaped by rising economic nationalism, climate-driven migration, and the rapid expansion of platform-based work—the participatory framework developed in this study offers a scalable and adaptable model for ensuring that the voices of the most affected remain central to the design of solutions.<sup>25</sup>

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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**Report designed by:** Shajitha Rasiah



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