

Survey of Informal Women Traders in Luanda

LURA · LUANDA, ANGOLA · 2026

This report presents the principal findings of the **Survey on Mobility and Work of Women in Luanda**, which gathered **245 responses** from quitandeiras and zungueiras across three city markets. The data reveal structural patterns of mobility, safety, work, and aspirations, contributing to the formulation of fairer and more inclusive public policies aligned with SDGs 1, 5, 8, and 11.



Informal Trade as Luanda's Economic Foundation

Popular commerce — present in formal and informal markets and in street vending practices — constitutes one of the most resilient social infrastructures of urban life in Luanda. For thousands of women, particularly quitandeiras and zungueiras, these activities simultaneously represent a source of income, a survival strategy, and a way of producing the city through daily occupation of public space.

79.6%

Informal Employment

of the employed population in Angola works in the informal sector

88.4%

Women in Informal Trade

of employed women work in the informal economy

245

Valid Responses

collected across three Luanda markets in April 2026

36.9%

No Formal Schooling

of participants had never attended formal school

This study speaks directly to **SDG 1** (Poverty Eradication), **SDG 5** (Gender Equality), **SDG 8** (Decent Work), and **SDG 11** (Sustainable Cities), situating the role of women in popular commerce within the international development agenda.

How the Survey Was Conducted

Fieldwork

Data collection was conducted on **21, 22, and 23 April 2026**, across three zones of high urban intensity in Luanda:

- Mercado dos Congolenses
- Mercado do São Paulo
- Largo do Carmo / Sagrada Família

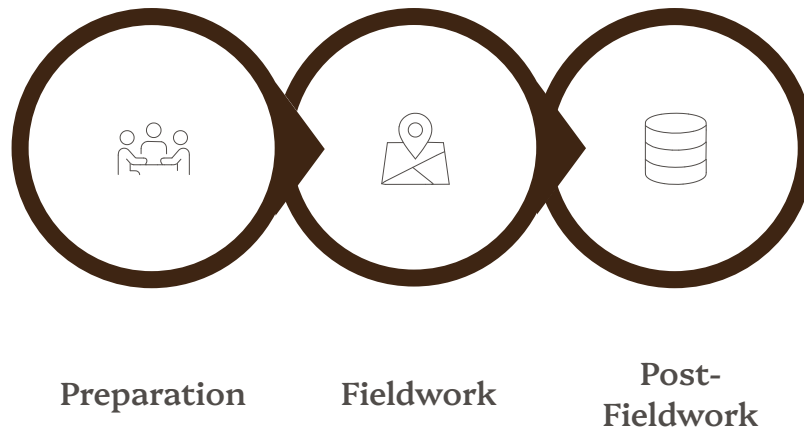
Each enumerator conducted **12 to 13 surveys per day**, with face-to-face administration between 14:30 and 16:30.

Multidisciplinary Team

The team comprised **eight enumerators**, including final-year students, municipal technicians, and LURA coordinators, later reinforced by six students from IGCA — geographical engineers — lending technical rigour and social sensitivity to the process.

Trust-Building Strategy

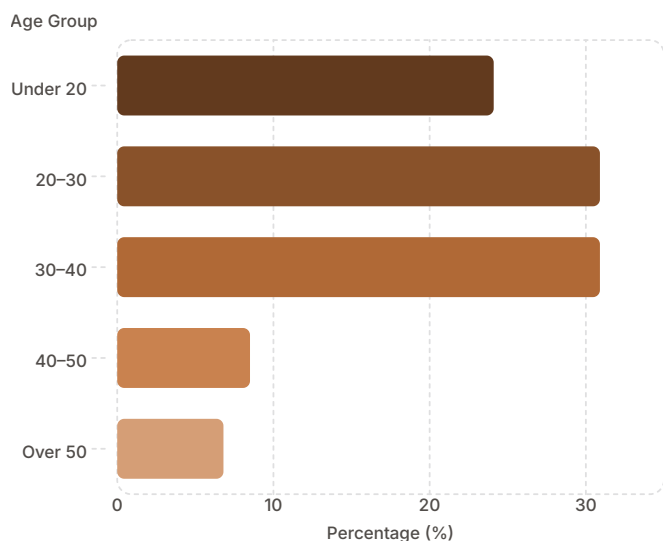
To overcome initial resistance from traders, enumerators made **small symbolic purchases** from participants, creating openness and a climate of trust that facilitated the sharing of experiences and improved the quality of data collected.



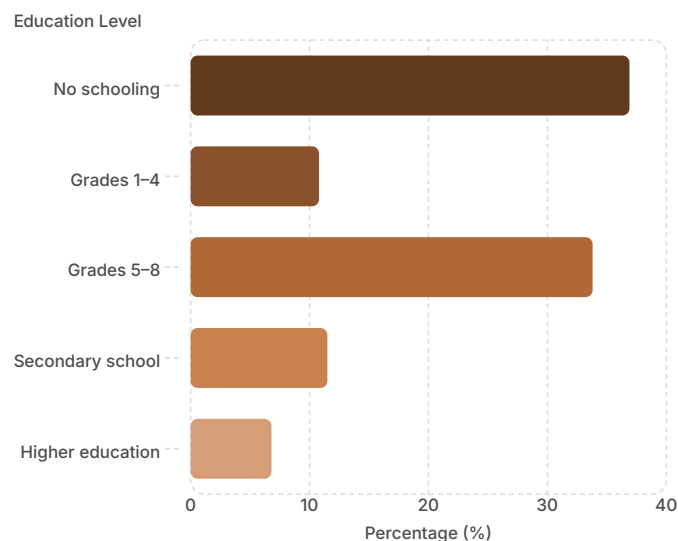
The process was coordinated through a WhatsApp group created specifically for this purpose, serving as the central communication space between coordinators, technicians, and students — before, during, and after data collection.

Who Are Luanda's Women Traders?

Age Distribution



Education Level

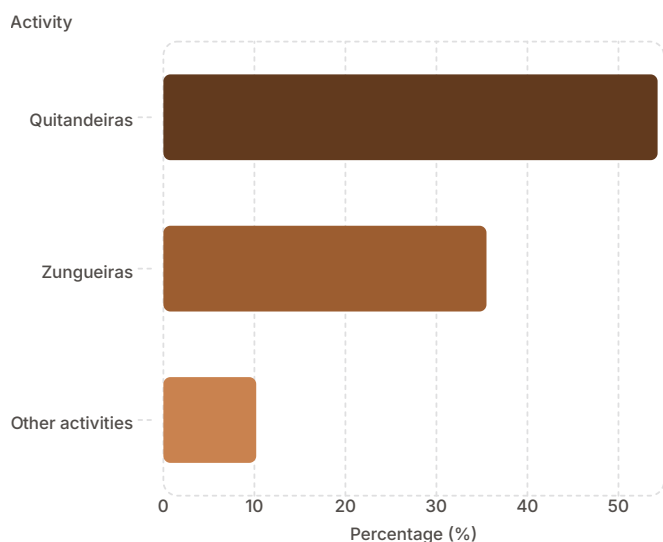


Participants originate from **nearly all provinces of Angola** – including Luanda, Uíge, Benguela, Malanje, Huambo, Cuanza Norte, Zaire, Kwanza Sul, Bié, Bengo, Moxico, Huíla, Lunda Norte, Lunda Sul, Namibe, Cabinda, and Libolo – and even one participant from **Cape Verde (São Vicente)**. This diversity confirms that informal trade in Luanda is sustained by internal and external migration flows, reflecting trajectories of economic mobility and family networks.

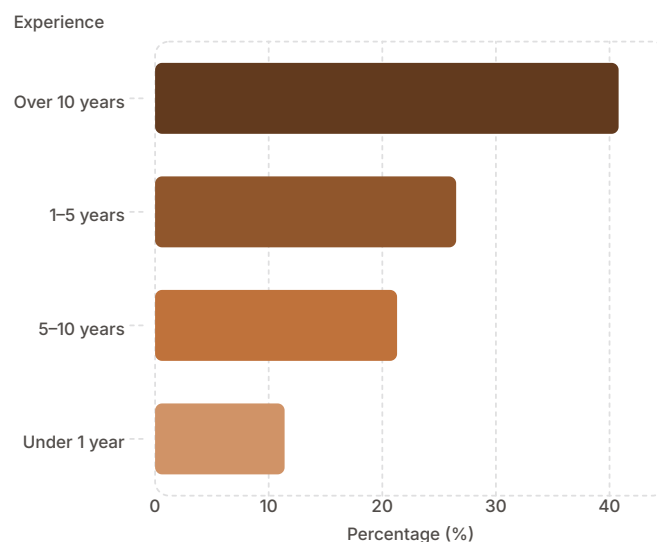
The age distribution reveals the **generational breadth** of women's informal trade: the sector welcomes very young women (24.1% under 20) but also women with decades of experience, showing it functions simultaneously as an **entry point and a space of permanence**. Education levels reveal profound inequalities: more than a third of participants (36.9%) never attended school, reinforcing the centrality of informal trade as an economic alternative in a context of educational exclusion.

Type of Activity and Years of Experience

Type of Activity



Years of Experience



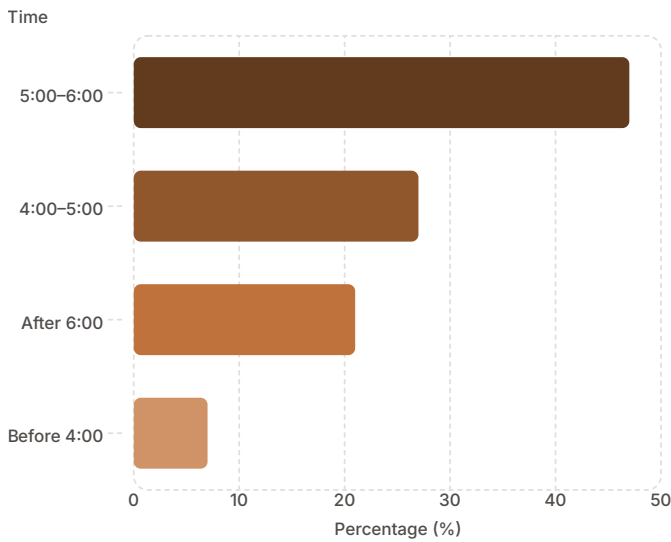
Quitandeiras (fixed-stall market traders) represent the majority of participants (54.3%), followed by **zungueiras** (street vendors, 35.5%) and other activities (10.2%). Regarding experience, **40.8% of participants have over 10 years** of practice in informal trade, whilst 11.4% began their activity less than a year ago.

The simultaneous presence of newly arrived women and traders with over a decade of experience shows that the sector functions as an **entry point for those arriving in the city**, but also as a **long-term activity** for those who find in it their primary means of sustenance. This underscores the need for policies that recognise the permanence and depth of these women's engagement in Luanda's urban economy.

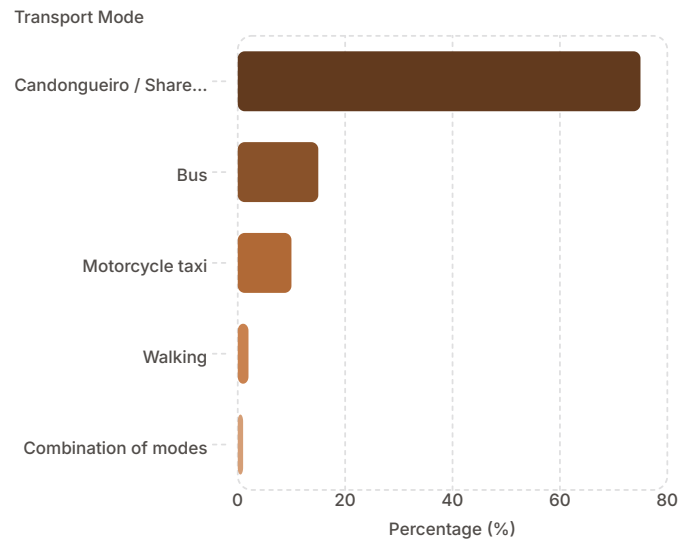
A City That Begins Before Dawn

The daily mobility of participants reveals a pattern marked by urgency and the absence of formal alternatives. The working day begins long before markets open, creating long and physically demanding journeys.

Start Time of the Working Day




Transport Modes Used



 **73.8% wake before 5am**

When transport is scarcest and the city offers least safety

 **74.7% depend on candongueiros**

Evidencing the absence of structured, accessible public transport

 **37.3% take 30-60 min**

And nearly 40% take over an hour to reach their workplace

 **47.3% spend 500-1,000 Kz**

On daily transport – potentially consuming up to 50% of their income

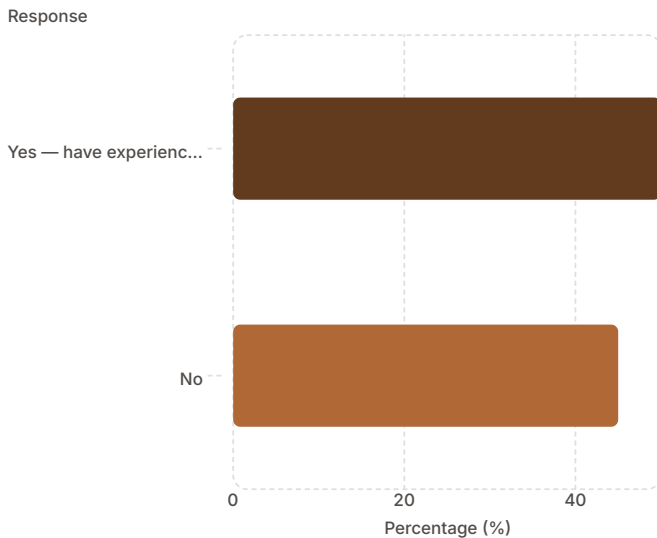
 **60.2% carry merchandise**

Increasing physical effort, travel time, and risk of falls and accidents

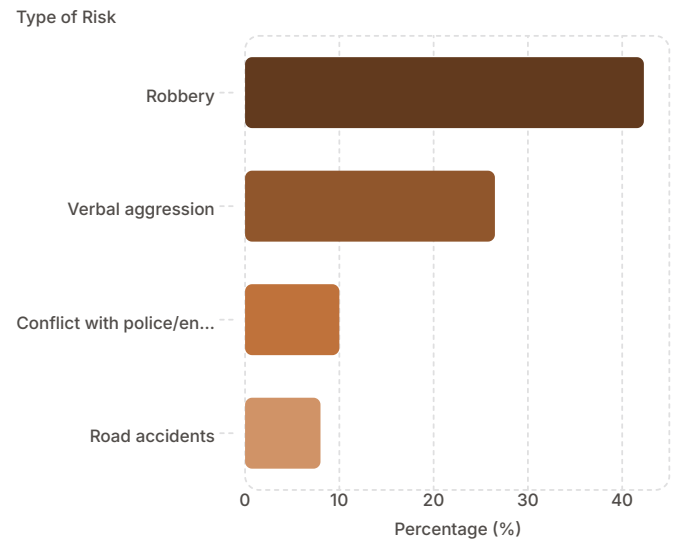
Mobility as a Field of Permanent Risk

Safety on the home–work–home route is one of the most critical dimensions of the traders' daily experience. The data reveal vulnerability, exposure to multiple risks, and a tense relationship with enforcement institutions.

Experiences of Insecurity on the Route



Most Frequent Types of Risk

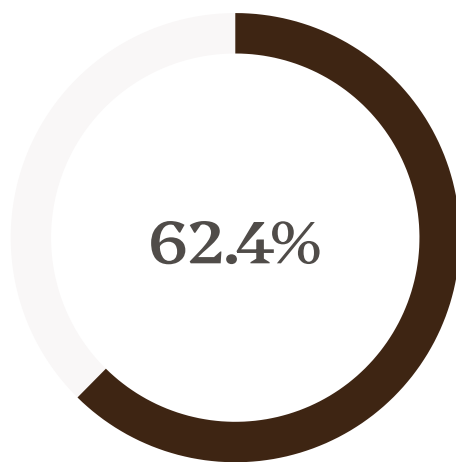


⚠️ ⚠️ **The institutional dimension of risk:** Accounts regarding inspectors and police reveal a consistent pattern of persecution, seizure of merchandise, abusive charges, and arbitrariness — directly affecting traders' income and emotional wellbeing.

The fact that the **morning** is identified as the most insecure period (59.1%) is directly linked to departure times between 4am and 5am, when the city is still dark, transport is scarce, and police presence is irregular. The **night** emerges as a second critical moment (25.3%), particularly on the return home, when physical exhaustion increases vulnerability. The predominance of robbery (42.3%) and verbal aggression (26.5%) shows that symbolic and economic violence is more frequent than direct physical violence — but no less serious.

Invisible Infrastructures That Sustain Work

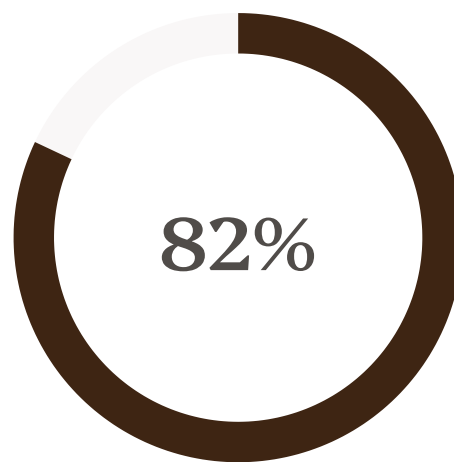
Support networks play a central role in the lives of traders, functioning as mechanisms of survival and protection in a daily routine marked by long hours and the absence of adequate public policies. They are predominantly familial, communal, and feminine.



62.4%

Receive Work Support

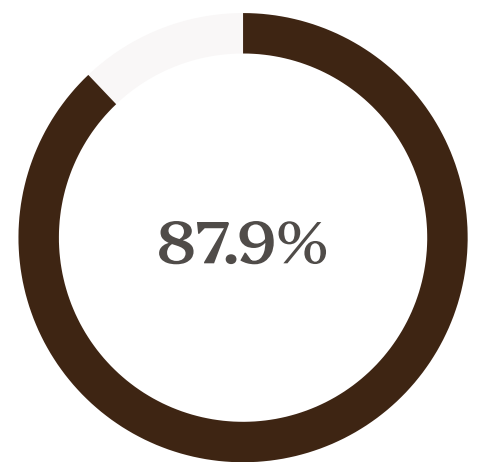
receive some type of support at work or for transport – husbands, children, siblings, colleagues, and market workers



82%

Childcare Support

of mothers have someone who stays with the children during work – almost exclusively family (82.1%) and neighbours (12.1%)



87.9%

Are Mothers

of participants are mothers, reinforcing the intergenerational and feminised dimension of care

Markets as Social Infrastructure

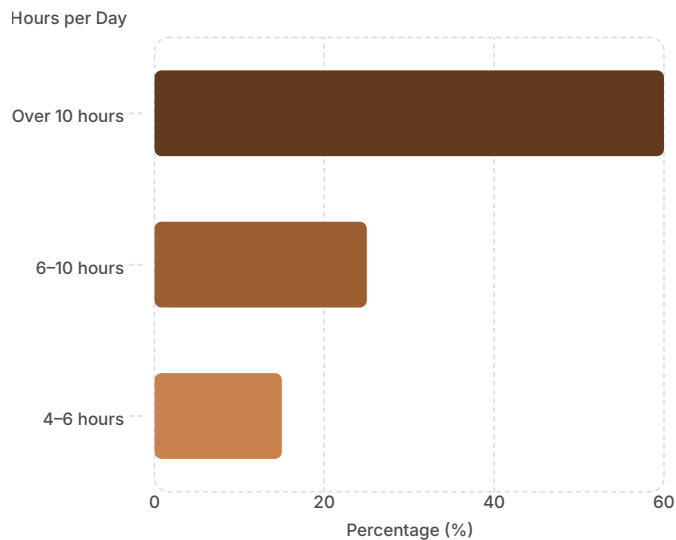
Markets function as genuine **social infrastructures**, where relationships of solidarity, mutual vigilance, information sharing, and protection against risks are built. Figures such as "market boys", "porters", and "errand-runners" appear repeatedly in accounts, performing essential functions for the daily operation of informal trade.

An Informal Social Protection System

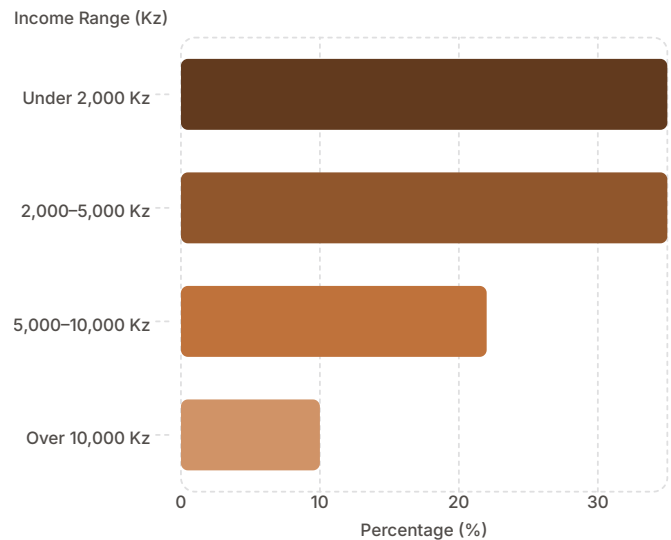
These networks are unpaid, intergenerational, and territorial – tied to the neighbourhood, the market, and neighbourly relations – functioning as an **informal social protection system** that compensates for the absence of public services.

Long Hours, Low Incomes, and Structural Precariousness

Daily Working Hours



Average Daily Income



The most commonly cited daily difficulties include: **enforcement and police** ("chases", "seizure of merchandise", "constant pressure"), **lack of customers and weak sales**, **inadequate infrastructure** (lack of shelter, flooding, intense heat, absence of toilets), **arbitrary costs and fees**, **theft and insecurity** within the market, and accumulated **physical exhaustion**. These difficulties show that women's informal work is shaped by **structural precariousness**, not individual failings.

❏ **69.2% earn less than 5,000 Kz per day** – and many spend 500–1,000 Kz on transport before even reaching the market. The instability of sales ("there are good days and bad days") reinforces economic vulnerability. The relationship with enforcement emerges as a primary stress factor: persecutions, partial or total seizure of merchandise, arbitrary charges, and unequal treatment ("some pass through, others are penalised"). This pattern reveals an **institutional dimension of precariousness**, where the absence of clear rules and protection mechanisms exposes traders to economic losses and symbolic violence.

Future Project: Aspirations and Policy Implications

Despite structural difficulties, the traders demonstrate a clear vision of what they wish to improve. Their aspirations reveal future projects, educational ambitions, and a desire for economic mobility.

Dignity in the Present

Better working conditions, safety on the route, reduced enforcement pressure, and adequate infrastructure in markets

Economic Mobility

Having their own structured business, expanding activity, gradually formalising, and diversifying into other areas such as beauty or tailoring

Social Mobility

Returning to study, completing secondary school, undertaking vocational training, and securing education and better conditions for their children

Education emerges as a deep and cross-cutting desire: in a context where **36.9% of participants have no formal schooling**, education appears as the key to improving their business, changing fields, supporting their children, and gaining autonomy. Family aspirations — giving better conditions to their children, ensuring education, owning a home — show that women's informal work is profoundly oriented towards care and the building of a future.

Three Strategic Priorities

01

Basic Infrastructure

Organised markets, nurseries, safe transport, drainage, and lighting

02

Stable Institutional Environment

Clear rules, humanised enforcement, and permanent dialogue

03

Female Human Capital

Education, technical training, and entrepreneurship programmes

This survey shows, with data and with voice, that these women are an essential part of **Luanda's urban intelligence**. Informal trade is a starting point, not a final destination. Investing in these women is investing in the city — with direct impact on the economy, social cohesion, and the sustainability of Luanda, aligned with **SDGs 1, 5, 8, and 11**.